

# Local

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## Grand jury fixes blame for jail escape

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SANTA CRUZ — Staff negligence and a broken holding-cell lock allowed two dangerous inmates to escape from County Jail last October, according to a report released Wednesday by the county grand jury.

The faulty door lock, lax behavior by some detention and court security officers, inadequate procedures and several policy violations — all “occurring simultaneously” — allowed inmates Johnny David Zamarron, 43, and Richard Anthony Losoya Rubio, 21, to flee the jail Oct. 22, said the grand jury.

The men are still at large and considered dangerous. The FBI recently issued federal warrants for their arrest, charging

the pair with unlawful flight to avoid prosecution.

“The actions of the jail and court security staff greatly contributed to the prisoners’ escape from the jail facilities,” the grand jury report concluded.

The inmates were returning from a day in court on kidnap and robbery charges when they cheated the mechanism on a faulty lock — possibly with a pocket comb — and escaped through an open, garage-type door left open in violation of jail rules. The escapees were clad in street clothes, since they were coming back from a jury trial.

While investigating the escape, the grand jury interviewed jail personnel; reviewed numerous incident reports; and

participated in a complete re-enactment of the escape. Jurists also read progress reports on numerous changes in security measures at the jail since the incident.

Sheriff Al Noren, whose office runs the jail, and the grand jury declined to list specific changes in jail procedures for security reasons. Three officers were disciplined as a result of the escape, said Noren.

Panel members recommended that ongoing security revisions at the jail should continue; that a written protocol on transporting “high-risk” prisoners be implemented; that a policy of notifying people at risk following an escape — including jurors, witnesses, victims, judges and attorneys — be started; and that all locks at the

jail be inspected four times a year.

Members of the jury that was hearing the trial of Zamarron and Rubio became alarmed after the escape when it was revealed that a list of jurors’ names was found the inmates’ holding cell.

The written protocol on transporting dangerous inmates means “exercise caution and care and be cognizant of the fact that you’ve got people who are high risks (to try to escape),” said Noren on Wednesday.

Noren said the security revisions were in place long before the release of the grand jury report. “We’re reinforcing stuff that in many cases was already there,” he said. “We’re doing more than what they suggest.” At least 20 undisclosed security measures already have been initiated at

the jail, according to the grand jury.

Noren said some of the changes in jail security and procedure are a matter of simple “common sense.”

“When you’ve got a high-risk trial with two high-risk inmates who have already plotted their escape ... you can’t let your guard down and think everything’s hunky dory because there’s a door there,” he said.

Grand jury forewoman Linda Gilcrest said the panel decided to release the results of its investigation right away because jail security is “such an important issue.” Grand jury probes are usually released in an end-of-the-year report. Gilcrest also said the Sheriff’s Office cooperated fully with the grand jury investigation.