California prison officials unveil new chamber for lethal injection


**Abstract (summary)**

The compound inside the gates of San Quentin state Prison is a large series of rooms and death chamber designed to overcome objections by courts to the old procedures, which have stalled executions in California for nearly five years.

**Full Text**

Sept. 21--SAN QUENTIN -- Gearing up for an execution scheduled to take place next Wednesday, state prison officials unveiled a new $853,000 lethal injection facility today.

The compound inside the gate of San Quentin state Prison is a large series of rooms and death chamber designed to overcome objections by courts to the old procedures, which have stalled executions in California for nearly five years. The last execution in California was that of Clarence Ray Allen on Jan. 17, 2006.

Convicted Riverside County Killer Albert Greenwood Brown is scheduled to die at 12:01 a.m. Wednesday in the new facility, although legal challenges may postpone that.

Despite that possibility, prison officials are moving forward with a carefully choreographed procedures they must follow leading up to an execution. Today’s tour for media revealed a new death chamber with separate viewing areas for the condemned inmate’s family and guests, the family and friends of the victim and for official and media witnesses.

Previously, all the witnesses would be crowded into a single room within view and earshot of each other, but the new facility precludes contact between the three groups.

The same green dentist chair-like gurney that has been used for 11 lethal injection executions in the old chamber now fits in the new execution room with more modern touches.

These include a speaker system designed to allow witnesses to hear what’s going on inside, as well as four round holes leading from the death chamber to the infusion control center from where the drugs and IV lines are administered. In the old gas chamber, which was converted for use with lethal injection, officials drilled holes through the walls of the chamber for the lines. There are two clocks inside the new death chamber, one directly over the inmate’s head and the other on the wall the inmate will be facing while lying strapped to the gurney.

Inside the infusion control room are four telephones labeled for direct lines to the governor’s office, the attorney general’s office, the Supreme Court and the warden’s office.

The holding cell for the inmate is a small space with one bunk and a gray plastic pad, a steel sink and toilet. There are 31 bars on the cell through which the inmate can watch television on a flat-screen TV across the room, chat with his spiritual adviser or lawyer and use a telephone on the wall directly outside the cell. The condemned inmate will spend the last six hours of his life in the cell, and will consume his last meal there if desired.

The entire compound is painted bright white inside, in contrast to the apple green gas chamber that was tucked behind an ancient iron door about 100 yards north of the new facility. The new chamber was formerly a visitors center and was revamped using inmate labor.

Prison officials would not discuss the planned Brown execution or any of the legal battles surrounding it.

"We are fully prepared to carry out the execution on the 29th," said acting warden Vincent Cullen.

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Call The Bee’s Sam Stanton, (916) 321-1091.

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