

2 Guards May Be Suspended

By Tyrone D. Terry
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A disciplinary board at the City Prison Farm decided to recommend that two guards be suspended without pay for "negligence" in the death of a prison farm inmate May 1, it was learned Monday.

The board plans to submit its recommendation to Public Safety Commissioner Lee Brown this week.

The two guards are Lt. Joe Williams and Sgt. Jerry Clark. They were accused of ignoring statements from several prisoners that inmate Robert Hurt, 55, was suffering chest pains. About five hours later, Hurt died of a heart attack.

The disciplinary board ended its hearing Thursday after about four hours of testimony, said Bureau of Corrections Director J.D. Hudson.

"We acted responsibly," he said. "We have taken what we believe to be the right steps to assure that the inmates' rights are protected. No one will be abused."

Hudson declined to state the specific length of the recommended suspensions before Commissioner Brown reviews the recommendations. But each guard could face a maximum suspension of 30 days without pay.

Brown can accept the board's recommendation or opt to fire or demote the officers.

Inmates William Long and Homer Cloude brought the complaints against the guards. The prisoners said Sgt. Clark was told that Hurt was ill, but the officer replied: "I'm no doctor. There's no nurse here. There's nothing I can do about it."

Lt. Williams is Sgt. Clark's supervisor.

Before the hearing, Hudson called Cloude and Long prison "regulars" who frequently instigate problems at the prison.

See SUSPEND, Page 3-C

Suspend

Continued From Page 1-C

But Hudson, who chaired the five-man disciplinary board, called the hearing a "fair trial. It was not a kangaroo court.

"We have to be careful not to put the officers in a position of being intimidated by the prisoners, and we have to temper that with what's right for the protection of the inmates," Hudson said.

He said the guards will continue to work at the stockade on Key Road until Brown makes a decision. Hudson said his secretary will type transcripts of the hearing and send them to Brown by the end of this week.