

INVESTIGATIVE SUPPLEMENT ASP-2025-0704/43

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Primary Information

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Narrative begins on the following page.



ARKANSAS STATE POLICE

Criminal Investigation Division

INVESTIGATIVE SUMMARY

This summary outlines the Arkansas Department of Corrections (ADC) policies, procedures, and response protocols, including specific verbal directives issued prior to the escape of inmate Grant Hardin. Identified failures by ADC personnel are also noted.

A central question in this investigation is whether inmate Hardin was allowed to be on the back dock of the NCU kitchen unsupervised as part of his kitchen duties. Information obtained during the investigation indicates that approximately one (1) month prior to the escape, Warden Thomas Hurst and Deputy Warden Kennie Bolden observed inmates on the kitchen back dock without staff supervision. Warden Hurst deemed this a potential security concern, and a verbal directive was issued instructing kitchen staff not to allow inmates on the dock unless directly supervised.

However, this verbal directive conflicted with longstanding NCU Post Orders, which allowed inmates to be on the back dock unsupervised if they were cleaning. Warden Hurst later clarified that when a verbal directive contradicts written policy, "staff should follow the last directive given." He also stated that such conflicts should trigger a formal policy review meeting involving relevant staff and leadership, followed by approval and issuance of a revised directive.

Despite the identification of this security concern, no documented effort was made to revise the written policy before Hardin's escape. As of July 14, 2025—approximately ten (10) weeks after the verbal directive was issued—Post Orders had still not been updated.

Warden Hurst also acknowledged that if Inmate Hardin's claim is true—that he stored escape-related items in the chemical room for two years—then every kitchen supervisor during that period failed in their duties to maintain a secure environment. Additionally, Warden Hurst referenced a document he claimed Kitchen Supervisor Justin Delvalle had signed, prohibiting inmates from being unsupervised on the back dock. However, the document contained no such language. Warden Hurst later conceded that his description may have been a "misstatement," though he claimed it was not intended to mislead.

Another central issue identified was how Inmate Hardin was able to simply walk out the gate unopposed by corrections staff. During the investigation, it was determined that NCU Security Guard William Walker was assigned to the west tower on the day of the escape. His duties included monitoring the sally port, back perimeter, and surrounding areas. Walker admitted to allowing Hardin to exit the facility due to complacency and a lapse in vigilance. The West Tower Post Orders clearly instruct guards to remain alert and to prevent inmate escapes—responsibilities that were not upheld.

Other concerns identified during the ASP review of the escape were conflicting directives across ADC as it relates to the notifications made following the escape.

The ADC Notification Policy Structure is organized into three (3) levels:

- **Secretarial Directives:** Broad policies issued by the Secretary's Office to ensure compliance with state law.

Case #: ASP-2025-0704	Agent: MCNEILL, MIKE
Report Date: 07/18/2025	ESCAPE

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- **Administrative Directives:** Operational policies issued by the Director’s Office, consistent with Secretarial Directives.
- **Unit Directives:** Facility-specific policies approved at the unit level, not subject to higher-level review.

The Secretarial Directive concerning serious incidents, including escapes, charges the ADC Internal Affairs Administrator with notifying both State and Local law enforcement. Under Section II, B, 3, the Administrator must be notified of “serious incidents” and is responsible for coordinating with the Secretary and Division Director to inform law enforcement. Section C specifically defines “escapes” as serious incidents. As such, the Internal Affairs Administrator had an obligation to ensure notifications were made—an obligation that was not fulfilled.

The Administrative Directive on escapes includes a “Commander’s Checklist,” which requires notification of the Arkansas State Police and law enforcement in the county of commitment to be completed by the Commander or his designee at the unit.

The NCU’s Unit Directive (Emergency Notification Action Plan) instructs staff to contact the ADC Pine Bluff Radio Room and request notification of all parties listed in Attachment #1—including local law enforcement.

The Arkansas Department of Corrections Internal Affairs conducted an investigation regarding the initial actions of Warden Hurst. Their findings revealed that Warden Hurst was found to be in violation of ADC policy. The internal affairs inquiry concludes that Warden Hurst, by virtue of being physically present when Master Control was designated as the command center, assumed the role of “ultimate commander” from the onset of the incident. Despite his presence, Warden Hurst identified Captain Brandon as the initial commander—a delegation that, according to the inquiry, was improper under policy due to the Warden’s on-site authority and command responsibility at the time.

Further, it was revealed that Sgt. Shanetta Brown—the highest-ranking officer in the ADC Pine Bluff Radio Room—committed multiple errors during the escape response. Sgt. Brown submitted a BOLO describing inmate Hardin as having gray hair, despite Hardin being bald as confirmed in his eOMIS profile. More significantly, the BOLO was rejected by the Arkansas Crime Information Center (ACIC) due to formatting errors. Although ACIC sent an automated rejection notice, Sgt. Brown reported she never received it. ACIC later confirmed that the rejection notice was transmitted.

This investigation shows despite known security concerns, verbal directives were issued without follow-through to amend written policies. Supervisory staff failed to prevent the escape. Outdated unit directives and poor communication protocols led to missed notifications to law enforcement. Leadership failed to enforce command responsibility during the crisis, and the central communications hub—responsible for transmitting urgent alerts—committed critical procedural errors.

Case #: ASP-2025-0704	Agent: MCNEILL, MIKE
Report Date: 07/18/2025	ESCAPE