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# Federal prisons bureau is speeding repairs with facilities 'strike forces'

By keeping the work in-house and using inmates to help, the agency is making progress against a \$4 billion repair backlog, the Bureau of Prisons deputy director says.

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*FCI Three Rivers in Texas. The federal Bureau of Prisons has created a strike force to make prison repairs more quickly. "Federal Prison" by Julie Tuason is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#)*

The Federal Bureau of Prisons has set up strike forces to tackle deferred maintenance at its facilities and it's starting to pay off, the agency's deputy director said last week in a video message to agency employees.

"These teams provide the Bureau for the first time ever a quick-reaction force capable of stabilizing damaged institutions, accelerating repairs and maintaining continuity of operations without a long wait or the added cost of outside contractors," Federal Bureau of Prisons Deputy Director Joshua Smith said in the address.

For example, a 25-person team is completing restoration of the federal prison in Estill, South Carolina, which was damaged by a tornado in 2020. The 175-mile-per-hour storm killed five and injured 60 in Hampton County.

“This work is being done entirely by our Bureau professionals along with some of our inmates that work in our facilities department,” said Smith.

The Bureau saved almost \$15 million by keeping the work in-house, he said, “all while returning the institution to a safe, reliable and compliant operation much faster than even the estimated highest contractors bid.”

Funding for its strike force initiative comes from a \$2 billion BOP earmark for critical infrastructure improvements in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act enacted last year. That amount would address about half of the \$4 billion backlog in maintenance and repair reported by the Bureau.

“Most of our facilities are in an unacceptable condition, for both our staff and the inmates,” Smith said. “That reality hasn’t changed. What has changed is [we] are fixing the problems instead of just talking about them.”

Other projects the strike forces are working on include new water heaters at a prison in Manchester, Kentucky; a new ceiling at a prison in Miami; a new fire alarm system at a prison in Montgomery, Alabama; and security enhancements at a prison in Fort Worth, Texas, Smith said.

Some 450 BOP facilities staff have volunteered to be on call for these assignments, he said. “These strike teams work side by side with the institution staff and the inmate population,” he said. “In the process inmates are gaining real marketable trades skills inside our institutions, using professional tools under the guidance of our Bureau experts.”

The Bureau has made some administrative changes as part of the initiative to make it easier for work to get approved. “Thresholds for major work orders have been raised and directives modernized

so urgent repairs move forward without the months of unnecessary delays all of you have dealt with in the past.” he said.

The agency oversees 122 prisons in about 40 states and territories.