

Video Script: “A Message from the Inspector General: Review And Inspection Of Metropolitan Detention Center Brooklyn Facilities Issues And Related Impacts On Inmates,” September 2019

Hello, I’m Michael Horowitz, Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Justice.

In January 2019, a fire at the federal Bureau of Prison’s detention center, MDC Brooklyn, caused a week-long power outage. After the fire, there were widespread concerns about heating in the facility and the overall conditions of confinement for inmates. The OIG initiated an inspection and review of the facility immediately afterwards, and today we released a report with our findings.

We determined that heating issues had been a longstanding problem at the jail that existed before, during, and after the fire and power outage and were unrelated to these events. Rather, they were the result of the facility’s lack of proper equipment to continuously monitor temperatures, which the BOP was aware of and had not addressed. In fact, we found that the lowest recorded temperature in the jail – 59 degrees Fahrenheit – was taken one week before the January fire. Also, these temperature regulation issues resulted in unusually warm conditions. During our February visit to the jail, we found temperatures of 80 degrees or more in several common areas and cells and that inmates during the winter had actually made nearly three times as many complaints about hot temperatures than cold temperatures. We make several recommendations to the BOP to address the heating system at MDC Brooklyn, which will improve the condition of confinement for its inmate population.

Additionally, we found that while prison officials took reasonable steps during the power outage to ensure the safety and security of inmates, they failed to effectively manage the known heating issues and two medical issues. We also found that the prison officials did not effectively communicate with inmates’ counsel, relatives of inmates, and other stakeholders about the suspension of legal and social visiting during the power outage. This was particularly problematic in view of the facility’s population of pretrial detainees, some of whom may have required daily access to counsel to prepare for trial.

To read the report and all of our findings, please visit our website oig.justice.gov, or go to oversight.gov. Thank you for joining us.

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