



## The Physical Plant and Infrastructure: The Jail Leader's Responsibilities

**Description:** Assure that the physical plant is in proper condition to provide the safety of inmates, employees, and the public.

**Rationale:** As the overall facility administrator, the jail leader's responsibility is to:

- Assure that the physical plant is in proper operating condition.
- Determine when it is necessary to obtain assistance for repairs or preventive maintenance.
- Plan ahead for projected structural needs.
- Ensure that the physical plant will be viable for the anticipated life of the building.

### Knowledge:

- Structural features of jail facilities (e.g., schematics, utility maps, life safety systems).
- Emergency/evacuation plans in response to a fire, riot, or natural disaster (e.g., hurricane, tornado, earthquake, flood, etc.).

### Skills:

- Interpreting blueprints, maintenance plans, etc.
- Conducting physical plant inspections.
- Establishing preventive maintenance plans.

- Overseeing capital planning when new construction is needed.
- Assuring that necessary repairs are made in a timely manner.
- Assessing facility capabilities in relation to inmate needs.
- Holding staff accountable.
- Collaborating with supportive public safety partners.
- Assessing the adequacy of emergency plans and facility preparedness.
- Writing policies governing the jail's response to emergency conditions.

### Abilities:

- Evaluate integrity and sustainability of the jail's physical features and infrastructure.
- Delegate as necessary to maintenance staff.
- Gather information from staff and inmates.
- Be proactive.
- Establish mutual aid partnerships.
- Analyze information.
- Be decisive.
- Establish an organizational culture where safety is the top priority.

Jail facilities operate 24-hours a day, 7-days a week. As such the jail's physical plant and equipment "age 3.5 years operationally for every chronological year" in

## 22 Core Competencies for Jail Leaders

- Anticipate, analyze, and resolve organizational challenges and conflicts.
- Assure organizational accountability.
- Build and maintain positive relationships with external stakeholders.
- Build and maintain teamwork; mentor and coach others.
- Communicate effectively, internally and externally.
- Comprehend, obtain, and manage fiscal resources.
- Develop and maintain a positive organizational culture that promotes respect for diverse staff.
- Develop and sustain organizational vision/mission.
- Engage in strategic planning.
- Enhance self-awareness; maintain proactive professional commitment.
- Establish organizational authority, roles, and responsibilities.
- Leverage the role of the jail in the criminal justice system.
- Make sound decisions.
- Manage change.
- Manage labor relations.
- Manage power and influence.
- Manage time.
- Obtain and manage human resources.
- Oversee inmate and facility management.
- **Oversee physical plant management.**
- Reduce jail-related liability risks.
- Understand and manage emerging technology.





inspection process that results only in forms with “yes,” “no,” and “NA” check boxes with little or no narrative.

In terms of the link between facility sanitation and the life-span of the building and components, clear direction is needed on what constitutes “clean and sanitary”—not just leaving those determinations to each shift and its supervisor. To that end, some jails take pictures in all parts of the facility (inmate cells, dormitories, bathrooms, dayrooms, hallways, staff control centers, kitchens, etc.) of what are acceptable conditions. This minimizes the chance that one person’s or one shift’s bias will not derail the facility’s standards. By clearly defining what is acceptable, the inspector can determine what meets these standards and what does not, and identify potentially costly conditions as they emerge, not after the system crashes. This process also allows the jail’s leadership to assess if inmate behavior is being appropriately managed to prevent damage to the physical plant and/or infrastructure and if staff are using resources appropriately.

With thorough training, the jail leader can “calibrate” the eyes of those responsible for the physical plant inspections so that these individuals “see” the same deficiencies, possible problems, and know how to accurately report and document their findings. The local community can also help your staff to assess the physical plant accurately and consistently. For example, administrators can enlist the help of the local health department and fire and emergency services to develop objective and measurable standards. These departments can also ensure that all those who are performing the inspections observe the physical plant approximately the same way. Determine what other facilities in your immediate area are also subject to inspections, then ask to examine their forms, directives, and processes for further ideas.

As part of examining the jail’s existing policies and procedures, the administrator needs to determine the link between the on-going security reviews of the facility and physical plant assessments. Generally, if the physical plant maintenance is sliding, the security operations are sliding as well. The *procedures* for how the staff reports maintenance issues and how rapidly the repairs are made can impact operations (if the staff even bother to report issues), which in turn also impacts the facility’s security. For example, one shift thinks the other shift reported camera or lighting deficiencies. The speed with which priority repairs are made to the physical plant must be a concern for the jail’s leadership. Whether these repairs are made by trained internal maintenance staff or by outside vendors, it is critical to know if the issues are promptly fixed. If the staff doesn’t trust the process to fix the physical plant (including security-related repairs), then there is a significant internal culture issue that needs to be addressed.

Examining operations should also be part of the physical plant assessment. The inspectors need to look at

gender-responsive design, safety, and security for special populations and housing. For example, inspectors may need to provide information about how well the physical plant and infrastructure supports the jail's inmate population on the mental health caseload.

Administrators also need an accurate tabulation of the current costs of facility maintenance as well. Specifically, they need information on what dollars in the approved budget are devoted to the jail's physical plant repairs, replacement of equipment, and to fund emergencies. Is this funding in the jail's budget or in another local government agency's budget?

A timeline of the last 5 or 10 years of these expenses can be a projection of future costs. Reviewing current contracts for vendors to perform repairs is also appropriate, including how those contracts were initiated, their expiration date, and what costs should be included in this fiscal assessment. Does the jail maintain a supply of parts that can be used in repairs, or does the vendor provide those at an increased per unit price? Perhaps the sharing of repair contracts with other local agencies could be another cost-effective approach?

### Disaster Preparation

The jail leader is the one who manages the risk associated with disasters. She or he will be collaborating with local emergency managers to assess the impact of

weather and man-made disasters on the jail's physical plan. She or he will also be required to develop a plan to address each plausible contingency that is essential to the public's safety, as well as to inmate and staff safety. Disaster preparedness drills, table-top exercises, and working alongside other public safety agencies are necessary to the jail's function in an emergency. It is more than just assuring that the emergency generator is regularly tested; it is about what happens after the first 24-hours of no power or access to the jail's physical site. It is also determining how the physical plant is repaired and/or inmates are relocated in serious incidents (Schwartz & Barry, 2009).

### Getting Buy-In from the Funding Authority

As mentioned previously, the jail's physical plant repairs, upgrades, and renovations are often the first items to be eliminated from a jail's proposed budget during strategic negotiations or in tough fiscal times. Although it feels expeditious for the funding authority to delay what is not urgent, this type of budgeting "resolution," especially when it occurs for 5 or 10 years, brings the jail's physical plant into a crisis. Failing to make repairs often costs more in the future, and if the conditions of confinement consistently fail to meet Constitutional standards, the costs become more than just the repairs.

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Jeffrey Schwartz and Cynthia Barry (October, 2009)  
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While local citizens might not be concerned about inmates living for a few days/weeks without air conditioning because of a system failure, they don't realize that staff are also working in those conditions. Even if the funding authority has a "contingency" fund for unbudgeted jail repairs, the process of working to make repairs under emergency (and stressful) circumstances is often not the best scenario in which to produce a repair that is long-term in effect and cost effective.

As noted above, the jail's budget requests related to the physical plant need to be based on facts in order to maintain its integrity and credibility. The jail administrator must brief the funding authority about the current and anticipated needs of the physical plant and the equipment infrastructure, including:

- Documentation regarding life span of required equipment.
- Replacement costs.
- Repair histories.
- Impact on security operations.

Finding allies in other local agencies who also must keep the physical plant functioning can help to present a larger view of the issues. If the responsibility for the jail's physical plant and infrastructure rest with a department outside the jail, the administrator needs to maintain a strong relationship and provide education about the

needs of the jail and the conditions required for inmates. Reference to professional standards, case law, and current litigation regarding conditions of confinement are also helpful strategies. For example, if there is an issue with the reliability of the internal camera system, briefings about the PREA standards may enlighten those who are providing the funds.

### Conclusion

Ultimately the jail's physical plant is the jail leader's responsibility. This is true whether or not the funding authority is providing adequate funds for repairs, or if the funds for these essential jobs are part of the jail's budget. The jail leader must develop the data to document the needs (both long- and short-term), be prepared to collaborate with other local agencies, and to anticipate how physical plant crises will be addressed. Being successful at this core competency is essential to public safety. ■

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