Mason County Courthouse to Begin Screening for Weapons

Local News

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Posted on : March 8, 2011 at 10:42 am

Shelton, WA - After years of discussion among Mason County’s criminal justice officials and Mason County Commissioners, additional security measures will be installed and implemented at the Mason County Courthouse. That program will be administered by the Mason County Sheriff’s Office. The additional security measures will include a weapons screening station at the 4th Street entrance to the courthouse to screen people from bringing weapons and other restricted items into the Mason County Courthouse. Two screening officers will conduct the weapons screening using a state of the art, walk through metal detector along with an x-ray machine capable of scanning backpacks, packages, purses and briefcases. The screening measures are similar to those used in airports around the nation. Access to the court house will be restricted to the one entrance.

The increased security is being implemented because of concerns about incidents of violence in and adjacent to courts throughout the nation. In this state alone 109 incident were reported by various courts to the Washington Courts Court Security Committee in 2009. According to the US Marshals, there were 500 threats to federal judges and prosecutors in 2003, and that number rose to 1,278 in 2008, with an increase in 2009. By reviewing the incident reports submitted in our state, it becomes apparent that the numbers of threats received by Washington judges also appears to be on the rise. Local officials are concerned that with so many facing economic struggles and very little relief in sight, judges, clerks, attorneys and others associated with the court may easily become targets of frustration. The weapons screening program is the first in a series of initiatives criminal justice officials want to implement to bring the security of the Mason County Court House in line with the Washington State Courthouse Public Safety Standards. Mason County Commissioners are also engaged in planning with department directors to assess county campus safety and implement additional staff and public safety policies. Commissioner Lynda Ring-Erickson thanked the Criminal Justice Working Team for their work and professionalism throughout this process and plan development. Mason County Sheriff, Casey Salisbury, said that “It has been a goal for a very long time to provide safe, effective and efficient weapons screening to prevent, detect, and deter the introduction of weapons to the Courthouse. Until now the money has just not been available. We hope to add additional security measures as time passes and funding becomes available.” The new weapons screening procedures will create some small delays in entering the courthouse especially at peak times. Visitors to the courthouse are advised to allow extra time for the screening process. They can help themselves considerably by leaving weapons and other questionable items at home or secured in their vehicle. Firearms and other weapons are prohibited from the courthouse by law. Other items which may be lawful to possess but nevertheless pose an unacceptable security risk with a courthouse location are also prohibited. Some examples of other prohibited items include (1) sharp instruments such as knives, box cutters, utility knives, knitting needles (2) clubs, martial arts weapons, sling shots (3) tools such as hammers screwdrivers, chains (4) chemicals such as mace, pepper spray, tear gas, flammable liquids and (5) miscellaneous items such as skateboards, baseball bats, etc. We expect to be able to implement the new weapons screening measures on or about April 1, 2011. Additional information on restricted and prohibited articles will be posted on the Mason County Sheriff’s Office website

at http://so.co.mason.wa.us/ Questions regarding prohibited items can be directed to the Mason County Sheriff’s Office at (360) 427-9670 Ext 313.