

Colorado Jail Deaths on the Rise

Colorado Counties Casualty and Property Pool (CAPP) has seen a large increase in inmate-related deaths over the past 18 months. During that time, there have been seven deaths in Colorado jails. While the causes of death vary, i.e., suicide, drug overdose, and drug/alcohol withdrawal, a conscious effort can be made to prevent such fatalities.

Upon intake, if a person appears to have a medical issue, the jail should first seek medical clearance from a hospital to ensure the inmate is fit for confinement.

Communication between inmate and jail staff should be transparent. While some jails have contract medical service assistance, many do not. When in doubt about an inmate's medical condition, err on the side of caution. Call EMS, a hospital, or your contract medical service.

Some inmate deaths are a result of being taken off prescription drugs until verification of such drugs has been received. While some jails elect to have inmates go "cold turkey," there are other facilities that substitute alternative medications to bridge withdrawals.

Most jail deaths result in litigation which can be expensive. Cost factors are a concern for the pool, both in settlements, trials and defense costs. For example, in one case, no medical intervention was sought for an inmate's specific drug/alcohol

withdrawal and the inmate died. His family is now seeking over \$7M in damages.

If taking an inmate to the hospital due to a complaint seems like too much trouble, or if you are tempted to delay medical treatment because a medical provider is scheduled to visit the following day, use the most conservative and appropriate approach when assessing the inmate's medical complaint. There may be up-front costs, but in the long run, a life could be saved, and potential costs to the county could be far less in the long term.

What This Means for Counties

Communication with jail staff, contract medical providers, local hospitals and EMS will assist counties in caring for inmates, with the objective of reducing the number of inmate fatalities in Colorado jails.

For more information, contact CTSI's Loss Prevention at 303-861-0507.