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## **Guards blame attacks on gangs, overcrowding; [FINAL Edition]**

**Pantagraph.** Bloomington, Ill.: Nov 29, 1993. pg. A.5

### **Abstract (Summary)**

Guards say gang members see hits against authority as a way of gaining the respect of fellow inmates and rising in the prisoners' hierarchy.

Overcrowding leaves a limited space to put inmates who attack employees. That should change when the state opens a 500-bed super-maximum security prison in Tamms in far Southern Illinois to house many of the system's most violent inmates.

Chip Markel, union president at the Menard Correctional Center, said inmates make weapons out of everything from the aluminum in portable toilets to toothbrushes.

### **Full Text (347 words)**

*Copyright Pantagraph Publishing Co. Nov 29, 1993*

JOLIET (AP) - Prison workers blame overcrowding, understaffing and street gangs for a wave of violent assaults on guards.

The gangs have stepped up their tactics of violence and intimidation in an effort to gain influence in the prisons, employees and state legislators say.

And, they say, the arrival of young gang members with long sentences and little hope has led to bolder attacks.

"Every day I leave I celebrate, and every day I walk in I pray," said Reginald Steward, a guard at the Stateville Correctional Center.

Steward said he has been beaten and had human waste thrown in his face.

"If you sit here and worry that this might be the day, you will go crazy," he said.

Guards say gang members see hits against authority as a way of gaining the respect of fellow inmates and rising in the prisoners' hierarchy.

Overcrowding leaves a limited space to put inmates who attack employees. That should change when the state opens a 500-bed super-maximum security prison in Tamms in far Southern Illinois to house many of the system's most violent inmates.

There, all inmates will be locked down 23 hours a day, and they will not be allowed to mingle with other inmates.

"There are no amenities, no basketball courts," said Sen. Carl Hawkinson, R-Galesburg, who sponsored legislation creating the prison. "It is not a place anybody will want to go."

Gov. Jim Edgar also signed legislation raising assault on a prison employee from a misdemeanor to a felony punishable by up to three years in prison.

But prison administrators said such a measure alone will not reduce the violence.

"The safety factor is more a function of the number of inmates and reducing the number of weapons," said Howard Peters, director of the Department of Corrections.

Chip Markel, union president at the Menard Correctional Center, said inmates make weapons out of everything from the aluminum in portable toilets to toothbrushes.

Guards, who make about \$24,000 a year, are unarmed. Sharpshooters patrol catwalks and towers, but there is nothing to stop an inmate from striking first.

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