

State cutting extra lunch pay at EMCC

By Stephen Elliott March 18, 2014

EAST MOLINE -- Controversy is trailing the state's attempt to cut back on the \$728,000 it spends each year paying correctional officers at the prison here who skip their lunches.

Department of Corrections spokesman Tom Shaer said the department believes it can trim \$400,000 to \$500,000 per year from the prison budget by eliminating unnecessary "work-through-lunch" assignments. He said "more efficient scheduling" makes the savings possible.

For a correctional officer, it can mean the loss of a couple thousand dollars a year, Mr. Shaer said.

"They don't like it," Mr. Shaer said. "They say, 'no, we like the money.' Now, we're (IDOC) saying, 'you don't have to work lunch today.'"

Gregg Johnson, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Council 46, who complained earlier that shifting guards around to cover more lunch periods was endangering guards, met Tuesday morning with IDOC officials in an effort to resolve the issue.

"We had a good dialogue today," Mr. Johnson said. "We are resolving it."

"We will never, ever put correctional officers in danger to save money," Mr. Shaer said. "The lunches were a nice luxury. The taxpayers can't afford luxury and the officers shouldn't expect it."

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"So, EMCC should expect to work harder on scheduling and efficiency, which is precisely what warden Mark Williams and his people are doing on this paid lunch topic."

Mr. Shaer said EMCC houses 1,420 inmates. Five years ago, it was 1,135 inmates as it was in 2004. Mr. Shaer said there are 204 correctional officers, up from 184 in 2009.

Mr. Shaer said said the IDOC and AFSCME have a written agreement defining which security posts are mandatory. He said those posts are covered every hour of every day.

"The union has not filed a single grievance charging a violation of the mandatory requirements," Mr. Shaer said. "Why? Because at no time have we decreased EMCC's ability to safely and securely manage and control the offender population with this newly implemented policy."