

# Detention Center Coronavirus (COVID-19) Challenges

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**D**etention center officers have one of the most difficult and least understood jobs in the world. Maintaining the safety and security of the staff, the inmates, and the facility is challenging during normal times. It becomes even more difficult when trying to meet the increased demands presented by COVID-19.

Our detention centers and their staffs have stepped up during these challenging times and have implemented several best practices to help mitigate the exposures impacting their staffs and the inmates. Some of these practices include:

1. Educating employees and inmates to recognize symptoms of COVID-19 and providing guidance on what to do if they develop symptoms.
2. Checking the temperatures of all staff and incoming inmates on a daily basis if possible.
3. Isolating inmates showing signs of infection and monitoring them for 14 days.
4. Isolating suspects brought into the facility in a separate housing area for 14 days prior to being housed with the general population if possible.
5. Enhancing their screening questions at booking to help identify high risk suspects by asking:
  - a. Have you been tested for COVID-19?
  - b. Have you had a fever in the last month?

- c. Have you been coughing or felt a shortness of breath in the last month?
  - d. Have you had close contact with anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19?
  - e. Do you have a chronic medical condition?
  - f. Have you traveled internationally or on a cruise ship during the last month?
6. Providing surgical masks to any person exhibiting respiratory symptoms and contacting medical personnel for guidance.
7. Providing hand sanitizer, cleaning supplies, and soap to staff and encouraging frequent hand washing throughout the day.
8. Providing soap to inmates and encouraging frequent hand washing.
9. Cleaning and disinfecting all housing units and common areas on a daily basis.
10. Maintaining a distance of six feet from other persons if possible.
11. Staggering their shifts to limit the number of officers present at one location.
12. Suspending visitations, meetings, programs, haircuts, recreation, movements, and other activities that involve close one-on-one contact.



13. Increasing the use of video hearings and telemedicine options.
14. Encouraging law enforcement officers to issue summons to appear instead of bringing non-violent offenders to the detention centers.
15. Working with the solicitors and judges on releasing non-violent inmates on bond or using electronic monitoring.
16. Suspending the service of bench

warrants for family court and non-violent offenses.

Another challenge presented by COVID-19 is the increased need for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in the detention center. SCAC recently surveyed detention centers throughout South Carolina and asked them to identify their PPE needs, and the challenges that they are facing in dealing with COVID-19.

The most commonly identified PPE needs were: surgical masks, N95 Respirator Masks, face shields, safety goggles, gloves, gowns/coveralls, Tyvek Suits, booties, non-touch thermometers, HEPA-AIRE Negative Air Machines, Bio-Hazard Bags, hand sanitizer, disinfectant spray, disinfectant cleaner, and disinfectant wipes.

In addition, many facilities identified operational issues that they had never experienced before. One critical issue was the lack of negative pressure cells. These cells are used to house inmates with contagious diseases such as TB or COVID-19. The ventilation system in

these cells creates negative pressure to allow air to flow into the room and then out of the facility. Exhausting the air out of the facility helps mitigate the risk of exposing officers and inmates to the contagions.

Since many of South Carolina facilities were not built with negative pressure cells, they had to find other solutions. One solution to this dilemma was to purchase a device that can be placed into an existing cell that draws in the air and runs it through a HEPA (high efficiency particulate air) filter to capture the contagions. The Abatement Technologies HEPA-AIRE Negative Air Machine Model H2KM 10A is one such device being used by the Lexington County Detention Center to increase their capacity to isolate potentially infectious inmates. Several other facilities have now purchased these devices to meet their needs.

As we move forward, these frontline warriors will continue to learn and adapt to the challenging environment created by COVID-19. Through the hard work and dedication of officers across South

Carolina we have seen very few COVID-19 cases in our detention facilities so far. By implementing best practices, coordinating with all the entities involved in the criminal justice system, and working together, hopefully this trend will continue.

The next challenge in this recovery process will be to replenish the PPE stockpiles and adapt new procedures for the future. Please keep these frontline warriors in your thoughts and prayers!



#### Available Services

##### **County Assessors**

Tax Appeal Appraisal  
Litigation/Mediation Support  
Surplus Property Disposition

Rick Callahan  
Greenville, South Carolina  
803/457-5009  
[rick.proval@gmail.com](mailto:rick.proval@gmail.com)

##### **Right of Way Services**

ROW Scoping & Appraisal Review  
Value Engineering/Quantifying Impacts  
Providing Alternative Strategies  
Cost Estimates/Appraisal Management

Debi Wilcox, MAI, CCIM  
Murrells Inlet, South Carolina  
866/429-8931 Toll Free  
843/685-9180 Local  
[wilcox.L.debi@gmail.com](mailto:wilcox.L.debi@gmail.com)