

Third Alert re: Sewage Flooding at Torrance County Detention Facility

Ian Philabaum <ian@innovationlawlab.org>

Wed, Jan 31, 2024 [...]

To: CRCLCompliance <CRCLCompliance@hq.dhs.gov>, DHS-OIG Office of Public Affairs <DHS-OIG.OfficePublicAffairs@oig.dhs.gov>, OIDO_Outreach <oido_outreach@hq.dhs.gov>

Cc: PJ Podesta <pj@innovationlawlab.org>, Colleen Kilbride <colleen@innovationlawlab.org>

Dear Officers,

Following the 12/19/2023 and 11/22/2023 alerts that Innovation Law Lab (“Law Lab”) provided to OIDO, CRCL, and OIG, referenced below, we are writing to alert you to the continuing public health crisis at Torrance County Detention Facility (TCDF), as **additional sewage floods** have been reported by several individuals inside the facility in the past week.

- During “count” on the morning of 1/25/24, people detained in unit 6B observed **sewage overflow from approximately nine of the unit’s ground-floor toilets**, in individual cells.
- Sewage from some of the toilets flowed out of the cells and into the central area of the unit, while in other cells the sewage stayed pooled without draining.
- Men were locked in these cells for approximately 10 minutes before a staff member who was present at the time enabled them to get out of their cells and away from the sewage.
- Several men were forced to walk through excrement to get out of the pooled sewage.
- The staff member present at the time of the overflow told the men that they were responsible for the flooding and that they would have to clean it up.
- The approximately 38 men in the unit refused to be forced to clean the sewage and were subsequently moved to another unit while the sewage was still in place in 6B.
- At least one detained man present at the time reports that when the men were originally moved into unit 6B, they noted water stains in the downstairs cells, suggesting that flooding had happened there previously.
- One individual noted that while on cleaning duty in unit 5B on 1/29/24, he observed water leaking from the shower area across the floor to the central area of the unit, creating a risk of a slip and fall.
- Additionally, men in the flooded unit on 1/25/24, who had been in unit 6C previously, reported that they had experienced wastewater flooding in unit 6C as well.
- Following the 1/25/24 sewage flood in 6B, at least one detained man present became sick with an apparent throat or respiratory infection.
- As in previous sewage flooding incidents, people detained in 6B were not provided with adequate medical check ups despite having been forcibly exposed to wastewater, which heightens their risk of illness from waterborne diseases and can negatively affect their respiratory, digestive, and epidermal systems, [according to the CDC](#).

This marks the third alert that Law Lab has sent your agencies regarding sewage floods at TCDF within three months. **These public health and infrastructural failures at TCDF are egregious and ongoing.** Your immediate attention to this continuously unresolved matter is requested, as ICE has plainly demonstrated that they are unwilling and unable to fix these issues once and for all.

Regards,
Ian

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Ian Philabaum <ian@innovationlawlab.org>

Date: Tue, Dec 19, 2023 at [...]

Subject: Public Health Crisis Amid Two More Sewage Floods at Torrance
To: DHS-OIG Office of Public Affairs <DHS-OIG.OfficePublicAffairs@oig.dhs.gov>, <oido_outreach@hq.dhs.gov>, CRCL Compliance <CRCLCompliance@hq.dhs.gov>
Cc: <detentionombudsman@hq.dhs.gov>, PJ Podesta <pj@innovationlawlab.org>

Dear Officers,

Following the 11/22/2023 alert that Innovation Law Lab (“Law Lab”) provided to OIDO, CRCL, and OIG, referenced below, we would like to draw your attention to an ongoing public health crisis at Torrance County Detention Facility (TCDF): **two additional sewage floods** have been reported by several individuals inside the facility in the past week.

- **On 12/12/2023, several individuals housed in unit 6C** reported to Law Lab staff that at least four cells (101, 102, 201, and 204) in the unit had sewage smelling of excrement consistently pooling in them. At least one of the men assigned to one of these cells was quite ill. After reporting this to Law Lab, the men were moved to two other units.
- **On 12/19/2023, several individuals housed in unit 5B** reported that at least five drains in the common areas are fully backed up with sewage water containing liquid excrement, flooding areas of the unit including the shower and the dining area. Several men detained in the unit have experienced vomiting, nausea, and dizziness.

In both of the above cases, TCDF staff have compelled the men detained to clean the sewage themselves without gloves or other adequate protective equipment.

Meanwhile men in 6C additionally reported that dozens of men in the unit had what they understood to be scabies, which a medical staffer reported to them had to do with inadequate laundry. The men in 6C also reported being locked in their cells from the evening of Saturday, 12/2/2023 to the evening of Monday 12/4/2023 with drinking water provided only once during this time by medical staff delivering small cups of water to those taking pills.

The men from each unit have consistently expressed a fear of retaliation from staff for speaking up about these issues.

The extended track record of plainly harmful conditions at TCDF again make clear that ICE must halt the further transfer of detained individuals to the facility and end its detention contract there.

Please acknowledge receipt of this email and don’t hesitate to follow up with any questions.

Thank you,
Ian Philabaum

Excerpt from 11/22/2023 alert from Law Lab to OIG, CRCL, and OIDO

On November 14, 2023, sewage flooded from all bottom-floor toilets of unit 8B in TCDF. According to two men detained in unit 8B at the time, and corroborated by several men in units 8B and 8A at the time:

- *On November 14, 2023, once in the morning and again during the evening, sewage flood water in 8B containing visible human excrement covered the downstairs cells (ie, half of the unit’s cells) and half of the common area in the unit. It flowed to a floor drain in the dining*

area which allowed some sewage to subside, but excrement and sewage water still remained.

- *A potent smell of human excrement filled the air throughout 8B and 8A the entire day of November 14, 2023.*
- *At least once, men in unit 8B managed to flee the sewage by going upstairs and/or by walking through an emergency door into 8A. Staff have subsequently sought to blame men detained in these units for attempting an “escape.”*
- *Approximately two days after the sewage floods, at least two men in 8B suffered from rashes on the soles of their feet and legs and from respiratory problems.*
- *Up to approximately 40 men detained in unit 8B were directly impacted by the sewage. Guards directed the detained men to clean up the sewage twice but did not provide them with protective gear (except for pairs of gloves provided to just two men out of the many directed to clean the sewage).*

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Innovation Law Lab