

From the Office of the Sheriff:

Last week an inmate escaped from Fox Lake Correctional Institution. The incident generated several calls to the Sheriff's Department. Most calls we received came from the media interested in how the search was going. I concluded their perception of our efforts included institutional staff and law enforcement running through fields with blood hounds attempting to locate the escapee; not necessarily true. For that reason I felt it necessary to explain our procedures and partnership with the Department of Corrections, Waupun Police Department and the Waupun School District when it comes to escapes.

Dodge County is home to four state institutions and one county jail. Conservatively, the total capacity can easily exceed 5,000 inmates. Each facility has various security classifications and work release programs. On any given day one can drive past any of the facilities and observe inmates mowing lawn, shoveling snow, feeding cattle, or even driving other inmates through town. The four state institutions, Waupun Correctional, Dodge Correctional, Fox Lake Correctional, and John Burke Center have similarities as our own Dodge County Detention Center; they require inmate labor to get routine tasks completed. These inmates, classified as trustees, have earned a level of trust enabling them to work outside the secure perimeter and within the local community.

We are the primary investigative agency for all crime within the institutions, as well as those that may occur on institution grounds. We work very closely with the staff at each institution and enjoy a solid partnership, so when an inmate goes missing, there are pre-established protocols. First and foremost we assess whether or not the escaped inmate or trustee poses a risk to the community. Did the inmate tunnel out of a maximum security institution or walk away from a lawn mower? The two scenarios generate two different responses. An escape from one of the maximum security institutions by a hardened criminal could generate an all out swarming of the area with squads, tracking dogs, an aerial search and even a reverse 911 call to the Waupun area to warn citizens, lock down schools etc. The level of response is directly related to the level of threat.

In this last case, the inmate was housed at Fox Lake Correctional but was assigned as a laborer at the Waupun farm located just east of the city of Waupun. We responded, took the report, entered an arrest warrant and notified surrounding law enforcement agencies as well as distributed a local press release which included a physical description and photo of the inmate. No reverse 911, no bloodhounds, no mass search. Why? The level of threat the escapee posed to the area did not support it.

With the multiple institutions in the area we are very fortunate we have the few escapes we do. I want to assure each and every citizen in the Waupun area and the entire county; we take each of them very seriously, but also gauge our response upon the level of threat posed to the community. As a community that hosts several institutions and a large inmate population, locking your doors, removing keys from unattended vehicles and maintaining awareness can aid in ensuring a safe community should there be an escape. Thanks for listening [tnehls@co.dodge.wi.us](mailto:tnehls@co.dodge.wi.us)