

Richardson County Jail Opened to Tours on Sunday

(KTNC) -- The public had another chance Sunday to get an up close look at the Richardson County Jail. Commissioners and Sheriff Randy Houser have opened the jail for public tours each of the last two Sunday afternoons.

Sheriff Houser says the purpose of the tours is to give the public a chance to see the safety issues that have prompted county officials to consider converting the former Falls City Armory into a jail and law enforcement center. Sheriff Randy Houser feels it's important for people to see the physical and psychological conditions are like for inmates and staff at the jail.

The Richardson County Jail is located on the fourth floor of the Courthouse in Falls City. It was built approximately 90 years ago and is one of the oldest – if not the oldest – operating jails in the state of Nebraska.

Sheriff Houser says the biggest safety issue with the facility is that jailers have no direct way to monitor inmates, most of whom are housed on a separate floor from where the jail staff works. The other big safety issue is that it would be difficult to evacuate prisoners should there be a fire in the Courthouse.

Another issue at the jail, Houser says, is that there is no outdoor recreation opportunities for inmates as required by Jail Standards. Three small, heavily barred, windows are all the “access” inmates have to the outside.

Sheriff Houser says it is also difficult to segregate inmates, with the limited space in the jail. He says there are six categories of inmates that they need to segregate and that is difficult to do when they have more than about 10 inmates. Sheriff Houser says they've also had an upswing in the number of female inmates since he became Sheriff in 2011.

Sheriff Houser says people who have come to tour the jail are surprised by the conditions in the facility. He says a new jail at the Armory would not necessarily be nicer, but would be safer.

Public tours of the Richardson County Jail will be offered again this Sunday, from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Many Signals Communication