

DHS inspector general exposes torture cages, filth and overcrowding at “Alligator Alcatraz”

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At least 79 immigrants were locked inside tiny metal cages at Florida’s “Alligator Alcatraz” concentration camp between July 2025 and January 2026, according to a report released by the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General on September 11, 2026.

The cages measured just 4 feet 3 inches by 4 feet 3 inches, providing approximately 18 square feet of floor space. Detainees were confined inside them for periods ranging from several minutes to nearly two hours. The inspector general described the practice as “unprecedented” among the Immigration and Customs Enforcement facilities its investigators had inspected and warned that it presented “significant risks to detainee health and safety.”

Camp officials referred to the cages as “calming areas” and claimed that immigrants voluntarily asked to enter them. The report undermines this absurd explanation. ICE officials acknowledged that the cages were used for disciplinary issues, crisis intervention, housing changes and conflicts between detainees. One facility record stated that an immigrant placed inside a cage for 26 minutes had “Failed to comply with a lawful command.”

That account is contradicted by testimony collected by Amnesty International months before the inspector general’s visit. Four men previously detained at “Alligator Alcatraz” described “the box” as a cage-like structure used for punishment. Detainees reported being held inside for hours while exposed to the elements with little water and their feet fastened to restraints on the ground. Amnesty concluded that use of “the box” amounted to torture or other ill treatment.

The cages evoke methods of confinement and torture employed by US imperialism over decades: the body-sized boxes used by the Central Intelligence Agency at its secret prisons, the open-air cages, isolation cells and stress-position torture at Guantánamo Bay and the infamous “tiger cages” used against political prisoners at Côn Sơn by the US-backed South Vietnamese dictatorship.

On January 21, 2026, the date of the inspection, 1,467 people were detained at the Florida Soft-Sided Facility (FSSF) near Ochopee, an unincorporated community in the south Florida

Everglades. Trump, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and their fascistic supporters promoted the facility under the name “Alligator Alcatraz.” The camp closed in June 2026 after all detainees were transferred to other facilities.

The cages were only one of the cruel and unusual punishments imposed on immigrants throughout the camp. Inspectors documented overcrowded windowless housing units, punitive isolation, insect-infested showers, inadequate drinking water, unsafe food storage, restricted access to hygiene supplies, almost nonexistent recreation and barriers to legal representation.

Immigrants held in the camp’s general population were packed into windowless structures without natural light or views of the outside.

General-population housing consisted of eight soft-sided structures, or pods. Each pod contained eight housing units surrounded on every side, including overhead, by nine-foot metal fencing. Every 897-square-foot unit was designed to hold as many as 32 detainees and contained rows of bunk beds, three toilets, three washbasins and four telephones. There were no tables, chairs, storage facilities or common areas.

At maximum capacity, the units provided only 28 square feet (8.5 square meters) of floor space per detainee, little more than one-third of the 75 square feet (22.8 square meters) required under the applicable detention standards. To comply with the minimum, each unit would have had to hold no more than 11 people. On the day of the inspection, none of the eight units examined in Pod Alpha 3 met the standard. Between 22 and 32 people were assigned to each, leaving every detainee between 28 and 40.8 square feet (8.5 and 12.4 square meters).

These conditions were made still more restrictive inside the Special Management Unit (SMU), the facility’s equivalent of segregated housing and, for some detainees, solitary confinement. Its metal cages contained little more than a narrow metal bed frame and thin mattress.

Only detainees placed in protective custody who were not classified as security risks received recreation outside the unit, limited to five hours a week. Other SMU detainees left their cages only under escort to use the bathroom or attend legal,

medical or other nonroutine appointments. They had no televisions or playing cards, while reading material was largely restricted to religious texts. One immigrant held in administrative segregation told inspectors that he had spent eight days inside the SMU without being allowed any recreation.

Detainees in the SMU also lacked access to a law library or legal materials, preventing them from contacting lawyers or arranging legal appointments while the government sought to deport them.

The degradation extended into every aspect of daily life. Inspectors documented insect-infested showers, filthy toilet facilities, restricted access to hygiene products, potentially contaminated drinking water and unsafe food-storage temperatures.

Detainees were permitted to shower only three times a week, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, even though the applicable standards required daily access. Before showering, they received kits containing soap, shampoo, deodorant, toothpaste and a toothbrush. Afterward, they were allowed to retain only the toothbrush.

Inspectors found the ceilings of the shower facilities covered with insects, in violation of standards requiring detention centers to be kept free of insects and vermin. Seven of the eight detainees interviewed said the facility was not clean, with two specifically identifying the showers as a problem.

Conditions surrounding the toilets were no less degrading. Each housing unit, designed to hold as many as 32 people, contained only three toilets, separated by low partitions that afforded virtually no privacy. Photographs published by the inspector general show cracked and peeling paint and dark organic growth around the toilet enclosure.

The camp also failed to maintain food at safe temperatures. A freezer used to store special meals registered 10 degrees Fahrenheit during the inspection and 14 degrees 17 minutes later. Freezers containing perishable food are required to remain at or below 0 degrees. The inspector general warned that the elevated temperature could cause food to spoil and increase the risk of foodborne illness among detainees and staff.

Because immigration detention is formally civil rather than criminal, the government is not legally permitted to use it as punishment. Conditions imposed for a punitive purpose, or conditions unrelated or excessive in relation to a legitimate administrative objective, violate the Fifth Amendment's Due Process Clause.

The inspector general's findings confirm that the conditions at "Alligator Alcatraz" were neither isolated failures nor unforeseeable consequences. Reports of overflowing toilets, insect infestations, inadequate food and water, denial of medical care and barriers to legal representation began almost immediately after the camp opened.

The camp's fascistic and cruel purpose was on display from

its opening. Trump toured the facility with Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem and White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller on July 1, 2025. Trump promoted it as a model for other detention centers and suggested that the government should consider removing native-born US citizens whom he characterized as dangerous: "Many of them were born in our country. I think we ought to get them the hell out of here too."

The methods documented in Florida also have identifiable precedents in US detention and torture practices abroad. The George W. Bush administration authorized CIA secret detention, confinement boxes, stress positions, prolonged sleep deprivation and waterboarding. In 2014, President Barack Obama acknowledged, "We tortured some folks," while defending CIA personnel. His administration declined to prosecute those responsible for the program.

The Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General's report therefore documents more than deficient management at one temporary camp. It shows how the methods employed by US military and intelligence agents abroad are being reproduced inside the United States against workers and their family members.

This development is taking place amid growing social inequality and increasing interest in socialism among sections of workers and youth. At the Republican Party's September convention in Dallas, attacks on socialism accompanied denunciations of immigrants, Muslims and transgender people. Texas Senator Ted Cruz claimed that the Democratic Party had been captured by a "red-green alliance" of "communists and Islamists." An audience member repeatedly called for the shooting of politicians whom Cruz accused of opposing capitalism, threats Cruz neither acknowledged nor condemned.

The eruption of anticommunism at the convention expressed the fear within the financial oligarchy that mounting opposition to inequality, war and dictatorship will develop into a conscious socialist movement of the working class. The cages at "Alligator Alcatraz" demonstrate the methods being prepared to suppress that opposition.



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