



Eleven Staff Exposed to Unknown Substances at Auburn Correctional Facility

Exposures Occur Over 3 – Day Period Last Week

August 11, 2025

Auburn, NY –Chemical exposures that cause staff to become ill and hospital treatment for their symptoms continue to plague correctional facilities across the state even as contraband seizures have decreased after the implementation of legal mail scanning at prisons this past April.

On August 3, two officers were transported by ambulance after becoming lightheaded, with headaches and chills, after conducting a cell frisk and encountering an inmate’s mail that had a dampness to it. The two officers were initially treated by medical staff at the facility and later transported to the hospital where they were treated and released.

It has not been determined what substance was soaked into the mail.

On August 5, an officer was conducting rounds in a cell block when he noted a chemical burning smell. Another staff member on the cell block also noted a similar smell. A third officer, who was conducting the inmate count on the cell block had smoke that smelled of a burnt chemical blown into his face by an inmate. The inmate then claimed to be suicidal, and a sergeant and mental health staff responded to the inmate’s cell. Once the inmate was cleared, the officer

who had the smoke blown into his face began feeling dizzy, lightheaded, and nauseous. He was evaluated at the facility and noted to have elevated blood pressure. He was taken by ambulance to Auburn Hospital for evaluation. The Auburn Fire Department was notified and responded to the facility to determine the chemical exposure.

A sergeant, three officers and a civilian staff, who were all exposed on the cell block, began feeling ill as well. They were all transported to Auburn Hospital for evaluation and released once the symptoms subsided.

During the investigation into the exposure, staff determined that inmates were exchanging unknown substances between cells that was captured on surveillance video just prior to staff becoming ill. Several inmates who were involved were removed from their cells and frisks were conducted for contraband. Firefighters conducted tests for chemicals but were inconclusive. Once the cell block was cleared, the inmates were returned to their respective cells.

The last exposure occurred the following day when staff observed two inmates vomiting in their cells. They were removed from their cells and escorted to the infirmary by a sergeant and officer. After completing the escort, the sergeant and officer both became ill and were transported to Auburn Hospital for treatment. During a search of the inmate's cells, a K9 alerted on one of the cells for drugs. During the search, staff recovered three sheets of paper that were saturated with an unknown liquid and two white pills, that later were determined to be anti-anxiety medication. The drugs were seized as evidence.

A third officer who was involved in the incident, also began feeling ill after entering the cell and was transported to Auburn Hospital as well.

"It is extremely frustrating and concerning that the exposures continue statewide at a high level and continue to send staff to hospitals because of the symptoms they develop. What is equally upsetting is the fact that although assaults and contraband can be tracked, there is nothing currently showing how many members are taken from prisons by ambulances daily. While we have been screaming since the HALT act was signed into law that the assaults on staff would sky rocket, which they did, and that when the state suspended the HALT act the assaults declined just as we said they would, we cannot accurately show the public the frequency of ambulances arriving at our facilities to take members to the hospital. More needs to be done to stop this influx of drugs getting in. No person should wake up to go to work wondering if they will be subjected to an unknown substance and what their body will be ingesting. Does the legislators that enact laws with little to no penalties for bad behavior know what the smell of synthetic marijuana, or of a lithium battery being smoked actually smells like or does to an officer's body? Adding to that frustration, when HAZMAT teams are called in after an exposure, most cannot determine the type of chemical, making it more concerning that we can't pinpoint what the actual chemicals are. These exposures continue to happen and there will be a time when someone develops permanent disabilities or even dies as a result of being exposed!" - stated Kenny Gold, Western Region Vice President.