Shakedown

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sew´·ẽr sō·ci·ol´ō·gy, *the science of society, social institutions, and social relationships viewed through the eyes of a sewer; specifically, the systematic study of the development, structure, interaction, and collective sewer use of organized groups of human beings.*

Most sewer flows are characterized by repeatable diurnal patterns that vary across weekdays, weekends, and holidays. Differences in land use also are apparent, and distractions and disruptions of daily life often can be observed.

This month, we take another look at life behind bars and witness a "shakedown" in progress.

Inmates are resourceful, and with nothing but time on their hands, trouble can erupt at any moment. For some inmates, circumventing prison rules and regulations is a regular pastime and often involves weapons, illicit drugs, and even cell phones. These and other prohibited items are called "contraband" and present a danger to both prison officials and inmates.

A shakedown is an unannounced search for contraband and is one of many tools that prison officials use to maintain order. The figure shows a composite hydrograph of sewer use at a Southern California prison. The green lines show weekday flows, and the blue line shows weekend flows. The red line marks what happened during a recent shakedown.

Prior to a shakedown, prison officials shut off the water supply to prevent inmates from flushing contraband down the sewer. This change in water use translates to a corresponding change in sewer use, as shown here.

Based on the sewer use data, this shakedown started at 5 a.m. and lasted about 2 hours – at about 7 a.m., the sewer flows begin to return to normal. We do not know what contraband was discovered or confiscated during this search, but we do know that life at this prison is just a little bit safer as a result.

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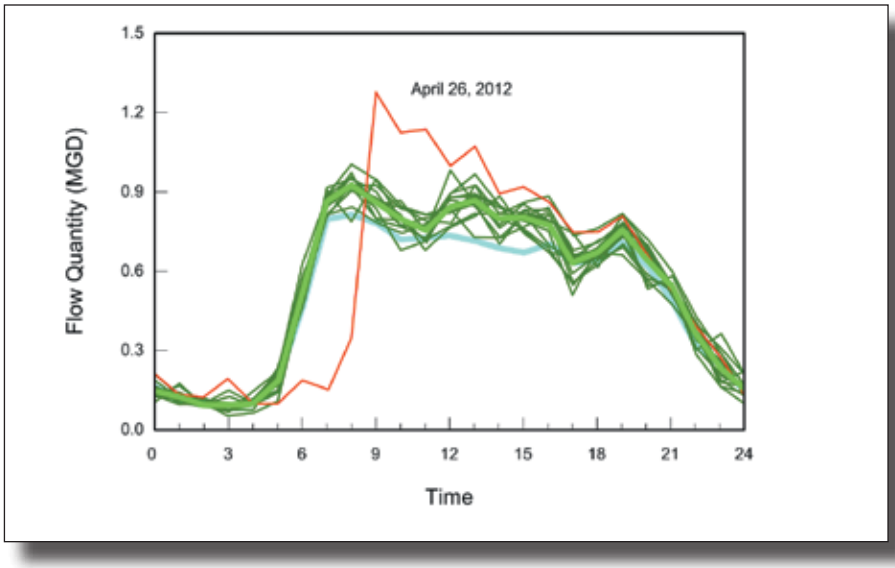
Shakedown at state prison



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