



# Preventing Staff Assaults in Correctional Environments: The Power of Rapid Response





Correctional environments are among the most challenging and risk-intensive workplaces in the nation. Every day, officers, healthcare staff, and facility personnel operate in conditions shaped by overcrowding, staffing shortages, aging infrastructure, and rising behavioral-health needs. When an incident occurs, response time directly affects how quickly a situation can be contained. The difference between a controlled event and one that escalates often comes down to how fast staff can communicate and mobilize support across posts and units. With assaults increasing and staffing levels under immense strain nationwide, every second lost increases operational risk for both staff and inmates.

## The Hidden Cost of Staff Assaults

Correctional officers face some of the highest rates of workplace violence in the country, a reality leaders across Departments of Corrections confront daily. According to joint reporting from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and NIOSH, correctional staff experience **149 violent incidents per 1,000 employees**, compared to just **8 per 1,000** across all industries.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1999 and 2008, there were **113 fatalities and more than 125,000 nonfatal injuries among correctional officers** treated in emergency departments, with nearly **40%** resulting from assaults and violent acts.<sup>2</sup>

These incidents create a significant personal and operational toll, contributing to extended medical leave, burnout, absenteeism, and rising turnover. Research from the National Institute of Justice shows some states reporting **vacancy rates exceeding 45%, with annual turnover ranging from 20% to 53%**.<sup>3</sup>

When positions go unfilled, remaining staff must absorb longer shifts and mandatory overtime while supervisors work to maintain coverage across critical posts. This increases fatigue, slows response capability, and heightens risk throughout the facility—especially when a crisis requires immediate coordination.

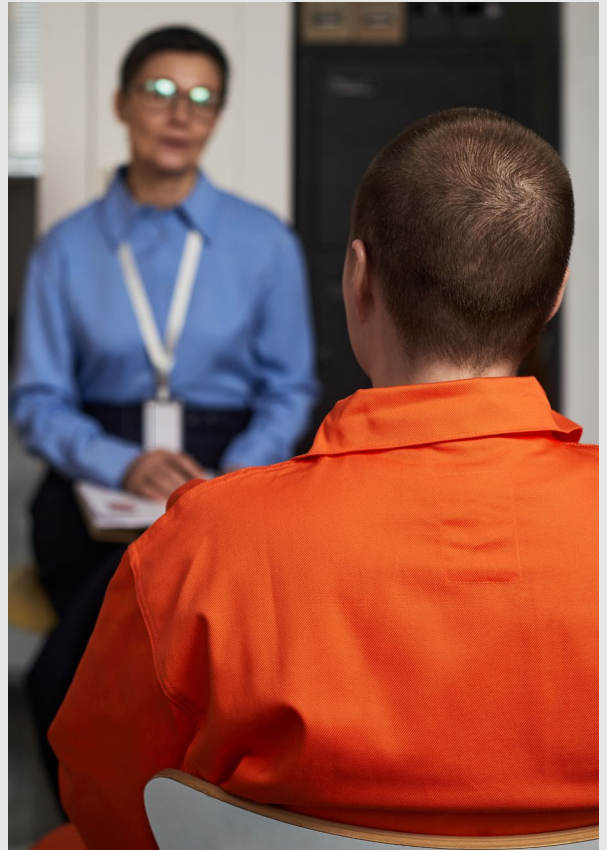


## Common Factors Behind Violence

At year-end 2023, more than **5.6 million adults** were under correctional supervision, including **1.85 million incarcerated individuals**.<sup>4</sup>

Overcrowding and turnover weaken the teamwork and situational awareness needed to prevent incidents early. Radios—the primary communication tool in most facilities—can be unreliable inside concrete structures, between housing units, or in high-noise areas like dayrooms or sally ports. When communication breaks down, officers working a post alone may have no dependable way to get immediate help.

Health and behavioral-risk factors add further complexity. The CDC documented **733,000 emergency-department visits** for nonfatal injuries among incarcerated adults from 2010–2019, nearly twice the rate of the general population, **with assaults accounting for nearly 40%**.<sup>5</sup> This underscores a reality every facility leader knows: incidents escalate quickly, and staff must be able to summon backup without delay.



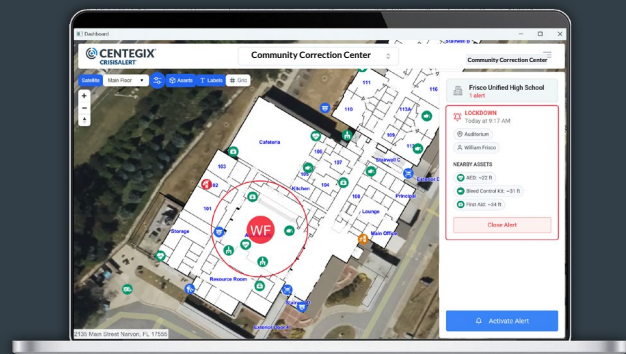
## Why Seconds Matter

Inside a correctional facility, an incident can escalate in seconds. Traditional radio traffic or phone-based alerts cannot always initiate a fast, coordinated response, especially when staff are spread across multiple units, movement corridors, recreation yards, or medical.

Delayed response also carries operational and legal consequences. At New York's Rikers Island, an eight-minute delay in staff assistance led to litigation and disciplinary action for personnel involved—**underscoring the importance of reliable, documented response processes**.<sup>6</sup>

Studies consistently show that **faster communication and clearer visibility across zones reduce the severity of assaults and injuries**.

Modeling from the National Institute of Corrections' Jail Vulnerability Assessment found that reducing average response time from roughly five and a half minutes to three minutes more than **doubled the likelihood of stopping an incident before injury occurred**.<sup>7</sup>



## Strengthening Facility Safety

Technology cannot solve staffing shortages or overcrowding, but it can strengthen response operations and ensure officers have reliable support when an incident occurs. In high-risk environments where staff remain alert at all times, dependable communication is essential to maintaining control and containing situations quickly.

Leadership drives this consistency. Safety expectations must be reinforced through tools that work under pressure and perform the same way on every post and shift. Reliable technology shows a clear commitment to staff protection and operational readiness.

Retention data also show that employees who feel supported by dependable systems are more likely to stay, even as some facilities manage turnover rates above 50 percent.<sup>8</sup>



## Technology as a Force Multiplier

Designed for environments where radios or phones may fail or be out of reach, CENTEGIX Safety Platform<sup>®</sup> equips every staff member with a **wearable device that supports two activation levels**. A three-press activation initiates a response for staff assistance to the location, while an eight-press activation signals a high-stakes emergency requiring a rapid, coordinated response. The system operates independently of Wi-Fi or cell service, ensuring staff can request help wherever they are.

When activated the CENTEGIX Safety Platform<sup>®</sup> will:



Send audible and visual notifications across the facility

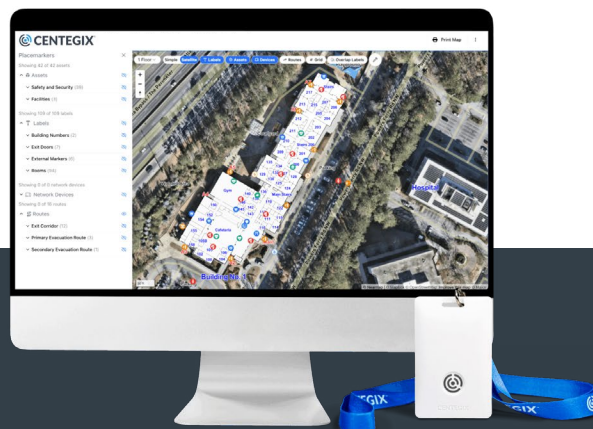


Transmit the staff member's precise location to responders in seconds



Enable immediate coordination among security, medical staff, and CERT units

Each activation also generates a **digital incident log**, allowing administrators to **review response times** and identify opportunities to strengthen readiness.



# The Road Ahead

Violence in correctional facilities is not new, but its impact can be reduced through strong preparation and consistent response practices. Effective safety operations rely on three core components:

- 01. Preparation:** Training, clear communication protocols, and stable staffing coverage.
- 02. Response:** Reliable systems that function under pressure and support rapid coordination.
- 03. Review:** Documented response times, post-incident analysis, and continuous operational improvement.

Facilities that invest in dependable rapid response tools strengthen their overall readiness, reduce operational risk, support compliance with state and accreditation standards, and create clearer expectations for staff response.

For leaders assessing current capabilities, the CENTEGIX® **Correctional Emergency Readiness Checklist** offers a practical audit tool covering assaults, medical events, movement challenges, and large-scale incidents. It helps identify vulnerabilities before they become liabilities and supports measurable improvements over time. Every second accounted for strengthens operational confidence and trust across the facility.

[View the Correctional Emergency Readiness Checklist](#)



## End notes

1. CDC NIOSH Science Blog (2023). "Correctional Workers and Workplace Violence." <https://blogs.cdc.gov/niosh-science-blog/2023/05/08/correctional-workers/>
2. NIOSH / PMC Study (2016). Work-Related Fatalities and Injuries Among U.S. Correctional Officers, 1999–2008. PMID: PMC4699466. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4699466/>
3. National Institute of Justice (2020). "Experts Identify Priority Needs for Addressing Correctional Agency Security Threats." <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/experts-identify-priority-needs-addressing-correctional-agency-security-threats>
4. Bureau of Justice Statistics (2024). Correctional Populations in the United States, 2023. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/correctional-populations-united-states-2023>
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2023). Emergency Department Visits by Incarcerated Adults for Nonfatal Injuries – United States, 2010–2019. MMWR 72(11): 281–286. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7211a2.htm>
6. Associated Press. (n.d.). Inmate suicide attempt: Officers charged in New York City. <https://apnews.com/article/inmate-suicide-attempt-officers-charged-newyorkcity-9f603b73d32c605f90064e32cdd88f3b>
7. National Institute of Corrections (2008). Improving Jail Safety and Security: Jail Vulnerability Assessment (JVA) Handbook – Final Draft. Correctional Management Institute of Texas.
8. National Institute of Justice (2020); Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024). Turnover and retention data summarized in Occupational Outlook Handbook, Correctional Officers and Jailers. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/protective-service/correctional-officers.htm>