

Custodial Operations Policy and Procedures

5.5 Cell security and alarm calls

Policy summary

Correctional officers must make sure all cells are clean, tidy and kept in good order and that furnishing and other materials do not impede visual observation or access to the cell. Obstructions may pose a risk to staff safety and restrict movement in and out of the cell in an emergency.

Cell call alarms provide inmates with direct access to custodial staff in case of emergency. The type of response to a cell call alarm will depend on the layout and resources available at the location. For this reason, Local Operating Procedures (LOPs) must be developed to provide clear instructions on how to respond to a cell call alarm.

Management of Public Correctional Centres Service Specifications

Service specification	Safety and security
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Scope

This section applies to all correctional centres and other facilities administered by or on behalf of Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW), and all CSNSW employees.

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1 Maintaining lines of sight

1.1 Policy

Correctional officers must always have an unobstructed view into an inmate's cell or cubicle. This assists in maintaining the safety and security of staff and inmates.

Cells, doorways and cell door observation windows or ports must always be kept clear of visual obstructions including improvised curtains and clotheslines. Correctional officers must remove these items whenever they are discovered.

Sheets, blankets and towels, or any other material, must not be hung over safety railings on the ends and sides of beds because they obstruct coverage by surveillance cameras and the view of patrolling correctional officers.

2 Responding to cell call alarms

2.1 Policy

Every cell or accommodation unit with a cell call system must have a multilingual sign explaining the purpose of the cell call system and how to use it. The sign must be placed on the wall next to the cell call button.

Every inmate must be informed during the induction to the accommodation area that cell call alarms are for emergency use only, and that any misuse of the cell call alarm may result in disciplinary action.

An inmate may be issued with a personal duress alarm if they are unable to activate a cell call alarm or if the alarm is inoperable (**refer to COPP section 15.1 Safe work practices**).

2.2 Cell calls requiring staff to immediately and urgently attend a reported location

Correctional officers must immediately and urgently go to the cell or other location as specified by the cell alarm caller when any of the incidents listed below are reported:

Table 1

A request for medical assistance, including any request to see a nurse, psychologist or psychiatrist

Self-harm or threat of self-harm.

Fire or smell of smoke.

A suspected assault or violent incident.

An inmate in physical or mental distress.

A suspected suicide or self-harm occurring in another cell.

Collapse or loss of consciousness

Loss of signs of life (turning blue, not breathing)

Table 1

Any incident of a similar nature to the above.

When no information was provided to identify a cause for the call or the information provided by the caller was not clear.

If an officer answers a call that requires a physical response the details are to be recorded on the *Cell call alarm medical request and physical response register*.

If the cell call alarm relates to a request for medical assistance, to see a nurse or mental health practitioner and is received during business hours onsite Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network (JHNSW) staff must be notified. If the call is received at a time when no health staff are onsite the OIC is to contact the After-Hours Nursing Unit Manager and inform them of the inmate's request.

A request for nurse, psychologist or psychiatrist only needs to be recorded once during a shift (i.e., if an inmate repeatedly utilises the cell call alarm to request a nurse, psychologist or psychiatrist the first request is the only one that is required to be recorded) and JHNSW also only need to be notified once during a shift.

Once notified, if JHNSW staff do not complete the request, either by attending, advising a course of action or advising the OIC why they will not be attending, within sixty (60) minutes then the OIC must contact the on-site JHNSW staff or the AHNUM again and remind them of the request.

If the OIC is advised by JHNSW staff that there will be no JHNSW action or attendance then this is to be recorded in OIMS case notes

The *Cell call alarm medical request and physical response register* is to be emailed to the health centre of the relevant centre at the end of each shift.

A Local Operating Procedure (LOP) must be developed to include the following:

- number of staff to attend
- Where the *cell call alarm medical request and physical response register(s)* will be located
- Who will be responsible for collating the registers and forwarding to the health centre
- any other locally relevant factors.

Procedures for minimum and medium security centres

	Procedure	Responsibility
1.	Confirm the cell call alarm relates to any of the incidents listed in <i>table 1 Cell calls requiring staff to immediately attend a reported location</i> .	Recipient of call
2.	Immediately inform the Officer in Charge (OIC) of the location where the call was made, if the cell call alarm relates to any of the incidents listed in <i>table 1 Cell calls requiring staff to immediately attend a reported location</i> . Inform the OIC of the nature of the emergency, if known.	Recipient of call

	Procedure	Responsibility
3.	Record details of the cell call and all action taken in response in the <i>Cell call alarm medical request and physical response register</i> .	Recipient of call
4.	Respond immediately as per the LOP 5.5 Responding to cell call alarms. Inform the nominated responding officers of the nature of the emergency, if known. Immediately alert a JHNSW nurse or NSW Ambulance if the conversation during the cell alarm call indicates that a serious medical emergency is or may be occurring and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A correctional officer cannot immediately attend the inmate's cell; or • A JHNSW nurse is not available in the correctional centre 	OIC
5.	Proceed directly to the cell identified in the cell call system or other location as detailed by the caller. Note: Responding staff must carry the Emergency Response Kit (ERK) (refer to COPP section 15.1 Safe work practices).	Responding staff
6.	Ascertain if the inmate(s) that occupy the cell are in good health by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • speaking directly with the inmate(s) to identify cause for the cell call; and • visually inspecting the inmate(s). 	Responding staff
7.	Seek approval before opening the cell if the OIC is not in attendance at the cell (this does not apply in an emergency) Officer attendance to the cell must be as per LOP 5.5 Responding to cell call alarms	Responding staff
8.	Provide assistance to the inmate(s) if required, (refer to COPP section 13.2 Medical emergencies).	Responding staff
9.	Provide a warning to the inmate if they have misused the cell call alarm, that the cell call system is for emergency use only and any further misuse may result in disciplinary action.	Responding staff

2.3 Procedures for maximum security centres and Police/Court cell locations

	Procedure	Responsibility
1.	Confirm the cell call alarm relates to any of the incidents listed in <i>table 1 Cell calls requiring staff to immediately attend a reported location</i> .	Recipient of call

	Procedure	Responsibility
2.	Immediately inform the OIC of the location where the call was made, if the cell call alarm relates to any of the incidents listed in <i>table 1 Cell calls requiring staff to immediately attend a reported location</i> . Inform the OIC of the nature of the emergency, if known.	Recipient of call
3.	Record details of the cell call and all action taken in response <i>Cell call alarm medical request and physical response register</i> where the call is received	Recipient of call
4.	Determine if occupants of the cell are classified AA/Category 5, or designated High Security (HS), Extreme High Security (EHS), Extreme High Risk Restricted (EHRR) or National Security Interest (NSI) and if there are separate procedures for responding to cell call alarms from these inmates. If so, direct staff to comply with these procedures.	OIC
5.	Complete steps 6 to 11 below for all other inmates	OIC
6.	Respond immediately with the number of officers as stated in LOP 5.5 Responding to cell call alarms. Inform the nominated responding officers of the nature of the emergency, if known. Immediately alert a JHNSW nurse or NSW Ambulance if the conversation during the cell alarm call indicates that a serious medical emergency is or may be occurring and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A correctional officer cannot immediately attend the inmate's cell; or • A JHNSW nurse is not available in the correctional centre/court cell location 	OIC
7.	Proceed directly to the cell identified on the cell call system or other location as detailed by caller. Note: Responding staff will carry the Emergency Response Kit (ERK) (refer to COPP section 15.1 Safe work practices).	Responding staff
8.	Ascertain if the inmate(s) that occupy the cell are in good health by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • speaking directly with the inmate(s) to identify cause for the cell call; and • visually inspecting the inmate(s). 	Responding staff
9.	Seek approval before opening the cell if the OIC is not in attendance at the cell (this does not apply in an emergency).	Responding staff
10.	Provide assistance to the inmate(s) if required (refer to COPP section 13.2 Medical emergencies).	Responding staff
11.	Provide a warning to the inmate, if they have misused the cell call alarm, that the cell call system is for emergency use only and any further misuse may result in disciplinary action.	Responding staff

3 Testing cell call alarms

3.1 Policy

Cell alarms must be tested for the functionality of both the alarm and the reception point of the call. If available, the accuracy of information displayed on the cell call system must also be checked. Each location must test:

- six randomly selected cells from each accommodation block/unit daily
- one randomly selected cell from each accommodation block/unit daily along the complete path of the system
- all cells weekly

The cell alarm must be tested using the complete path of the system before an inmate is placed into a cell for the first time.

3.2 Procedures for daily cell alarm test

	Procedure	Responsibility
1.	Randomly select a minimum of six cells in the accommodation area.	OIC
2.	Nominate one officer to attend each selected cell.	OIC
3.	Inspect the cell call alarm panel and multilingual sign for any damage.	Assigned officer
4.	Activate the cell alarm.	Assigned officer
5.	Answer the call at the officer station or nearest available point.	Assigned officer
6.	Check that the audio transmitted via the cell call system is clear.	Assigned officer
7.	If the call system displays the time and location of the call, check that the data is consistent with the cell number and time of day - this can be achieved by relaying information over the cell call system.	Assigned officer
8.	Record details of the test in the <i>Inmate accommodation journal</i> , including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• time and date of testing• alarms that were tested• time accuracy display check (if available)• if the alarm was functioning or not functioning• any action taken to repair a unit identified not functioning.	OIC

3.3 Procedures for daily cell alarm test (complete path)

	Procedure	Responsibility
1.	Contact the officer in the location where the cell call will complete the full path of the system, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complex/centre control room • gate house • Night Seniors office. 	OIC
2.	Tell the contact officer that a cell call alarm test is being undertaken.	OIC
3.	Tell the contact officer that any barriers preventing the call from completing the full path of the system must be bypassed for the purpose of this test only.	OIC
4.	Take appropriate action to ensure the cell call alarm can complete full path of the system.	Contact officer
5.	Randomly select one cell in the accommodation area.	OIC
6.	Nominate an officer to test the cell call alarm.	OIC
7.	Inspect the cell call alarm panel and multilingual sign for any damage.	Assigned officer
8.	Activate the cell call alarm.	Assigned officer
9.	Answer the call.	Contact officer
10.	Check that the audio transmitted via the cell call system is clear.	Assigned and contact officers
11.	If the call system displays the time and location of the cell call, check the data is consistent with the cell number and time of day. This can be achieved by relaying information over the cell call system.	Assigned and contact officers
12.	Tell the contact officer the cell call test has been completed.	Assigned officer
13.	Return the cell call system to normal operation if any action was taken to complete the test.	Contact officer
14.	Record details of the test in the <i>Inmate accommodation journal</i> , this must include; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • alarm that was tested • time and date of testing • time accuracy display check (if available) • whether the alarm was functioning or not functioning • if the alarm was inoperative what action was taken to repair the unit. 	OIC

3.4 Procedures for weekly cell alarm test

	Procedure	Responsibility
1.	Nominate an officer to attend each cell in the accommodation area.	OIC
2.	Inspect the cell call alarm panel and multilingual sign for any damage.	Assigned officer
3.	Activate the cell alarm.	Assigned officer
4.	Answer the call at the officer station or nearest point available to the cell.	OIC
5.	Check that the audio transmitted via the cell call system between the officer activating the alarm and the OIC is clear.	OIC and nominated officer
6.	If the call system displays the time and location of the cell call, ensure data is consistent with the actual cell number and time of day - this can be achieved by relaying information over the cell call system.	OIC and nominated officer
7.	Record details of the test in the <i>Inmate accommodation journal</i> , this must include; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • alarms that were tested • time and date of testing • time accuracy display check (if available) • whether the alarm was functioning or not functioning • if the alarm was inoperative what action was taken to repair the unit. 	OIC

4 Non-functioning cell call alarms

4.1 Policy

An inmate must not be placed into a cell with a non-functioning alarm other than in exceptional circumstances. This could include:

- systems failure
- emergency situations

An inmate may be issued with a personal duress alarm if they are unable to activate a cell call alarm or if the alarm is inoperable (**refer to COPP section 15.1 Safe work practices**). If this option is not available, the Manager of Security (MOS) or Functional Manager (FM) may approve to house an inmate being housed in a cell with non-functioning alarm.

4.2 Procedures when one cell has a non-functioning alarm

	Procedure	Responsibility
1.	Inform MOS or FM that cell call alarm is inoperable.	OIC
2.	Approve/not approve use of cell.	MOS or FM
3.	If use of cell is approved, develop observation routine taking into consideration the inmate's at-risk status.	OIC
4.	Seek agreement from the MOS or appropriate FM to implement the observation routine.	OIC
5.	Record details of the observation routine in the <i>Inmate accommodation journal</i> .	OIC
6.	Record any results from observation in the <i>Inmate accommodation journal</i> .	Observation officer

4.3 Procedures for multiple cells with non-functioning alarm

	Procedure	Responsibility
1.	Develop observation routine taking into consideration the at-risk status of all the inmates.	MOS or FM
2.	Record details of the identified observation routine in the MOS or FMs Journal.	MOS or FM
3.	Inform the OIC the accommodation area of the observation regime to be employed in their area.	MOS or FM
4.	Record details of the observation routine in the <i>Inmate accommodation journal</i> .	MOS or FM
5.	Record any results from observation in the <i>Inmate accommodation journal</i> .	Observation officer

5 Quick links

- [Related COPP](#)
- [Forms and annexures](#)
- [Related documents](#)

6 Definitions

Assigned Officer	An individual officer or an officer who is a position that the Governor (or MOS) in charge of a correctional centre has assigned to perform a particular duty or task.
Complete path	The last point where a call will be received (for example the control room or gatehouse).
COPP	Custodial Operations Policy and Procedures
ERK	Emergency Response Kit
EHS	Extreme High Security
EHRR	Extreme High Risk Restricted
FM	Functional Manager
HS	High Security
JHNSW	Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health Network (JHNSW) is a division of NSW Health providing health services to inmates. Also includes any private health provider performing equivalent duties at a correctional facility.
LOP	Local Operating Procedure
MOS	Manager of Security
NSI	National Security Interest
OIC	Officer in Charge
S&I	Security and Intelligence, a branch of CSNSW

7 Document information

Business centre:	Statewide Operations	
Approver:	Dr Anne Marie Martin (Deputy Commissioner Security and Custody)	
Date of effect:	16 December 2017	
EDRMS container:	18/7144	
Version	Date	Reason for amendment
1.0	16/12/17	Initial publication (<i>Replaces section 12.1.7 and 12.1.8 of the superseded Operations Procedures Manual</i>)
1.1	12/03/20	General formatting update and improvements
1.2	10/12/21	<p>The following amendments have been made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subsection <i>2.4 Procedures for maximum security centres</i> is now named <i>2.4 Procedures for maximum security centres and Police/Court cell locations</i> and these procedures now apply to Police and Court cell locations. • It has been clarified that officers should ‘urgently’ attend the cell or other location specified by the cell alarm caller when an incident (incidents are listed in table 1 at 2.2 of the policy) appears to be occurring. This means that an officer will move to the location quickly with regard to their physical capability; • When a call is received, the recipient of the call must inform the Officer in Charge of the location where the call was made of the nature of the emergency, if known; • When nominating other officers to respond to the cell alarm, the Officer in Charge must inform the nominated responding officers of the nature of the emergency, if known. • The Officer in Charge must immediately alert a JHNSW nurse or NSW Ambulance if the conversation during the alarm cell indicates that a serious medical emergency is or may be occurring; and <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ a correctional officer cannot immediately attend the inmate’s cell; or ○ a JHNSW nurse is not available in the correctional centre. <p>Refer to Joint Assistant Commissioner Memorandum Custodial Correction 30/2021 & Security and Intelligence 10/2021</p>
1.3	18/08/23	Update in line with CSNSW restructure: deletion of reference to Security and Intelligence (S&I).

1.4	11/03/24	Inclusion of requirement to include details of cell alarm calls to be recorded on the Cell alarm call medical request and physical response register. Changing of Authorised officer to Assigned officer including definition.
1.5	21/05/24	Addition within subsection 2.2 of the requirement to follow up with JHNSW if no action has occurred within 60 minutes. Changing of JH&FMHN to JHNSW
1.6	21/06/24	Addition to subsection 2.2 <i>Cell calls requiring staff to immediately and urgently attend a reported location</i> of circumstances requiring immediate and urgent attendance on cell in response to cell call alarm: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collapse or loss of consciousness• Loss of signs of life (turning blue, not breathing)
