

Why Consider the Preventability of a Detention Incident?

Risk management is one of the faster growing occupations in the United States due to internationalization of risks, insurance costs, and to greater attention paid to national security issues. One of the basic tenets of risk management in any context is to analyze accidents or other high risk situations to determine if the type of situation that occurred is partly or totally preventable. Why focus on preventability in a detainee population? Isn't it a pretty certain thing that detainees will act in irrational and violent ways? How can you accurately determine preventability of incidents when you are dealing with such a volatile population?

A good risk management plan requires facts or data, an assessment of trends, and a plan for circumventing risks. By tracking incidents, and doing a review of the factors that might have helped prevent the incident, a good detention manager can gather the information he or she needs to reduce future incidents. Risk management covers physical risks, environmental hazards, psychological or human factor risks, and procedural risks.

Physical assessment includes an assessment of the building, facilities, alarm systems, back-up generators, and other physical aspects implemented to secure prisoners and to secure facility records. It includes the environmental hazards that exist in, or are specific to, the locale and in the particular emergency. It also includes the physical preparedness of your staff to effectively contain various incidents, their proven physical ability to use special equipment and protocols, and physical limits on the team's ability to respond, such as the amount of resources your facility has compared to the degree of risk.

Psychological risk assessment includes an evaluation of the mental and psychological preparedness of your staff, their effectiveness as a cohesive team. It can measure

the degree to which they are "over-trained" so they will respond in the automatically correct manner even under stress, and assigning their tasks based on their individual personal characteristics—not ethics or what they believe, but their proven ability to act in accordance with a proper protocol under stress. The point of para-military emergency management is not to have employees that make "good" ethical judgments on their own initiative, but ones that will take the right procedural step without questioning it.

Another aspect of psychological assessment is assessing your inmates and detainees and learning to predict common types of behaviors as a response to environmental factors. One example is the overtly aggressive inmate. Most times, this behavior is a habitual, external reaction to personal stress. Once removed from the presence of other people or scapegoats, it is common for such an individual to turn the aggression on him- or her-self. While this may not be prevented in all instances, it may be predicted, and the risk reduced by the use of proper physical, environmental, procedural or psychological controls.

Procedural risks can be surveyed in two manners, by a review of the process itself or by a review of the documentation of the process which is to be followed. The documentation should accurately reflect what is actually done, and the actual procedures should meet a "best practice" benchmark recommended by an accreditation agency or the guidelines of a reputable professional organization. They must also pass Federal Constitutional muster or legal claims will result. For more information, contact CTSI at 303-861-0507.