

# PRISONERS IN ISOLATION

## CALIFORNIA'S PRISON ISOLATION UNITS

THE CELL DOORS  
ARE CONSTRUCTED  
OF HEAVY GAUGE  
PERFORATED METAL  
WHICH SIGNIFICANTLY  
BLOCKS VISION, LIGHT  
AND FRESH AIR

# 8m<sup>2</sup>

ISOLATION CELLS  
ARE UNDER EIGHT  
SQUARE METRES

(MOST HOLD ONE PRISONER BUT SOME, TWO)



PRISONERS IN ISOLATION UNITS ARE CONFINED FOR AT LEAST

## 22 AND A HALF HOURS A DAY

WITH NO WORK OR MEANINGFUL REHABILITATION PROGRAMS OR GROUP ACTIVITIES OF ANY KIND

IN PELICAN BAY, PRISONERS ARE ALLOWED  
TO EXERCISE FOR AN HOUR AND A HALF A  
"DAY", ALONE, IN A BARE, CONCRETE YARD.

CALIFORNIA IS ONE OF MORE  
THAN 40 US STATES TO HOUSE  
PRISONERS IN HIGH SECURITY  
ISOLATION FACILITIES, OFTEN  
TERMED "SUPER-MAXIMUM  
SECURITY" PRISONS.

No other US state  
is believed to have  
held so many prisoners  
for such long periods  
in indefinite isolation.

MORE THAN 3,000 PRISONERS IN CALIFORNIA ARE HELD IN HIGH  
SECURITY ISOLATION UNITS KNOWN AS SECURITY HOUSING UNITS (SHUs).<sup>[1]</sup>

Some prisoners have spent more than a decade without  
visits from their family. They may correspond with their  
attorneys, families, friends and outside organizations,  
subject to certain restrictions. All visits are non-contact,  
taking place behind a glass screen.



On average, 900 inmates were released on parole annually directly from Pelican Bay and Corcoran SHUs during the ten year period from 1997 to 2007. Many were released directly to the street, often with no transitional programming, in some cases after years of solitary confinement.<sup>[4]</sup>

More than 500 prisoners serving  
indefinite SHU terms had spent  
ten or more years in the Pelican Bay  
SHU; of this number, more than 200  
had spent over 15 years in the SHU  
and 78 more than 20 years.<sup>[2]</sup>

As many as 25,000 prisoners are  
estimated to be held in isolation  
facilities across the USA.<sup>[3]</sup>

Only 37 prisoners out of over 1,000  
prisoners in Pelican Bay SHU were  
enrolled in an educational program.  
22 others enrolled in college  
correspondence courses in  
November 2011.<sup>[4]</sup>

[1] US Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

[2] California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, 2011

[3] Urban Institute, 2004 and US Department of Justice, 2005

[4] Amnesty International

[5] "Parole, Snitch, or Die: California's Supermax prison and Prisoners, 1987-2007", by Keramet Reiter, Institution for the Study of Social change, UC Berkeley, 7 July 2010

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