

State safety inspectors target all 21 county courthouses  
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The state Department of Labor's safety and health arm is investigating conditions at court facilities in every county in New Jersey, officials said yesterday. "We are in the process of inspecting all county courthouses," said Marcela Ospina, an agency spokeswoman. "We want to make sure we go everywhere for possible violations." Earlier this month, The Star-Ledger reported on poor conditions at court facilities in several counties around the state. In some places, the conditions were potentially dangerous, such as in Hudson County, where fire detectors don't work and criminal defendants walk down public hallways to get to courtrooms. In others, including Warren County, the courthouses are painfully overcrowded. Because the courthouses are run by county governments, judges and court officials say their hands are tied when it comes to getting necessary repairs. In places like Camden, Warren and Passaic counties court officials and lawyers' groups have filed lawsuits or hired attorneys to consider legal action. In many instances, county officials say the cost of building new facilities is more than their budgets and taxpayers can bear. Judges yesterday cheered the news that inspectors from the labor department's Public Employees Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission were studying each facility. "I welcome an inspection to verify the conditions not only in the Hudson County courthouse, but courthouses around the state," said Superior Court Judge Maurice Gallipoli, the assignment judge in Hudson County. "It is important that the public who uses the courthouses be assured that everything is being done that should be done to make them appropriate places to work in and for public to conduct their business in." Passaic County Assignment Judge Robert Passero also said he can't wait to see the inspectors. Leaking pipes and peeling walls have caused court administrators in Paterson to consult with lawyers from the Administrative Office of the Courts about potential legal action. "An evaluation by an independent agency to make an objective decision about the health and safety of the facilities is needed," Passero said. The safety and health commission tries to inspect courthouses every two or three years since they are not considered high-hazard facilities, which require yearly evaluations. But it has been six or seven years since the last round of inspections, said Ospina. Officials had been planning to inspect the courthouses, but were inspired to get started by the newspaper article, she said. Court facilities in all 21 counties are expected to be evaluated; several already have or will be soon, said Tamara Kendig, a judiciary spokeswoman. Among them are Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Essex, Gloucester, Hudson, Monmouth, Ocean, Salem, Union and Warren counties. All told, the inspections are expected to take a couple months, said Ospina. Once complete, a report on the findings will be issued.

Employees can report complaints about facility conditions at (800) 624-1644. Kate Coscarelli may be reached at (973) 392-4147 or [kcoscarelli@starledger.com](mailto:kcoscarelli@starledger.com).

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