

## Oregon prisoners get flat-screen TVs

**SALEM, Oregon (AP) -- Convicted felon Nicholas Krahrmer kicks back on a bunk and enjoys one of the latest perks of prison life: A spanking new flat-screen TV that's still the envy of many viewers on the outside.**

The tiny 7-inch set resembles flat-screen models installed in cars or on airplane seats. But it beats the alternative, he says -- a night in the recreation room with about 150 other inmates who are prone to brawls over what to watch and where to sit.

Oregon's in-cell television policy springs from years of frustration in finding incentives for good behavior among prisoners serving mandatory sentences.

Krahrmer bought the \$300 television with money he earned working in prison, where he is paid a few dollars a day for computer drafting. Inmates also must have clean discipline records to qualify for the flat-screens.

"I've worked for it. I've stayed clear of any sort of nonsense in the institution," said Krahrmer, 27, who is serving 70 months at Oregon State Correctional Institution, outside Salem, for assault with a knife.

"I've never seen an episode of 'Survivor.' I'm eager to watch that. I want to see what my family watches."

Randy Geer, administrator of the prisons' non-cash incentive programs, said that as far as he knows, Oregon is the only state where felons have flat-screen TVs in their cells. The 25 inmates who have bought the high-tech TVs get the same basic cable that's piped into the prison's common TV room.

Before the flat-screen program began in Krahrmer's prison last month, Oregon was already one of 16 states in the country to allow in-cell televisions.

But most inmates in the state's 12 medium and maximum security prisons did not benefit: Only one of those prisons allowed personal TVs, and they were of the traditional tube variety, not flat-screens.

### Practical gadget

While allowing inmates to enjoy the latest high-tech gadgetry may seem odd, prison officials stress the flat-screens -- which the state plans to introduce soon in all 12 of its higher security prisons -- were selected for practical reasons.

Bulky tube televisions pose dangers, such as parts that could be used as a weapon, and hollow spaces that could serve as a hiding place for contraband, Geer said.

Flat-screen TVs used at the Oregon prison are made of clear plastic -- so inmates cannot hide contraband inside.

Managers also considered cramped prison cells and decided the sleek, flat-screen models made sense.

"It was really the best solution," Geer said. "It is not a luxury item."

Before implementing the policy, Oregon officials questioned prison directors about television policy in all 50 states. Some states have decided to prohibit TVs in cells because the traditional tube models are too bulky. If a prisoner is sent to disciplinary confinement, the prison must store his or her belongings.

"Try finding space for 1,000 13-inch televisions," Geer said.

## Opposing view

Steve Doell, president of the Oregon chapter of Crime Victims United, opposes television in prison for anything other than educational programming and to ease the work of correctional staff in disciplining inmates.

"If I were in charge, I would make sure they watch the Learning Channel, Discovery and C-Span," he said. "There's lots of movies and entertainment that show violence and sexual behavior."

Rank and file officers, however, are nearly as happy as the inmates.

"It's cut down on the number of inmates that come out in the evening to watch TV," said Julian Ruiz, a corrections officer who operates electronic door locks and monitors a cell block. "The more people you get down here in the evening, the more problems."

In the common TV room, each cell with two inmates is given a night to choose what to watch, and the honor rotates in strict order, Ruiz said. Prison staff intercede only to ensure major television events are shown, such as the Super Bowl, the NCAA basketball championships and the World Series. There is little interest in presidential addresses or other news, Ruiz said.

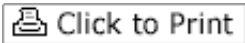
"If you ask, 'who wants to watch Bill Moyers?' one hand goes up, maybe. You ask about football, 100 hands go up," he said.

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