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Embargoed until 11:30am on 26 July 2012

Two special reports to Parliament

The NSW Ombudsman Bruce Barbour has tabled two reports to Parliament today. The reports deal with two distinct and important issues: the use of force by correctional staff in prisons and the management of asbestos and other hazardous materials in NSW Police Force buildings. Both reports can be accessed at the NSW Ombudsman website after 11:30am on Thursday 26 July 2012.

Managing use of force in prisons: the need for better policy and practice

This report outlines the Ombudsman's findings and recommendations following an investigation into a use of force in a correctional centre. It also draws on our work over a number of years looking at the adequacy of the policies, procedures and systems for managing uses of force by correctional officers across the State.

"Inmates in NSW gaols are being punished by having their liberty taken away. They should not be subject to inappropriate or unnecessary uses of force" Mr Barbour said.

"Correctional officers work in a difficult, unpredictable and occasionally dangerous environment" said the Ombudsman. **"I accept there will be situations where they have to use force. But it is essential that they only do so appropriately and that they are given clear guidance."**

In addition to recommending a range of changes to use of force policy and procedures, the report highlights the need for better and more regular training in using force.

The report makes a range of recommendations to improve the checks and balances around individual uses of force. **"The information collected during these incidents is vital"** said Mr Barbour. **"Corrective Services should review each use of force, and the information and experience gained from these reviews should inform future situations and training."**

Our investigation showed the weaknesses of Corrective Service's ageing Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) systems. **"Clear video footage is one of the most essential accountability measures in prisons"** the Ombudsman said.

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“CCTV in gaols across the State needs to be checked to ensure it is recording what it is supposed to, and that those recordings are clear and are managed correctly.”

“While Corrective Services NSW has accepted for several years that improvements are needed in how uses of force are managed, the deficiencies outlined in this report show much more needs to be done” the Ombudsman said. **“My office will continue to monitor this issue very closely.”**

Safe as Houses? Management of asbestos in Police buildings

This report outlines the Ombudsman’s findings and recommendations following an investigation into NSW Police Force’s (NSWPF) actions in managing hazardous materials, such as asbestos and lead based paint, in its buildings.

“NSW Police Force has approximately 1,350 properties across the State” said the Ombudsman, Bruce Barbour. **“These are police stations, holding yards, training facilities and houses. Police employees and their families are entitled to expect the premises in which they live and work to be safe’.**

“Deficiencies in how police properties have been managed means hazardous materials like asbestos and lead based paint have not always been identified and properly managed” Mr Barbour said. **“NSWPF had failed to comply with its obligations to keep its staff safe from harm.”**

The current property management model involves four separate parties – the NSWPF, a private property contractor, the State Property Authority and the Ministry for Police and Emergency Services. **“The current model doesn’t work and is one of the main reasons for the failure to properly manage hazardous materials”** the Ombudsman said. **“Each party needs to know what its responsibilities are, and has to work to ensure it meets them.”**

Importantly, since July 2011 NSWPF has done a great deal of work to meet its obligations and ensure staff are safe from contact with hazardous materials. It has also conducted an education and information campaign across local area commands.

The report makes a number of recommendations, most of which relate to developing a new model for the management of police properties. It also recommends the State Property Authority conduct a broader review of all government properties to ensure hazardous materials are identified and appropriately managed. **“This is an important issue across government”** said the Ombudsman. **“Conducting this review will help make sure all those working in older public buildings are safe in the workplace.”**

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