



## Summary Fact Sheet

November 21, 2024

### AUDIT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS AND REHABILITATION'S PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES FOR PREVENTING, DETECTING, AND RESPONDING TO ESCAPES (AUDIT REPORT N° 23-02, NOVEMBER 2024)

In this audit, we evaluated the department's policies and processes for preventing, detecting, and immediately responding to escapes. We reviewed escapes that occurred from January 1, 2022, through December 31, 2023, from minimum-support facilities and conservation camps—the only locations with reported escapes during the audit period. Our audit did not include a review of escapes or attempted escapes from community reentry programs.

#### Background

One of the department's primary objectives is to protect the public by maintaining physical custody of incarcerated people. Incarcerated people are not in the department's physical custody when they escape. Incarcerated people are guilty of escape if, without lawful authority, they remove or attempt to remove themselves from official confinement.

When incarcerated people are taken into departmental custody, they undergo a classification process to establish where they will be housed. Staff use a placement score, in conjunction with escape history and other case factors (administrative determinants), to house the person in either a secure or nonsecure facility.

Secure facilities generally have multiple physical barriers and checkpoints, such as sallyports and gates, which confine incarcerated people and restrict their movement within facilities. Conversely, nonsecure facilities generally do not restrict movement and include fewer physical barriers.

Departmental regulations and guidelines include measures that may deter and prevent escapes. These measures include conducting physical counts to track and account for incarcerated people. The department's Design and Construction Standards: Design Criteria Guidelines (design guidelines) also require security fences and walls, based on the security level of the facility. Most prisons that currently operate minimum-support facilities include fencing with razor or barbed wire. In contrast, most conservation camps do not have physical fences.

In addition, each prison and conservation camp is required to have an escape pursuit plan that must be updated annually. Escape pursuit plans are initiated by prisons and conservation camps when an incarcerated person is discovered missing.

After every escape, staff must prepare an after-action report summarizing the incident and detailing a timeline of key events that occurred both before and after the escape. After-action reports also identify deficiencies that contributed to the escape and recommend specific actions to correct the deficiencies.

In total, from 2019 through 2023, one incarcerated person escaped from a secure prison facility, while 50 incarcerated people escaped from either a minimum-support facility or a conservation camp. Although the number of escapes is relatively low, the department must take every precaution to prevent escapes and to protect the safety and security of prisons, prison staff, incarcerated people, and the public. The risks and consequences of just one escape can be severe and tragic, resulting in injury and harm to prison staff and the public.

#### The Department Can Improve Its Policies and Procedures to Ensure That Established Protocols Are Followed to Prevent, Promptly Detect, and Respond to Escapes

In our review of 12 of 25 escapes that occurred from January 1, 2022, through December 31, 2023, we found that count procedures were effective in detecting missing incarcerated people and initiating emergency counts to confirm escapes. Moreover, departmental staff conducted the required searches of housing and yard areas after escapes were suspected. However, staff did not always follow departmental policy and procedures when carrying out the escape pursuit plan.

We found several instances in which prisons or conservation camps did not follow the required sequence of escape pursuit activities. For example, incident commanders failed to notify designated departmental units of escapes, assign additional central control staff to pursue the escapee, retrieve





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and review escapees' records, or notify escapees' documented victims.

### After-Action Reports Are Not Written After All Escapes as Required by Departmental Guidelines and Policy

Departmental staff provided us with vague and contradictory explanations regarding the circumstances under which after-action reports are required after an escape. During our review, departmental managers stated that after-action reports had not been completed for seven escapes. When we made numerous requests for clarification as to why the reports were not prepared, a departmental manager stated that departmental policy does not require after-action reports for all escapes, and that policy supersedes the guidelines that require after-action reports.

We requested that the department provide us with after-action reports for three escapes we had selected for substantive testing. After informing us multiple times that those reports did not exist, the department ultimately provided the reports 49 days after we had initially requested them. However, none of the three reports document that they had been submitted to departmental executives for review or approval, and the department could not confirm whether management had reviewed them. Furthermore, the department could not provide the date on which one of the three after-action reports had been prepared.

If staff do not comply with existing policy to complete after-action reports, the department cannot effectively monitor staff's compliance with procedures to prevent and respond to escapes, provide guidance, or revise policies to address escape risks and improve operations.

### The Department Does Not Always Adequately Oversee Facilities' Responses to Escapes in Order to Identify and Correct Security Weaknesses

We found that the department did not always require deficiencies identified during escapes to be corrected. Managers recommended specific actions to correct deficiencies related to six of the 12 escapes we reviewed. However, we found that the managers' recommendations were not implemented in three of the six cases.

In one instance, the incident commander's contact information was missing from an initial press release issued after an escape. Because the incident commander's contact information was missing from the press release, the incident commander did not receive timely information regarding a sighting of the escapee, and law enforcement units were not immediately dispatched. According to the department, staff who were responsible for issuing the incomplete press release received training, but the department neither provided proof of training nor training memoranda to support the statement.

After another escape, a manager recommended corrective action to address deficiencies identified in staff reports, in communication among staff, and in monitoring a conservation camp's telephone system. Although the department provided a participation sheet as evidence that staff had attended training after the escape, it did not include any information about the training topic, the individuals who attended, or the date the training was provided. Therefore, we found no evidence that staff at the conservation camp had carried out the corrective action recommended in the after-action report.

Finally, a manager from a conservation camp jointly operated with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) recommended corrective action after identifying errors in reports, deficiencies in the inventory of vehicles used at the camp, and delayed telematics reporting from a stolen CAL FIRE vehicle used in an escape.

The conservation camp took corrective action after the escape by requiring staff to attend additional training and by implementing measures to control the inventory of vehicles; however, it did not address the inability to promptly access telematics reporting from the CAL FIRE vehicle. When we asked why this deficiency was not addressed, the department stated the following:

CDCR has zero access or any point of contact for CAL FIRE telematics after hours. This is a CAL FIRE issue and will need to [sic] handled at a higher level to streamline this process between CDCR and CAL FIRE. It cannot be handled at the local level and camps have no control over this issue.



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Because conservation camps are jointly operated by the department and CAL FIRE, other CAL FIRE vehicles could be commandeered during escapes. Therefore, the department should have immediately communicated with CAL FIRE to ensure that the GPS tracking system is always enabled for all its vehicles used at conservation camps. Because the department failed to address this known weakness, its ability to promptly track escapees continues to be impaired.

**The Department Does Not Have a Central Source of Data for Tracking and Monitoring Escapes**

We found inconsistencies between the escape data the department had publicly reported and the data it provided for this audit, in part because there is no central location or source where escapes and attempted escapes are tracked and monitored.

According to departmental management, all escape data is tracked in its Strategic Offender Management System (SOMS), one of its electronic databases. The department, therefore, pulls data from SOMS to publicly report escape statistics. However, the escape data provided to us during this audit came from the Office of Correctional Safety's (OCS) escape logs, a

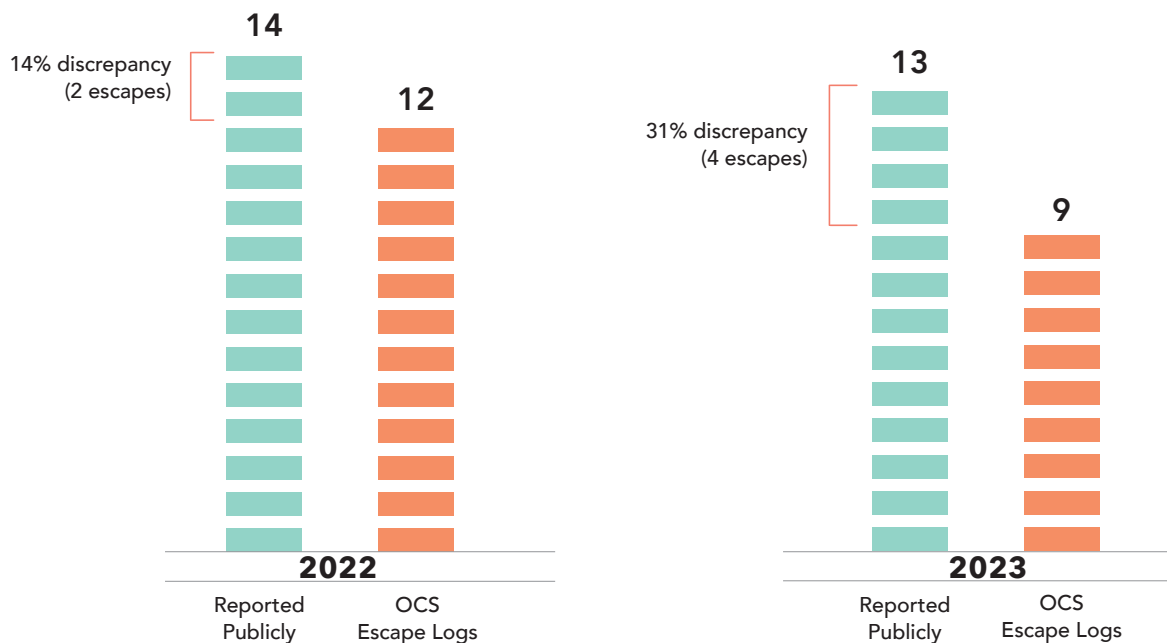
manual tracking system that is maintained outside of SOMS.

When a prison or conservation camp requests assistance from OCS to respond to an escape, and OCS staff are deployed, a special agent in that office generates a case number and manually logs the incident in its records. If OCS is not contacted or OCS staff are not deployed, the escape is not documented on its escape logs.

Because the department did not provide the information we had requested from SOMS, we were unable to reconcile the two data sources to verify that the escape statistics the department had publicly reported were accurate. However, we reconciled the department's 2022 and 2023 OCS escape logs to the after-action reports the department had provided and identified four escapes in 2023 that had not been included in OCS escape logs.

Figure 1 below shows the discrepancy in the number of escapes the department publicly reported and the number of escapes documented in the department's Office of Correctional Safety escape logs.

**Figure 1. Discrepancies in the Department's Reporting of Incarcerated Person Escapes in 2022 and 2023**



Note: OCS stands for the Office of Correctional Safety.

Source: Departmental COMPSTAT reports and OCS escape logs for the period from January 1, 2022, through December 31, 2023.



## Recommendations

### *The Department Can Improve Its Policies and Procedures to Ensure That Established Protocols are Followed to Prevent, Promptly Detect, and Respond to Escapes*

- The department should ensure that after-action reports are prepared after all escapes.
- The department should require staff to document the staff member who prepared each after-action report and the date each report was prepared.
- The department should require designated managers to document that they reviewed and approved the after-action reports.

### *The Department Does Not Always Adequately Oversee Facilities' Responses to Escapes in Order to Identify and Correct Security Weaknesses*

- The department should clarify or, if necessary, develop and implement policies and procedures to ensure that corrective action is taken to address all issues identified in after-action reports written in response to escapes.

### *The Department Does Not Have a Central Source of Data for Tracking and Monitoring Escapes*

- The department should develop a central tracking system to collect and report all escapes and attempted escapes. The tracking protocols should include reporting all incidents—not only those for which OCS is notified or when OCS staff are deployed.