



Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Corrective Services**

# **Response to the Report on Thermal Conditions of Prison Cells**

## **Department of Corrective Services**

**July 2015**

## Responses to Recommendations

### *1. Document acceptable temperature ranges for each prison.*

**Response:**

There are few or no Australian guidelines on thermal standards for custodial environments. However, the Department is aware that overseas prison authorities have adopted thermal comfort ranges.

The Department is also aware of a number of heat stress indices that take into account factors such as air temperature, wind movements, vapor pressure, metabolic rates and the insulating effect of clothing. These indices could be used as a means for determining geographical zones of higher and lower thermal comfort. Like all comfort indices, they should only be regarded as a guide for determining heat discomfort and decision making.

To date, each facility has managed temperature extremes with flexible, local solutions depending on the perceived or apparent level of thermal discomfort. Practical examples include changes to structured activities and work routines and adaptive initiatives such as the availability of water coolers and freezers, the provision of fans and the distribution of additional blankets and clothing.

**Level of Acceptance:** Supported in Principle

**Action required:**

- Conduct research into the thermal comfort ranges used by other prison authorities and consider their applicability to WA.
- Prisons continue to manage temperature extremes at individual sites in accordance with local management plans, sustainability guidelines and community expectations.

***2. Implement mechanisms for assessing cell temperatures in every prison, at least during the hottest and coldest months.***

**Response:**

The suggestion that the Department is unaware of cell thermal conditions is incorrect. Local management at each facility is aware of the cell conditions during the hottest and coldest months. Where appropriate remedial action is taken to maintain or improve thermal comfort. Practical examples include the distribution of fans, cooled water, extra blankets and additional appropriate clothing.

Defining the criteria for physical discomfort is difficult because personal reactions to the weather vary according to a number of factors such as health, age, clothing, physical activity and acclimatisation. Any approved monitoring mechanisms would need to include temperature monitoring and may need to consider a wider set of defining criteria of physical discomfort such as humidity, vapour pressure and air movement depending on the complexity of information required.

The Department is aware of climatic discomfort studies based on the average response of subjects under specified conditions. The data from these studies has been used to chart personal comfort levels and to map the likely number of days of discomfort in different regions and under standardised conditions e.g. indoors and wearing light clothing. The feasibility and cost of monitoring and collecting representative thermal comfort data will be explored further.

**Level of Acceptance:** Supported in Principle

**Action required:**

- Investigate the feasibility and cost of mechanisms to monitor and collect representative thermal comfort data in prisons.

**3. *Develop and implement a state plan for addressing the risk of temperature extremes across the custodial estate.***

**Response:**

The Department has implemented a Summer Strategy at each facility for many years. Last year, the strategy was extended and revamped. In October 2014, Operation Solstice was developed and implemented as the state-wide summer strategy. At the conclusion of the summer period, an evaluation occurred where improvements were identified.

The lessons learnt from this strategy are being used to develop a broader operational preparedness strategy that will focus on reducing climatic discomfort and fatigue during the summer and winter solstice. This strategy will reflect a number of actual and potential site specific preparedness activities for managing physical discomfort and risks to prisoners during temperature extremes.

**Level of Acceptance:** Supported – existing Departmental initiative

**Action required:**

- Complete and implement an operational strategy with guidance on actual and potential site specific initiatives to address physical discomfort and risks to prisoners during temperature extremes.

**4. Provide air-conditioning in all prison cells where acceptable temperatures cannot be maintained using cheaper methods.**

**Response:**

Air-conditioning is a costly form of temperature control, especially if buildings need extensive retrofitting for efficient operation. The provision of air-conditioning in all cells across the state would be cost-prohibitive, and in some cases is not possible due to the security and safety concerns that retrofitted infrastructure can present.

The limited monitoring snapshot in the Inspectorate's report does not provide sufficient data to build a case for costly and complex infrastructure improvements at some of the older facilities. Detailed longitudinal data at prioritised facilities would be required, along with a business case that considers offender acclimatisation, local community infrastructure standards and broader community based expectations. Potential trade-offs against other work programs would need to be identified.

The Department has adopted a mixed approach to maintaining thermal comfort. The selective use of air conditioning is one of a number of solutions based on an understanding of risk, offender needs and the primary considerations of safety and security.

Air-conditioning is used as a safety measure for cells used to hold prisoners deemed at-risk. Management and observation cells in most facilities are air-conditioned in order to maintain thermal discomfort and to minimize the number of potential ligature points. Air conditioning is also prioritised in crisis care units and day rooms such as communal areas and libraries, mother and baby houses, maximum security wing cells, work camp bedrooms, transit cells and some gender specific wings and cells. All cells at West Kimberly have refrigerated air conditioning.

Elsewhere, the Department utilises a more economical system of air-conditioning the wings of units, which increases the air-flow to cells. For example, at the Banksia Hill Detention Centre, all units have air conditioning in day rooms which is also used to cool cells. At the Wandoo Reintegration facility, all common areas, save the 'J Block' wing, have evaporative air conditioning which also cools cells (Attachment B refers). In all other cases, cost effective forms of passive and temperature control is used to maintain thermal comfort.

The Department is aware of broader regulatory and community expectations for appropriate building designs that keep indoor temperatures comfortable without using energy-intensive space cooling. Both the West Kimberley and Eastern Goldfields regional prisons have been designed to reduce the impact of temperature extremes while also reducing operating costs and increasing building resilience. Practical examples of passive heat management strategies at West Kimberley include the provision of opening windows for air flow and enclosed mesh patios for sleeping in if prisoners wish.

**Level of Acceptance:** Noted

**Action required:**

- Investigate the feasibility and cost of mechanisms to monitor and collect longitudinal thermal comfort data at prioritised sites, including Roebourne.
- If data is collected, use this data and any nominated climatic discomfort index as a guide only for future decisions and strategic asset planning.

**5. Include heat-related illness as part of the risk assessment when assigning people to cells, ensuring people at high risk of heat-related illness are placed in cells with air-conditioning.**

**Response:**

The Department notes that some health conditions can adversely affect an offender's ability to manage extreme temperatures and can pose a risk to their well-being.

The Department intends to explore options on assessing the potential heat-related risk assessment when assigning people to cells. Given the multiple factors that affect an individual's ability to self-regulate responses to temperature, it is intended to seek advice from relevant health professionals.

Other relevant factors, that are less reliant on the health status of individuals include:

- the thermal environment (which encompasses more than just the weather or the temperature, and includes local humidity, air flow, radiant heat sources),
- the availability of water,
- behaviour and activity level,
- the ability of the person to take reasonable steps to maintain their own temperature management (cognition, mental health, self-management),
- clothing, and
- a heat tolerance threshold which is quite personal and not easily predictable. People also have their own preference as to what environment they feel comfortable in, and do acclimatise.

As you would be aware, prisoners with ongoing medical conditions, the frail and the aged and other risk groups are continually monitored and assessed, Where appropriate, offenders may be relocated or transferred to an air cooled cell or more appropriate facility on the advice of a nurse or doctor.

**Level of Acceptance:** Supported

**Action required:**

- Explore the development of an appropriate risk assessment tool that includes heat-related illness.

**6. Improve shading and install air-conditioning in Roebourne Regional Prison within the next 12 months to mitigate the significant risk of heat-related illness.**

**Response:**

Roebourne has been referred to as the hottest prison in Australia. At the time of construction in 1984, the Department assessed the use of air conditioning for prisoners against the regulatory and community standards at the time. Air conditioning was not the standard in the local community or a feature of most homes.

The Department has retrospectively installed air-conditioning in the following areas of Roebourne Prison:

- all work camp cells
- all wing 3 cells (maximum rated)
- the observation cell, two multi-purpose cells and the transit cell
- all wing 4 cells (female section) including observation cell, two multi-purpose cells, the mother and child cell and the dayroom
- dining room
- library areas.

Active and passive temperature control measures are also utilised including:

- windows that can be opened by prisoners to allow fresh air into the cells
- ventilation
- ceiling fans in all mainstream cells
- high ceilings
- shade sails in the yard areas.

Adjustments to Roebourne's prison routine and modified patterns of prisoner movement such as flexible lock downs are used to avoid temperature extremes. A range of adaptive and behavioral initiatives such as the use of sun cream, wide brimmed hats, ice machines, water bubblers and water bottles are used and encouraged. Education such as instructions and signage is also used.

The installation of permanent shade structures in place of shade sails at Roebourne has been included in the proposed Infrastructure Program 2015/16.

**Level of Acceptance:** Noted

**Action required:**

- Roebourne continues to manage temperature extremes in accordance with local management plans and proposed operational strategy.
- Investigate the feasibility and cost of mechanisms to monitor and collect longitudinal thermal comfort data at prioritised sites, including Roebourne.
- Use this data and any nominated climatic discomfort index as a guide for future decisions and strategic asset planning.
- Continue to evaluate cost effective air cooling options in line with current codes, regulations and community expectations.

***7. Cease the practice of using dongas as accommodation for prisoners unless acceptable temperatures can be maintained.***

**Response:**

The Department has dealt with the increasing prisoner population through the selective addition of donga accommodation that can be installed both efficiently and cost effectively. It not intended to install donga style accommodation as a long term measure; although it is occasionally necessary and preferable to the installation of additional beds in existing cells. They are typically, but not always, used to house minimum security prisoners.

Three prison sites use donga accommodation for medium or minimum security rated prisoners. They are:

- Bandyup – 16 individual dongas
- Karnet – 32 individual dongas
- Greenough – 14 individual dongas.

The dongas at Bandyup and Greenough have air conditioning while the dongas at Karnet have heating and no air conditioning.

Other sites including Pardelup prison farm, Walpole, Wyndham, Warburton, Dowerin, and Roebourne work camps and Hakea Unit 8 use transportable/prefabricated buildings with varying levels of air conditioning provided. It should be noted that the transportable/prefabricated buildings at Wyndham, Warburton, Dowerin and Roebourne are custom designed with thermal considerations as part of their design including site placement and the roof materials used.

**Level of Acceptance:** Supported in Principle

**Action required:**

- No further action.

**8. Develop guidelines on actions to be undertaken in response to extreme temperatures.**

**Response:**

A number of active and passive mitigations are deployed across all facilities to manage physical discomfort and risks to prisoners during temperature extremes. The Department acknowledges that documented guidelines on existing and new mitigations would assist superintendents to manage climatic variables.

The Department has had a Summer Strategy in place at each facility for many years. Last year, the strategy was extended and revamped. In October 2014, the Department developed and implemented Operation Solstice as a state-wide summer strategy. At the conclusion of the summer period, an evaluation occurred where improvements were identified.

It is intended that this strategy will become a broader operational strategy that focuses on reducing climatic discomfort, illness (colds and flu) and fatigue across the full summer and winter climatic cycle. The need for localised plans for each facility to respond to extreme temperatures will also be considered.

**Level of Acceptance:** Supported – existing Departmental initiative

**Action required:**

- Complete and implement an operational strategy with guidance on actual and potential site specific initiatives to address physical discomfort and risks to prisoners during temperature extremes.

**9. Address the inequity in fan provision for prisoners.**

**Response:**

Fans are periodically used by some prisoners to reduce apparent temperatures in cells. However, portable fans must be used with caution when apparent temperatures exceed 37°C. This is because the increased circulation of hot air can increase thermal stress and health risks unless they draw in cooler air.

*Policy Directive 42: Prisoner Property* enables the designated superintendent to allow prisoners to retain certain personal effects during their imprisonment. These personal effects may be kept in a prisoner's possession (in their cell for example). Permitting prisoners to retain some private property assists to reduce the negative impact of imprisonment and promotes individual well-being.

The number of electrical items allowed in a prisoner's cell depends on their supervision level. The possession of electric heaters in cells is at the discretion of the superintendent. Air conditioners are not permitted in a prisoner's possession. The superintendent may, on advice from the Director Health Services, supply items of property not normally issued to a prisoner who requires the item due to a medical condition.

In periods of extreme heat, superintendents exercise their discretion to issue personal fans or additional electrical items. Fans are also available for purchase. Roebourne, which experiences hotter temperatures than other facilities during the summer period, applies this discretion under Local Order 51. In all cases, the number of electrical items in the possession of prisoners may be rationed where the electrical system is inadequate or where the presence of multiple electrical items may pose a safety risk.

The Department is updating and consolidating existing policy directives and rules to provide a clear and unambiguous set of guiding principles for the safety and security of staff and offenders. Equity and fairness considerations will be taken into account as part of the policy review process where appropriate.

**Level of Acceptance:** Noted

**Action required:**

- Incorporate equity and fairness criteria into the policy consolidation process where appropriate.