



DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

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April 12, 2011

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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****Updates with identity of correctional officer, corrects Inmate Berget sentence to Attempted 1st Degree Murder****

Penitentiary correctional officer killed during escape attempt

(Pierre)- A correctional officer at the South Dakota State Penitentiary was killed during an escape attempt earlier today.

Correctional Officer Ronald Johnson was assaulted during the escape attempt. He was transported by ambulance to a Sioux Falls hospital where he was pronounced dead at 11:50 a.m. Johnson, age 63, had worked at the Penitentiary for more than 23 years.

Two inmates, Rodney Berget and Eric Robert, were apprehended within the confines of the prison grounds during the escape attempt just before 11:00 a.m. CDT this morning.

Another correctional officer suffered minor injuries. He was taken to a Sioux Falls hospital to be evaluated.

A full sweep of the Penitentiary grounds was conducted following the escape attempt. All other Penitentiary staff members and inmates are accounted for. The Penitentiary was placed on lockdown status and will remain so while an investigation into the incident is conducted by the Division of Criminal Investigation.

Interim Corrections Secretary Laurie Feiler was notified of the incident at 11:09 a.m. Incoming Corrections Secretary Denny Kaemingk, who was at the Penitentiary for Board of Pardons and Paroles hearings, was also notified of the incident.

Inmates Berget and Robert were transported to the Minnehaha County Jail.

Berget, age 48, is serving two life sentences for Attempted 1st Degree Murder out of Lawrence County and for Kidnapping out of Meade County.

Robert, age 48, is serving an 80-year sentence out of Meade County for Kidnapping.

