



AROUND THE STATE: DRONES DROP CONTRABAND AT MTU, DRF

After many close calls and suspicious sightings, drones have unquestionably dropped contraband in at least two Michigan prisons.

MTU officers caught a drone dropping contraband near two units in the early morning of Aug. 17. Due to the quick actions of two third-shift yard officers, police were able to arrest three suspects immediately after the drop. The Ionia Emergency Response Team found the drone and evidence near the prison later that day. *MTU officers and the Ionia-area ERT did a phenomenal job. Thank you for your great work!*

A drone also dropped contraband at Carson City Aug. 10. Packages were found in the inmate garden, officers said.

The two MTU yard officers heard a strange noise shortly after 4 a.m. Aug. 17. One of the officers said the noise sounded like “bees buzzing.” They looked up and saw a drone.

“Shortly after we spotted it, it dropped a package,” one officer said. The drone flew away, but returned and dropped another package.

The officers called a supervisor. The area was searched, and the packages were brought to the control center.

Staff immediately called the police, and three people found nearby with a vehicle were detained. Jonathan Lavawn Roundtree, Daryl Steven Marshall, and Patrick Corey Seaton Jr. now face charges in Ionia County, according to media reports. One of them was recently released on parole.

Later that morning, the ERT found the drone, tobacco, marijuana, and other possible evidence near the prison.

Although MCO members and leaders are grateful this drone was quickly seen and arrests were made, we still have concerns about the safety and security of prisons. MTU officers say there was some luck involved here. The two yard officers

were in the right place at the right time, and all staff handled the drone drop appropriately.

Officers have pointed out that if COs were in a gun tower, they could have seen suspicious activity, possibly before the drone dropped the packages. Towers, when staffed, serve as a powerful deterrent against contraband drops.

MDOC now relies heavily on cameras, but cameras can’t respond. Technology can’t replace staff, who can intervene. The presence of custody staff, whether it be in housing units or in towers, deters crime.

MCO is still heavily advocating for more legislation and regulation of drones. The MCO/MDOC joint Health and Safety Committee has discussed the threats posed by drones and possible solutions.

“The threats are not threats any more. They are happening. It’s happening across the country,” said Brent Kowitz, MCO Executive Board member and MCO’s representative on the committee.

An Unmanned Aircraft Systems Task Force will develop statewide policy recommendations on the operation, use, and regulation of unmanned aircraft systems in Michigan. The task force, established by the governor, includes representatives from several state departments, including MDOC. MCO leaders are pleased the governor is taking drones seriously.

MCO will keep members posted as we and other groups find solutions to drones over prisons.

A nine-inmate fight broke out on a walkway during morning chow lines Thursday at Bellamy Creek. Level IV prisoners started to fight on the way back from breakfast. COs say the fighting was gang-related.

Officers immediately responded and recovered a weapon. One CO suffered a knee injury in the response.

A Trinity worker at Kinross was fired for refusing to order inmates to pick through rotten potatoes to salvage good ones, according to the Detroit Free Press.

The former employee told the Free Press that many bags of potatoes were spoiled. An MDOC spokesperson said only about a third of the potatoes were bad. Due to inmates’ concerns, none of the potatoes were ultimately served, the spokesperson said.

MCO President Tom Tylutki told the Free Press members still have serious concerns about food quality and quantity.

“Poor food quality and quantity puts the safety of everyone inside a prison at risk...” Tylutki said. “Everyone deserves healthy, nutritious food prepared in a sanitary environment, and that goes for inmates, too. This is a moral issue for all sides.”

MCO leaders and staff are still keeping tabs on food complaints. Please email mail@mco-seiu.org with information.

Unions examining proposed Civil Service rule changes

The Michigan Civil Service Commission will consider proposed rule changes that the state personnel director claims will improve efficiency and streamline employee issues.

A coalition of unions and attorneys are combing through these proposed changes to Civil Service Commission Rules Chapter 6, “Employee-Employer Relations.” The coalition is preparing to address the proposed changes and impacts they could have on collective bargaining.

The Civil Service Commission is scheduled to decide on these changes at its Sept. 20 meeting. If they are approved, the changes are scheduled to take effect in January 2019. More details could be shared in the coming weeks. Please watch your email and our website, mco-seiu.org.