

New heaters ease hot-water shortage

Inmate population has risen to 110 a day, warden says

By Marcia Moore
The Daily Item

MIDDLEBURG — Snyder County Jail inmates were asked to conserve water in recent months as the Selinsgrove facility experienced problems with two hot water heaters.

“It’s been a recurring problem,” said county board Chairman Joe Kantz at Thursday’s prison board meeting.

The county has addressed the issue by replacing the two oil-fired heaters with propane heaters, a measure appreciated by members of

the nonprofit inmate advocacy group, the Lewisburg Prison Project.

Dave Sprout, a paralegal with the group, said he received a complaint from an inmate about the limited amount of hot water and is pleased with the county’s response.

“It does seem the board is taking a proactive approach and doing something about it,” he said.

Kantz said they had to act

to protect the more than 100 inmates plus staff who work in the prison and rely on the availability of hot water for bathing, laundry and in the kitchen.

Warden Ruth Rush said no limits were placed on inmate showers, but they were asked to use as little water as possible for a period.

A “considerable” increase in the prison population in the past eight months added to the strain on the hot water

system, Kantz said.

Rush said the facility had been housing fewer than 90 male and female inmates at a time until early 2011 when the population began increasing to the current level of 110 to 120.

“It is up considerably,” she said, although it’s below the facility’s 136-bed capacity.

Kantz said he isn’t sure

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what's causing the population increase, but noted that probation violations have gone up.

The number of inmates being housed for neighboring counties has remained steady at about 20, Rush said.

The prison board met for 45 minutes in executive session

to discuss personnel and security issues stemming from a couple of incidents involving staff in the past several months, but took no action. Three corrections officers have been fired in the past year, two for allegedly sexually harassing a co-worker and another, Randy Noll, for using a stun gun on a prison nurse who had admittedly pulled a prank on him.

It was revealed Tuesday in district court that Noll had received something other than an honorable discharge from the military in 2005 in lieu of a court martial for conspiracy to commit theft.

Prison board Chairman Malcolm Derk said the issue of background checks for prison guards would be scrutinized.