

Quotes from prisoners about “security/welfare checks” June 2014 - May 2017

Central CA Women’s Facility (CCWF) Condemned Units/death row 2014-2016

“Flashing light in our face, metal on metal hitting, banging. (No way to be quiet doing this.) Some talk with others as they go (loudly), keys banging, spray can and baton hitting each other and the door as they pass by, boots clomping by and up and down stair-well etc. Beeping, Beeping, Beeping, Beeping”

“Prolonged sleep deprivation is recognized as a form of torture, and can lead to suicidal thinking and/or tendencies.”

“Many of us have histories of seizures. Flashing lights, banging on doors and lack of sleep have caused some of us to go into seizures. Some of us have had to raise/change meds just to cope, because of the monitoring/banging/ beeping/flashlights. We're surprised nobody's has [had] a heart attack yet...”

“The beeping device hits the door a minimum of 2 times per the 30 minute cycle with such force it startles anyone who is fully sleeping. Having a heart condition, this really isn't good”

“When asked to use the silent pipe at night or to do the “touching” to the door quietly instead of “hitting” it, they do it more loudly and hit the door 2 to 4 times each check.”

“It echoes into the cell like a blow-horn! There's an industrial fan...so loud that the c/o's can't hear how hard they're hitting the cell doors. I have to have earplugs shoved in my ears, and my radio on next to me to be able to get any sleep, and I can still hear them hit the door! Wakes me up!”

“I've spoken to every mental health person available, and my yard doctor, and officers, and captains and the warden herself! I basically get attitude, “Then you shouldn't come to prison.” or “Oh, well.””

“We feel we're being targeted for some reason... IT IS TORTURE, A SLOW, HORRIBLE, DAILY TORTURE!”

“The banging has gotten really bad again! There is no regular pattern anymore... It's awful. And now they don't even take our mail! We're lucky if we get our outgoing mail taken twice per week!”

Pelican Bay State Prison (PBSP) SHU 2015, 2016

“Our client is being treated like a prisoner of war, in a torture interrogation facility, when he is not allowed to sleep for more than 30 minutes at one time.” Attorney for a Pelican Bay prisoner to CDCR leadership

“My son doesn't have the energy to exercise, write, or draw nearly as much since the checks started. He used to write me letters 2-3 times a week; now maybe once a week, and only a few lines.”

“I could block out the noise and disruption if it were 3 times a night, but this is so many times...”

“Between the constant metal to metal tapping every 20 minutes, the loudest electronic door opening, and the c/o's in the tower/outside the pod, sleep is rare... My second night here I could feel my sanity slipping away.”

“We can't go on like this for much longer. This...is no joke and, from someone that went through the hunger strikes from start to end a couple of years ago, this...is much worse...You can't hide from it.”

“Is this an attempt to create mentally ill patients of the state?”

“... It is like a construction site all night. It is horrible.”

“I have noticed an extreme withdraw from those around me as well as an even higher negative response to my family due to the lack of sleep from the aggressive wellness/security checks and the extremely loud opening and closing of the pod door.”

“For decades, military and police forces have used ‘extreme isolation, sleep deprivation and constant banging/noise’, to cause mental/physical torment and try to break a person's mind or human will to resist questioning. These are so-called clean torture methods. So CDCR/PBSP cannot possibly claim, ‘We did

not know the cause or effect of this new program's use of extreme isolation, sleep deprivation, and constant noise/banging.”

“I've lost weight, my vitals have shot up and all I got was some aspirin, and [told] that it was out of their hands.”

“I don't want to sit with ear plugs in all day. It's more isolating.”

“The noise as it goes on, it's like a carpenter is working with his hammer touching metal to metal, loud enough that it doesn't let you concentrate- not even to read or meditate at all...”

“Feeling irritated. I have a dark path in my eyes. I feel like my body is dehydrated. I can't concentrate. I feel like I am irritated with little noise. I don't like to listen to music or watch TV. I feel easily annoyed.”

“The checks affect my ability to exercise, read, write. I will feel tired, wasted with no energy, mad, cloudy almost all the time. Physically, bones hurt me, can't stand up too much, I get tired easy. Muscles hurt...”

“I feel like I am a cold person. I have distanced myself from my studies, because I feel like I am losing interest due to the fact that I get mad easily, for everything. I used to be always in a good mood. Reading, listening to music, motivated. Now I feel like I am somebody else...”

“With continuous wearing of ear plugs they have begun to bother and irritate having been placed so often inside my ears.”

“Ear plugs...are not effective... you can hear right thru them most of the time, they fall out while you're laying down. They are uncomfortable and create moisture in your ear and cause infection.”

“The checks could make someone suicidal.”

“It's gotten to the point that I can't perform properly in my daily activities during the day. When writing a letter, reading a book I often fall asleep, and when I exercise I get these headaches like I never felt before.”

“I've gone up to 5 to 6 days without getting even 2 hours of sleep during this period. This has never happened to me before.”

“The most devastating thing, if I was put back in SHU, would be the checks.”

Salinas Valley State Prison (SVSP) Ad-Seg 2016

“I myself am an Iraq War Veteran with a Disability Rating from the VA for PTSD, and this constant sound truly exacerbated my symptoms.”

“[They] slam a metal rod into a metal plate on the cell door. You can hear the cop coming a mile away. Ba-Boom! Ba-Boom! And you cringe in anticipation because even though you know it's coming, it is one of the loudest, most obnoxiously unpleasant sounds one could experience.”

“Experiencing this nuisance from 6am to 10pm is equally disturbing to one's psyche. Simply reading is difficult, because of the anticipation as you hear it coming and then when it does, the immediate rise in stress and aggravation levels.”

“Why does the plate need to be on the doors at all? To describe the sound is simple; just grab a bat or other thick object and slam it into something large and metal. BOOM!”

“Occasionally, a C/O would attempt to make the metal contact quieter, but it's metal on metal, and your cell echoes.”

“The “checks” represent (either real or perceived; it doesn't matter) a deliberate assault by staff unto the psyche and the spirits of Ad-Seg inmates that are already experiencing the lowest point of the prison experience. This assault cultivates feelings of irritation, anger, depression, and hopelessness.”

“...you're constantly tired since it's done 24 hours. You're never fully rested.”

SATF - Corcoran (SATF) ASU March 2016

“That kind of sleep deprivation diminishes and wrecks EVERYTHING in life. EVERYTHING.”

High Desert State Prison (HDSP) Ad-Seg Dec 2015 – Jan 2016

“The lack of sleep is like being in a haze. It actually made me seriously contemplate suicide to get away from the banging.”

“It is all psychological and emotional and physical cruel and unusual punishment. They do know this, too.”

“Checks can be heard throughout the unit.”

“[The checks] interrupt REMS; sleep is possible only when exhausted. Groggy, not well rested in mornings. Maybe a few hours all night total.”

“Made me angry, depressed, and seriously suicidal. They cause real hopelessness on top of Ad Seg.”

CA State Prison-Sacramento “New Folsom” (SAC) Ad-Seg June 2016

“In terms of the Noise from the pipe being nailed into the cradle, words fail. Everything is metal and concrete. There is nothing to dampen the acoustics. When any noise happens in a prison block it is amplified X 10 because of design.”

“...I couldn't concentrate – in reading or writing. Because I knew that they were coming. It upset my state of mind. It was a constant mental battle... it was impossible to ignore, because it was constant and steady.”

“The every 30 minutes checks are useless. Because they are done in a robotic manner. Sometimes, the officer is only concerned to make sure that the metal wand records the check. And they don't even look inside the cell. So, it is a waste of resources, time, and money.”

“Their mechanism for making us cry? They literally speed-walk down the tier and slam that [thing] into our doors.”

“There's ZERO Welfare Checking. ...and if you try stopping one to conduct business, they just literally keep running down the tier CRACK doors while yelling over their shoulder 'I gotta keep movin,' the pipes on a timer.”

New Folsom (SAC) PSU June 2016

“We literally – very literally – live inside of a steel drum that gets pounded 48 times a day. It just happened now and it startled me so bad I dropped my ...pen. THIS is Torture!”

“Before these pipe checks started I slept 8 hours a night without interruption. And I was able to write letters without droppin' my pen from being startled. I don't sleep deeply anymore. I don't dream anymore.”

“I wake up 16 times a night, each time by being jarred awake... I never get fully back asleep before I'm disturbed again. In fact, I don't even sleep anymore; I just nod off repeatedly.”

“Performing mental and physical tasks is tough. Everything gets put on hold because I tell myself I'll do it after I nap. It never happens. My Mood is hopeless.”

“What purpose or value can I add to my life or contribute to humanity if I'm deprived of one of life's most quintessential elements?”

“I've filed Complaints. Nobody Responds. Period.”

"It is especially bad for Mental Health patients... I ask you to listen to the voices of us prisoners and call for the immediate cessation of these "welfare/security" checks that don't check on anything, but which make our lives a living hell."

California State Prison LA County/Lancaster Ad-Seg

"[I have] been experiencing intense headaches, fatigue, lack of sleep, and depression."

"...I'm [again] bringing to your attention my inability to sleep due to the 24 hour activation of the suicide prevention device. Whether it rings or knocks, the noise level is intolerable."

Deuel Vocational Institution (DVI) Ad-Seg April and May 2016

"There is no way to justify this cruelty."

"I can't even rest or recuperate because of the "shock" rude awakening siren alarms, banging and noise these cops make all day and night, totally unnecessary."

"They sound louder at night – more intense and annoying, because the alarm seems louder and noisier when all else is quiet."

"I feel as though I don't get any sleep at all. My eyes hurt from being puffy, swollen, tired, and red/irritated. My body aches from tossing and turning back and forth. Nothing blocks out the loud, alarming, beeping, echoing noises and hitting sound from the metal bar. This is the longest I've ever been deprived of sleep."

"My mind and my eyes hurt. I have headaches. My ears ache. My body is burned out and fatigued, weak and run down, as if I'm old and worn out."

"These checks have caused me to have stomach aches, diarrhea, chest pains, and heartburn. I've lost weight, [23 lbs in 90 days]...from this anxiety, mental anguish, and confused state of mind."

"I wouldn't wish this for anyone... The C.O.'s walk and hit your door, sounding a beeper...as if to torture us with annoyance and disturbance that is loud, rude, and causes my blood pressure to rise with mental fear, mental anguish, leaving me irritated and angry."

"Some officers who I've told to not hit it [door frame] so hard laugh at me and tell me, "Don't come to Ad Seg. You are not here to be comfortable." They rattle their keys and yell out loudly, to let you know they are walking the tier. Some ignore you when you ask for a form or sick call slip for medical. ...They still hit the metal pipe, rather than check on any specific inmate."

"It is the cruelest unusual punishment one has to go through."

"The flashing of a bright flashlight penetrates my eyes like a shock, like when you see lights of a train, and the noise sends chills through you. I wind up angry, my blood pressure and heart rate increase. This can't be good for my heart."

"I haven't been issued my high blood pressure medications...My head's been pounding with all of this confusion."

"My mood is angry, irritated, shocked, annoyed, and bothered by this harassment."

Calipatria State Prison (CAL) Ad-Seg June 2016

"We did a group appeal in Ad-Seg Calipatria "[in 2014]"

"[would hear them] every 15 minutes at night by the time the C.O. walked around a whole building, 100 cells, top and bottom tiers"

CA State Prison Corcoran (COR) SHU April – August 2016

“This is one of the first worst policies CDCr has ever implemented since I [was imprisoned] in 1995..”

“I have P.T.S.D. from the USMC and have to take meds to help my already messed up sleep schedule, which is between 3-4 hrs a day. But when I do get to sleep, it’s disrupted with each metal on metal contact.”

“It reduces the amount of privacy inmates are allowed while in their cells (like we weren’t being scrutinized enough already); it’s totally irritating to have the c/o’s knocking on your cell doors every 30 min. whether day time or night; the c/o’s are a nuisance in the manner they do the checks and their attitudes about doing them is taken out on the inmates; **it’s the worst thing I’ve experienced yet regarding the deterioration of my mental health and constantly keeps me pissed off.**”

“During the day, they use a ‘Day tone pipe,’ which has a fairly loud “beep”. Loud enough to hear 6-10 cells down the tier with fans humming... and the normal noise of the day going on.”

“My conversations with officers and other inmates are slurring. My mental spirit and physical tasks are Sluggish.”

CA Correctional Institution Tehachapi (CCI) SHU June and July 2016

“The checks completely damage my ability to function and perform.”

“The Welfare Checks occur every 30 minutes, 48 times a day.... They are loud and they echo. The staff is loud- keys, noise and all and very rude when you tell them; they simply say, ‘I’m doing my job.’”

“I’ve been very worried for the fact that I’m an older inmate with high blood pressure. But my biggest concern was due to me getting out of bed today after not being able to sleep because of a very rude c/o staff who was louder than normal, and I’ve been feeling lightheaded throughout the day.”

“I have been to the Doctors and explained about the rise in my blood pressure and expressed concerns to the condition of my heart, and Restless Leg Syndrome that has increased since I came to SHU. The Doctor has agreed with me that being kept awake can cause these symptoms, but there’s nothing he can do.”

“I have noticed all the differences in my health and my moods. I have even talked to other inmates who have started to have suicidal thoughts, or wanted to go crazy by the damage and torture this noise causes.”

“This system of having metal bang on metal (CCI Tehachapi has it right in the middle of the door) in NO WAY prevents suicide or helps a suicidal person.”

“The entry doors into the pods make the Bulldozer Sounds.”

“...since I’ve been in the SHU, 21 months, I haven’t gone TO SLEEP!!!”

California State Prison-Solano Dec 2016

“I’m writing on behalf of my brother, who is currently serving time in California State Prison-Solano. ...He stated that the officers wake him up every 30 minutes all night long... that they hit the door as if they have a hammer in hand, every 20-30 minutes. This is affecting him mentally.”

Folsom State Prison “Old Folsom” (FSP) ASU May 2017

“END CRUELTY, NOISE AND SLEEP DEPRIVATION OF WELFARE CHECKS: Sleep deprivation from welfare checks: Correctional officers (COs) on first watch create excessive noise with keys while walking every half hour; mixed with uncourteous loud metal on metal contact, it creates unnecessary cruelty and punishment. A CO’s equipment and keys can be properly secured on their person to prevent the excessive noise, yet when asked for courtesy, the noise is made extreme as a retaliation, thus waking prisoners every half hour the entire night.” *May 25, 2017 Hunger Strike Demand & Grievance*