

pain, disability, and very likely, unnecessary deaths from cancer. Someone should be held accountable.

Note: The information used in the preparation of this article came from the following sources:

- 1) ATSDR U.S. Public Health Service. "Health Assessment for Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge." Cerclis No. IL 8143609487. June 12, 1986.
- 2) Kilbride and Quilty. Marion Federal Prison Water Problem. (Available from CEML).
- 3) NIOSH. Pocket Guide to Chemical Hazards. U.S.

Dept. of Health and Human Services. 1985.

4) Williams and Burson. Industrial Toxicology. Van Nostrand Reinhold. 1985.

5) U.S. Dept. of HEW. Occupational Diseases. June 1977.

6) Cantor et al. Bladder Cancer, Drinking Water Source and Tap Water Consumption: A Case-Control Study. JNCI, Vol. 79, No. 6. December 1987.

7) Zierler et al. Bladder Cancer in Massachusetts Related to Chlorinated and Chloroaminated Drinking Water: A Case-Control Study. Archives Environmental Health. March 1988.

What is U.S.P. Marion?

Marion Prison, located in Southern Illinois, was opened in 1963 to replace Alcatraz, which was closed that same year. Marion is the highest maximum security prison in the country, the only one with a "level 6" security rating. Marion also is the only U.S. prison that has ever been condemned by Amnesty International for "violating the UN's Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners." Despite this international condemnation, Marion has become an experimental laboratory and trendsetter for the entire federal prison system.

Since 1983, Marion Prison has been in a state of permanent "lockdown." Prisoners are locked in their cells for 22.5 hours a day, and all normal vocational, educational and recreational activities are virtually nonexistent. The cells are 8' x 10' and contain a tv, bed, toilet and sink. Prisoners are forced to sleep, eat and defecate in their cells. They are also forbidden to socialize with each other or to participate in group religious services. Those who "misbehave" in their cells (an arbitrary determination made by the guard on duty) are tied spread-eagled and naked, on their concrete slab beds. A typical lockdown may last several days to a week.

However, at Marion the lockdown has been made permanent, and the entire prison has been transformed into a "Control Unit." The objective is to maintain absolute physical and psychological control over the prisoners.

Despite BOP claims, the purpose of Marion is not to contain violent prisoners; it is to control dissidents. Many are sent to Marion because they have written "too many" law suits, participated in work stoppages, or pursued their religious beliefs. Notably, many at Marion are political prisoners. In fact, Marion holds more political prisoners than any other prison in the U.S. even though it is one of the smallest prisons in the country!

Marion is an outrage. It should offend the sensibilities of those whose minds have not been poisoned with the foolish propaganda about "the war on drugs" which claims that prisons are the answer to society's ills. It is clear that the BOP wants Marion as its terror mechanism. People of good will, people who want a society based on true human values, must assure that the government cannot maintain this brutal institution which dehumanizes those it incarcerates as well as those of us in whose name the U.S. Penitentiary at Marion exists.

For further information about the water at Marion and other aspects of the inhumane lockdown:

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Suppressed Government Study Documents Health Risks of Water at Marion Prison

by Alan Berkman, M.D. and Richard Clapp, Sc.D.**

Summer in Southern Illinois is hot, and a cell at the U.S. Penitentiary at Marion is a windowless concrete sweat box. If a prisoner does even a little exercise, he finds himself drenched in sweat, panting, and parched.

He can't go take a shower because he's locked in. What he needs is a glass of ice water. One of the few luxuries at Marion is the little plastic container of ice chips that the silent guards refill when they shove the meals through the bars. The prisoner fills his cup with ice and water from the tap, leans back on the concrete bunk, and wonders if he's killing himself. It takes all the pleasure out of it.

Prisoners at Marion and concerned people on the outside have questioned the safety of the water at Marion since 1983. At that time it was clear that state and federal environmental officials knew that Crab Orchard Lake, the source of Marion's water, was contaminated with PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) and the related compound, dioxin. When challenged, officials said the water was safe to drink. The city of Marion, which used Crab Orchard Lake as a backup source of water, stopped using it. Guards at the prison switched to bringing their own water in thermoses. Only the prisoners had no choice about whether to fight or switch. They've been fighting.

Most attention has been focused on PCBs because of their well-established and well-publicized toxicity and cancer-causing properties. The

two of us obtained and reviewed some of the reports prepared by the Environmental Protection Agency. These reports, as opposed to some earlier studies, showed the PCB levels to be "acceptable." However, we were struck by the extraordinarily high levels of other known toxins in the water at Marion: chloroform and trihalomethanes. These substances are chemically related and are usually lumped together as total trihalomethanes (TTHM).

Chloroform and Cancer

The trihalomethanes (THM) are formed by a chemical reaction between naturally occurring organic material in the water and the chlorine added at the water treatment plant as a disinfectant to prevent infectious disease. Prior to treatment by the chemical, the water has almost no TTHM. Chloroform is the THM produced in greatest quantity, and much of the research on actual and potential toxicity has been focused on it. Scientists have known for at least twenty years that THM can cause cancer in laboratory animals. Since 1974, epidemiologists have found an association between long-term use of chlorinated water and cancer of the bladder, colon, and rectum in humans. Based on these studies, the federal government established guidelines for the levels of chloroform in water that statistically result in one additional case of cancer for every one million people exposed. This "one additional case per million" standard is commonly used as an acceptable limit for environmental toxins. For

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c. 1989

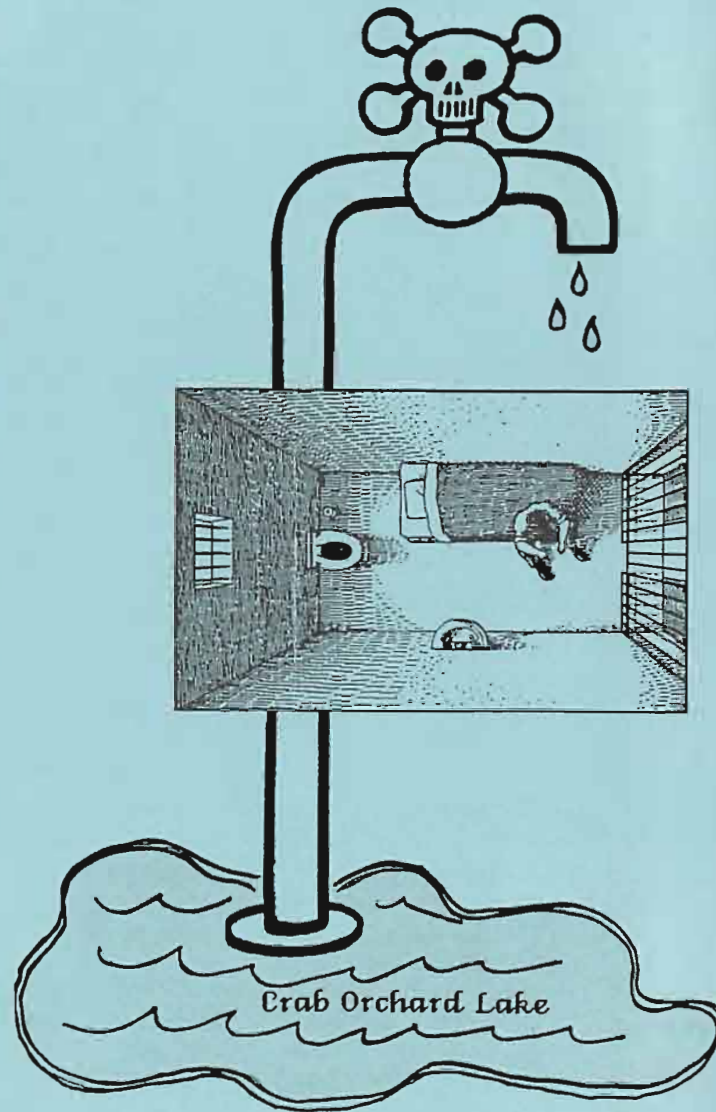
chloroform, it is now set at 0.190 ug/L (microgram per liter).

In 1986, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) asked the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) of the U.S. Public Health Service to prepare a study of water specimens taken from the water supply at Marion Penitentiary during 1982-4. Chloroform levels measured 0.210 mg/L (milligram per liter). The important thing here is to know the metric system: a milligram is a thousand times larger than a microgram. The water levels of chloroform at U.S.P. Marion are more than a thousand times higher than the established safe limits. Correspondingly, the statistical risk of cancer is a thousand times greater than the one case/million designated "acceptable" by the EPA.

Most epidemiological studies show that the incidence of cancer rises only after twenty years of exposure to chlorinated water. However, those studies are based on so-called normal levels of chloroform. The extremely high levels at Marion will likely cause a tumor after much shorter periods of exposure. In addition, there's no way to know if the presence of PCBs or other toxins multiplies the risk of cancer at any given level of chloroform. The research just hasn't been done.

Other Health Problems

It is known that short-term overexposure to chloroform can damage the liver and kidney, cause headaches, balance problems, mental dullness, and can irritate the skin and digestive tract. The ATSDR estimated in its 1986 report that chloroform levels should not exceed 0.54 mg/L of water to avoid toxic effects over a period of seven days. The level at Marion is



0.210 mg/L, less than half that figure. *But prisoners at Marion drink that water every day for years, not only for seven days.*

The ATSDR somewhat disingenuously concludes that "the levels of chloroform that have been found in the drinking water supplies of concern should not pose a short-term public health threat." They don't define "short-term," but it's reasonable to conclude that they are referring to a period of weeks. It is also reasonable to conclude, based on their figures and the studies they cite, that drinking the water at Marion for years does pose a public health threat.

The main health problems that appear disproportionately in prisoners at Marion include skin problems, headaches, digestive problems, and difficulty with concentration. The toxic levels of THMs in the Marion water may well account for some or all of these illnesses. Robert Wyler, the prisoner who first filed suit about the water, has since died of cancer of the kidney, one of the target organs affected by THM.

The government has had this information since at least 1986. The ATSDR, obviously being careful not to expose EPA or Bureau of Prison (BOP) errors, concludes only that "Continued long-term ingestion of waters containing the detected chloroform levels could increase the potential public health risk." It recommends further testing and states that "consumers of the affected drinking water should be informed of the potential health risks." The only consumers of the affected drinking water are the prisoners at Marion.

Instead the BOP has done everything it can to stop the consumers of the tainted water from finding out about the potential risks. It continues to state that the water is safe. It has blocked the prisoners' attorneys from obtaining independent analyses of the water. It opposed the prisoners' efforts to use the courts to obtain copies of governmental studies.

We were able to obtain the information contained in this article only through personal contacts with health officials and through the Freedom of Information Act. When one of us called the federal EPA office in Chicago to see if any follow-up studies had been done, he was told the federal government isn't responsible - the state of Illinois

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is. When we then spoke to the state EPA official, that bureaucrat said he'd never heard anything about it. Furthermore, he said, the state wouldn't do anything because fewer than ten thousand people drink the water.

Imagine, for a moment, the way U.S. officials would have reacted to such a report if it involved a prison in the Soviet Union where Andre Sakharov was held. Or, imagine the field day the U.S. press would have if it was shown that the water at a Cuban prison was contaminated and their government was trying to cover it up. Instead, when the malignant neglect of prisoners' rights occurs here in America's heartland, the silence from government officials and the press is deafening.

The data contained in the government's own reports validate the prisoners' demand for an immediate switch to a safe water supply. Prisoners who have been exposed to the contaminated water should be monitored closely for both immediate and long-term ill effects by a medical group independent of the BOP. Finally, Congress should investigate who in the BOP and EPA was responsible for the decision to declare the water safe and to obstruct the efforts of the prisoners and outside groups to discover the truth. Six years of delay and disinformation have caused prisoners