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Jail purchasing digital imaging to replace strip searches

Barbara Miller 6 hrs ago



Courtesy of Nuotech

This model of full-body scanner sold by Nuotech will be used at Washington County jail.

Strip searches could become a thing of the past at the Washington County Jail in light of new technology Warden Edward Strawn introduced Wednesday to the prison board.

Members of the board voted 6-0 in favor of a "whole-body inspection system" by Nuctech, a British firm, which will cost \$113,000 to be paid for, not by taxpayers, but by the Inmate Welfare Fund. Judge John DiSalle was absent.

A five-year warranty costs \$18,000, and the entire package includes transportation, insurance, installation, deployment, training and technical support.

According to its promotional video, Nuctech's digital X-ray imaging is capable of detecting both metal and non-metallic contraband, such as drugs and explosives, in less than 10 seconds. Strawn contrasted this with "a proper strip search" of a prisoner that takes 15 to 20 minutes.

"Current policy dictates every prisoner who leaves the facility is showered and searched" upon his or her return, the warden said. The shower and strip search also applies to newly incarcerated inmates whose street clothes are stored in garment bags when they are issued orange prison garb.

Image enhancement will allow jail personnel to see contraband hidden inside an inmate's body cavities or swallowed.

"If something is found, that will start a whole 'nother process," said Strawn, who considers the capabilities of the device to be a deterrent to smuggling.

The company called the X-rays "low dose," and Strawn said an identification bracelet will track how many times an inmate is exposed to the device when entering the jail as a new prisoner at the booking center or re-entering after court appearances or hospital trips, for example.

Four hundred scans equal one chest X-ray and 50 scans equal the amount of radiation to which a passenger would be exposed during a 2 ½-hour flight, according to Nuctech.

The digital scanning and imaging device will not replace pat-down searches, Strawn said, which are done during "interfacility transports," meaning when an inmate goes from one unit to another within the jail.

Visitors will continue to be required to walk through a metal detector at the jail's public entrance.

Now that the county prison board has approved the purchase, Strawn intends to buy it through a statewide contract that does not require bidding.

The Inmate Welfare Fund comes from receipts covering commissary sales, phone service and commissions on phone calls, plus interest and miscellaneous income.

The law states this money can be spent only on services and items that benefit the entire inmate population.

The warden hopes to have the device in place for use by the end of this year at the correctional facility, which housed 300 male inmates and 70 female inmates at the end of July.

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