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OREGON'S MID-WILLAMETTE VALLEY

Arrests, abuse, lawsuits hit Oregon women's prison

PORTLAND, Ore. (WTW) — A thousand blind spots gave cover to sexual predators at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, the Oregon women's prison. Former prison landscape manager Paul W. Golden used a shed.

One of his victims described how he cornered her, kept watch out the building's only window and fondled her under her prison-issue clothing.

Golden was convicted in 2009 of custodial sexual misconduct, but his crimes were not the end of problems at the facility in Wilsonville.

The Oregonian (<http://bit.ly/Jgj43P>) reports state authorities have paid \$1.2 million to 17 current and former inmates to settle lawsuits stemming from sexual abuse by corrections workers.

"I came here to pay my consequences, not to become a victim of a crime," Golden's victim said.

Crimes against prisoners were tracked to 2002, a year after the prison opened. The settlements cover crimes by Golden and three others before 2008, but authorities believe abuse has continued. Two men were arrested this year and a third is being

investigated.

Corrections officials said the newest arrests surprised them.

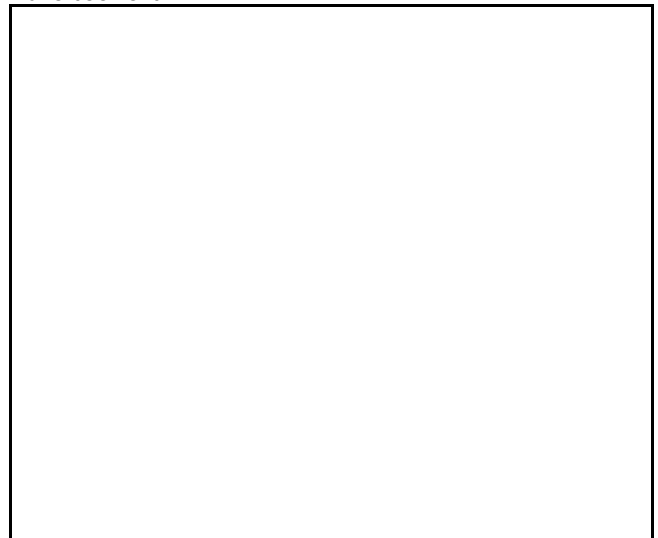
"We put as many checks and balances in place as we can," said Colette Peters, Corrections Department director since February. "Unfortunately, there were still areas these activities occurred and boundaries that were still crossed."

Salem attorney Brian Lathen represents 14 victims.

"You need to clean house," he said. "It's one thing if it was one case involving one inmate. You've got a serious problem here — an epidemic."

The prison covers 108 acres and sex acts, which are illegal even if a prisoner consents, occurred in cleaning closets, utility tunnels, toolsheds, woodlands and under a fire truck, according to interviews, trial transcripts, depositions, police reports and budget documents.

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An internal review ordered in June 2009 by prison superintendent Nancy Howton, who led the prison from 2007 until last month, found inadequate security patrols, too few surveillance cameras and rooms without windows.

Howton restricted access to remote buildings. She created a "Rule of Three" that barred entry to certain parts of the prison unless three people were present. Auditors from the National Institute of Corrections recommended 28 improvements. Howton ordered modest fixes such as adding windows to small offices, but budget problems got in the way of other changes.

Howton suggested spending \$355,000 to hire a corrections officer to oversee the maintenance area and to upgrade and expand the prison's surveillance system. Four months later, agency officials promised to consider the request and attend to it "based on the availability of funds." Last year, the Corrections Department authorized Coffee Creek to buy 10 cameras. Howton renewed her request for \$355,000, but a state money shortage forced the department to cut millions.

Current and former inmates sued after initial arrests. State attorneys denied their allegations and said harm to the women "was a direct result of their own actions and inactions," including "any failure to report any alleged misconduct."

The woman whom Golden assaulted in the shed told The Oregonian that the state's

attitude toward her was: "You must have done something. You wanted it." The state never apologized.

"I don't feel like they think they did anything wrong," she said.

Attorney General John Kroger rejected requests for an interview.

Michelle Burrows, a Portland attorney representing four of the women, said in a federal court filing that "this case has generated a wall of silence and non-responsiveness from the state."

"They are very aggressive," said Lathen, the Salem attorney. "It's not so much that this didn't happen but, 'You should have told us.'"

The Justice Department, the Corrections Department and the state's in-house insurers at the Department of Administrative Services decided to settle in March after nearly two years of litigation that cost Oregon \$415,000. The

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settlement will pay the 17 women an average of \$74,000 each.

The state admitted no wrongdoing.

The settlement does not end litigation from Coffee Creek. Two women on April 3 notified the state that they intend to sue over abuse they claim they suffered by the two men arrested this year.

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