

MEDIA RELEASE

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REPORT RELEASED ON PRISON PROPERTY

Ombudsman Victoria (OV) today released a report that revealed systemic problems in the handling, storage and transfer of prisoner property.

“The aim of the investigation was to provide recommendations that would lead to improving the management of prisoner property in all Victorian prisons,” Victoria’s Ombudsman Mr George Brouwer said.

During the investigation, OV investigators visited all 12 public and private Victorian prisons and conducted over 100 interviews with staff and prisoners.

Out of 807 complaints from prisoners in 2003—04, 123 complaints were about damage and loss of property. Policies and standard operating procedures were reviewed and property systems were inspected. Officers also examined procedures at an interstate prison.

Mr Brouwer said the investigation found the computer system at the heart of the property management system was inefficient.

“One of the main failings of the present system is that property data was not accurately recorded and there was a lack of training and support for staff using the database that has also led to less than optimal use of the computer system.”

The database is fully operational and networked across the public prisons but private prisons do not have direct access to the network.

OV made the following recommendations to address the inadequacies in the current administration of prisoner property across the prisons.

- All Victorian prisons have access to a fully integrated computer program to enable property to be effectively and efficiently managed.
- Consistent policies on cell clearances, cell searches, property compensation, property storage, transport, and property handling should be developed and promulgated for all prisons.
- Ensure that property officers directly enter and accurately record property data on to a computer database program.
- All property officers receive appropriate training in the new E*Justice system.
- A storage limit for property be established and managed by Corrections Victoria.
- Property lists be provided to prisoners on entry to a prison.
- Introduce sealed and individually identifiable plastic property tubs.
- Ensure that uniform storage systems are developed for valuables across all Victorian prisons.

The Department of Justice and the private prison operators have accepted the recommendations.

The report is on the Ombudsman Victoria website at www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au.

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