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Evacuation as a result of exceptional occurrences in the Prison Service practice

Original article

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Abstract

Keywords:

threat, evacuation, prison service, exceptional occurrences

Objectives: This article aims to present the specificity of evacuation in the Prison Service practice resulting from an exceptional occurrence.

Methods: The article has been written on the basis of the author's experience while working in the prison service as well as document analysis.

Results: The Prison Service is one of those state dispositional services which enable its adequate protection in the face of various threats. In this case, it is about isolating offenders because they pose a real threat to public order and security. The role of the services is to prepare for emergencies to minimise the risk of injuries, deaths and damage to property that disrupt society and individual administrative systems. It is a significant challenge, as emergency events are impossible to predict, and only their probability can be estimated and preventive and mitigating actions established.

Conclusions: The task of each professionally organised formation is to prepare for various circumstances, including crises. Events that require evacuation in the Prison Service are relatively rare. Evacuation under the conditions of the Prison Service is, therefore, usually a derivative of local threats: fires, natural disasters, and others, which require leaving the penitentiary institution. It should be emphasised that as prisoners serve their sentences of acute deprivation of liberty, penitentiary units must ensure their safety. This means acting in ordinary, everyday activities and responding to complex and unusual situations, including those requiring evacuation.

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Introduction

The Prison Service is a critical entity in the state system. It ensures the effective, humane, and fully legal execution of imprisonment. Each individual and institutional subject, functioning within a turbulent environment, is potentially exposed to several threats, which may be severe in consequences. It also applies to the Prison Service, which manages the risk of exceptional occurrences as a part of its activities. These may originate directly from the institution's profile and may be related to risks posed by inmates. However, many such events originate from the environment. Fire and natural disasters require evacuation. This article aims to present the specificity of evacuation in the Prison Service practice resulting from an exceptional occurrence. The implementation of tools in the form of evacuation procedures will significantly affect the safety of people deprived of their liberty.

1. Evacuation and its reasons

Etymologically, the word evacuation comes from the Latin *evacuatio*, a neologism combining two words: *ex* and *vaccum*. The former means 'from', while the latter translates as 'void'. The word's origin is sometimes indicated as French, from whence it may have come into Polish (Bańkowski, 2000). Evacuation involves people leaving an area because of potential danger. It may take various forms, but it must be assumed that it involves the loss of human life or health (Masłowska-Szczerba, 2015). Evacuation is an action that aims to ensure the safety of people who, due to the condition of their surroundings, must leave them and go to a location where there is no danger (Lindel, 2013).

The evacuation process consists of several features. Firstly, it is a movement, a movement of people between points. The coercive nature of this movement is critical. A person is obliged - whether by a representative of the authorities or his or her survival instincts - not to remain in the current location. The second important element is danger, as the source of the need to evacuate. For an evacuation to occur, there must be a typically sudden change of condition in the environment.

Additionally, there is a social process that affects the evacuation practice. Research shows the importance of psychological and sociological variables in an evacuation (Hofinger, Zinke, & Kunzer, 2014). There are several types of evacuation, as shown in Figure 1 (Otwiński W., 2015).

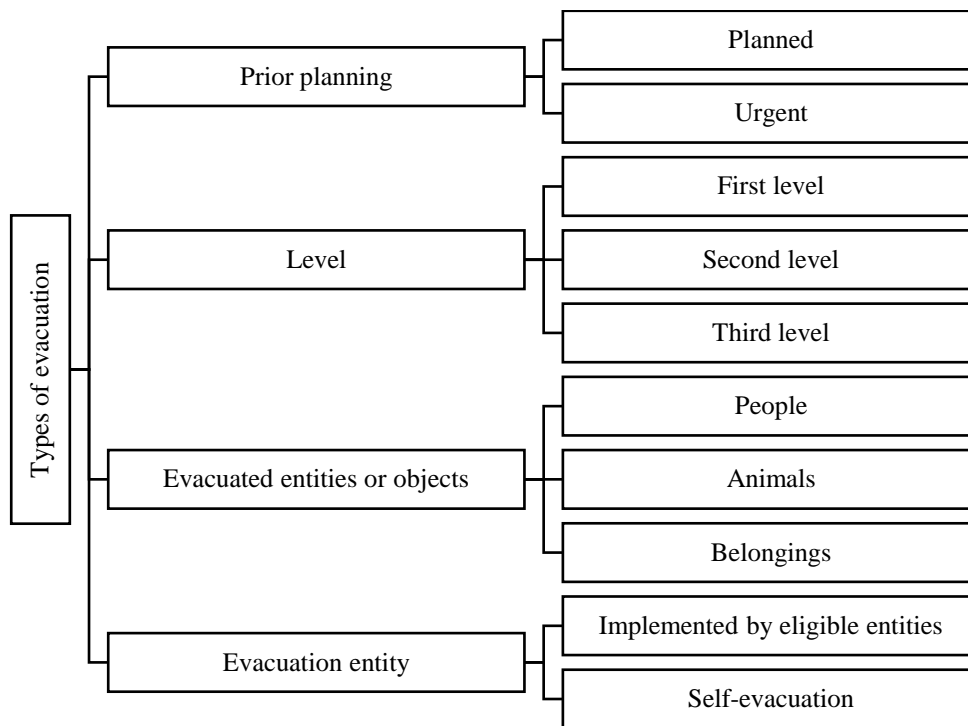


Fig. 1. Classifications of evacuations
 Source: Otwinowski, 2015, p. 116-122

A distinction can be made between planned and urgent evacuation based on prior planning. The second criterion is the degree involved in the evacuation, and three different levels are distinguished (described in the next paragraph). The question of the subject or entity being evacuated is important, as evacuation cannot be reduced to people alone and is also a process that involves animals and belongings. We can name a procedure carried out by authorised entities (rescue services, military, and more) and self-evacuation concerning the entity conducting the evacuation (Otwinowski W., 2015). In the case of a planned evacuation, the situation is also unexpected. A crisis arises; however, the state of the environment allows to activate the previously prepared procedures, and it is possible to carry out actions according to the plan (Wiłun, 2015). On the other hand, an urgent evacuation is undertaken occasionally based on the knowledge and instinct of those in danger. There is no plan, but the objective is clear: guaranteeing one's safety without losing health or life (Abdelgawad & Abdulhai, 2009).

Civil Defence materials point out that there are three evacuation levels in the practice of the Polish state - first, second and third. For each level, evacuation has the same meaning. Mainly, it is described as the movement of people and their belongings from areas of risk to areas considered safe. A level one evacuation involves the rapid movement of the population from an area where there is an immediate, unforeseen threat to life or health. A second level evacuation assumes that there is not a point risk but a considerable risk area resulting from, e.g., damage and industrial accidents. Evacuation of the third degree has a different dimension. The movement relates to an increased readiness to defend the country, connected to a crisis or warfare (Leśniakiewicz & others, 2008).

One of the critical issues is the time available for safe evacuation. The time is not fixed and depends on air temperature, visibility, oxygen content, etc. (Chołuj, 2012). It consists of

two main elements. The first is the required evacuation time, and the second is the safety margin if unforeseen circumstances arise. The time for the risk to be detected and the alarm to be raised is crucial. It is followed by the evacuation itself, divided into the first reaction, the start of evacuation, and the transition time (Barański & Maciak, 2017).

The primary reason for carrying out an evacuation is the occurrence of a threat. Then other factors emerge leading to a significant risk increase in loss of life or health for people. At-risk are also other cherished values. The danger can be caused by random and non-random, anthropogenic, and natural factors (Ficoń, 2007). The fundamental reasons for threat-related evacuation are addressed in Figure 2 (Głogowska, Zdrojewska, & Wagner, 2016).

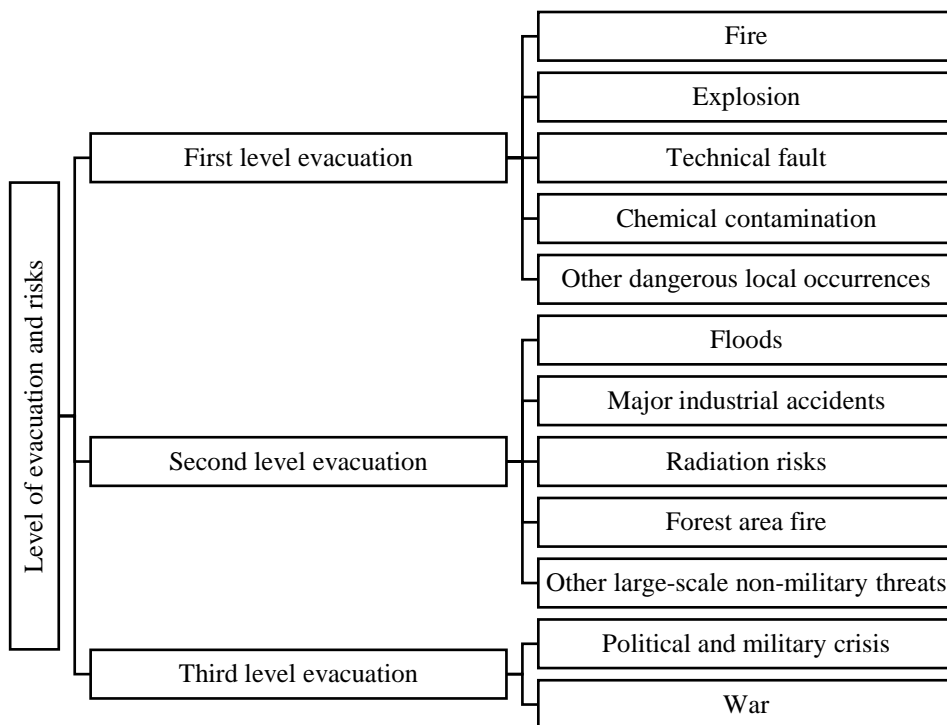


Fig. 2. Reasons for evacuation at a given level
Source: Głogowska *et al.*, 2016, p. 68

Local threats, which pose a severe risk to a relatively small number of people, cause first-level evacuation. These include fire, explosion, technical failure, chemical contamination, and other dangerous local incidents. Second level evacuation covers incidents that are large in scale but not related to military issues. These include floods, major industrial accidents, radiation hazards and forest fires. Risks can be regional, but (e.g., in a nuclear accident) can be national or even more expansive. Finally, third level evacuation concerns military events such as the war between states, e.g., internal military clashes or terrorist acts (Głogowska, Zdrojewska, & Wagner, *Ewakuacja i jej aspekty w ujęciu teoretycznym*, 2016). Evacuation must be tailored to the type of threat. It is also firmly embedded in the organisational context of the entity responsible for it.

2. Exceptional occurrences in the Prison Service

The Prison Service is one of those state dispositional services which enable its adequate protection in the face of various threats. In this case, it is about isolating offenders because they pose a real threat to public order and security. According to Article 1 of the Act regulating the functioning of this entity: "The Prison Service is a uniformed and armed apolitical formation subordinate to the Minister of Justice, with its organisational structure"(Act of 9 April 2010 on the Prison Service, 2010).The prison system is spread between the PS (Prison Service) Central Board and penitentiary units (Przesławski, 2016). The PS Central Board is subordinated to the district inspectorates that run the remand prisons, penitentiaries, and outer wards (The Prison Service website).

The role of the services is to prepare for emergencies to minimise the risk of injuries, deaths and damage to property that disrupt society and individual administrative systems (Rostami-Tabor & Ziel, 2020). It is a significant challenge, as emergency events are impossible to predict, and only their probability can be estimated and preventive and mitigating actions established. According to the dictionary definition, the term *exceptional*, as used in this analysis, means as much as "caused by special circumstances or not foreseen in the programme, plan" (Polish Language Dictionary). Figure 3 presents the main exceptional occurrences known from Prison Service practice (The Prison Service website).

Escapes or arbitrary departures of detainees	Hostage-taking	Death of a prisoner or serious physical injury
Assault on an organisational unit or convoy of the Prison Service	Local risk	Violation of order
Assault on an officer on duty	Rape of a detainee	Abuse of a detainee
Sickness of detainees	Disclosure of illicit object	Fight or beating
Death of a detainee	Attempted suicide or suicide of a detainee	Escape or attempted escape

Fig.3. Extraordinary events in the practice of Prison Service

Source: <https://sw.gov.pl/dzial/Statystyka>

As a matter of principle, the events that prison units deal with may be divided into recurring events and various types of states, extraordinary situations, which may have the

features of a crisis. They require a different approach to unusual activities, particularly on the officer's part, that contributes to regaining control over the situation (Brzeziński, 2019). Exceptional occurrences refer to local threats, including fires, a hostage-taking situation, or another form of a breach of the order. Not all such events require evacuation, but some undoubtedly make it necessary to leave the prison premises. Emergency threats are also analysed in the Order of the Director General of Prison Service, as can be observed in Table 1 (Order of the Director General of Prison Service, 2010).

Table 1. Extraordinary events in the classification of Order No. 42/2010 of the Director General of Prison Service

Category	Exceptional occurrences
Category A	Dangerous disturbance of security, mutiny, dangerous disorder, assault on an officer or employee in the course of performing official activities, assault on an organisational unit or convoy, unauthorised disclosure of classified information or loss of a document containing such information, conducting search activities on the territory of an organisational unit of the PS, suicide of an inmate, suicide of an officer or employee, death of an inmate or another person, loss of a document or a carrier of information, loss of a firearm, finding a firearm, escape of a person deprived of liberty, taking a hostage
Category B	A fight or battery, illness of an officer, employee or inmate, external threat, discovery of a dangerous or prohibited object, assault on an off-duty officer, arbitrary departure of a person deprived of liberty, attempted suicide, rape of an inmate, death of an inmate other than by suicide, abuse of an inmate, other events deemed extraordinary by the director

Source: Order No. 42/2010 of the Director General of Prison Service (2010, August 13) Defining the list of exceptional occurrences, the manner of proceeding in case of their occurrence and the mode of operation of command posts. <https://edu.cossw.pl/file/redir.php?id=5789>

Examining the period 2015-2019, it can be concluded that between 2.2 and 2.9 thousand extraordinary incidents occur annually in Prison Service. The highest number of them was recorded in 2017, and it was 2984 incidents, while the lowest number was in 2018, when 2268 incidents were recorded. By far, the most common incidents involved the disclosure of a prohibited item. Bearing in mind that this is not just about dangerous items, but also, for example, mobile phones. Runaways and arbitrary departures are relatively common - with 161 in 2019 (and 255 the year before). These take forms of outside employment escapes (155 cases in 2019) and escapes from plant premises or convoys, which are sporadic (a total of 6 such incidents in 2019). Assaults on an officer on duty were also relatively numerous (139), as well as fights or beatings (132). In addition, there were 173 suicide attempts and 23 successful suicides in 2019. There were 135 deaths in penitentiary units, virtually all caused by natural causes. In some of the situations mentioned, evacuation measures had to be carried out to protect both officers and inmates under the care of the Prison Service.

3. Prison evacuation procedure

The occurrence of risk requires appropriate steps commensurate with the problem's scale. The priority is always to protect people, then animals and then property. Human life has absolute priority in any emergency instruction, as it is the highest value (Abdelgawad & Abdulhai, 2009). Evacuation should be carried out in a planned manner, which is not always possible but produces the best results. Institutions should have appropriate procedures in place and practice potential options. If an actual threat were to occur, this would translate into more responsive action (Lindel, 2013). The Prison Service is an entity prepared to perform practical evacuation actions.

An evacuation plan consists of several components that are not solely related to leaving a prison or detention centre. This is a result of the very nature of crisis management, where the starting point is not to react but to plan and prepare for a threat. The response to a problem can be efficient precisely because the plan is adequate and translated into concrete preparations by the units to respond (Ziarko & Walas-Trębacz, 2010). The evacuation procedure is complex and consists of several elements of greater or lesser importance. The starting point is the identification of facilities and areas to be evacuated. In the case of PS units, this can be a complex list, as they are multi-element entities with different security zones. Both "free" persons (e.g., administrative staff), as well as persons deprived of liberty, are subject to evacuation. Therefore, the criteria for selecting people for evacuation will be more complex than in other entities. However, the self-evacuation scale will be limited due to the imprisonment of some people and, for example, the rules for handling weapons and securing means of direct coercion (Leśniakiewicz & others, 2008). Figure 4 shows an example of an evacuation process carried out in the Prison Service.

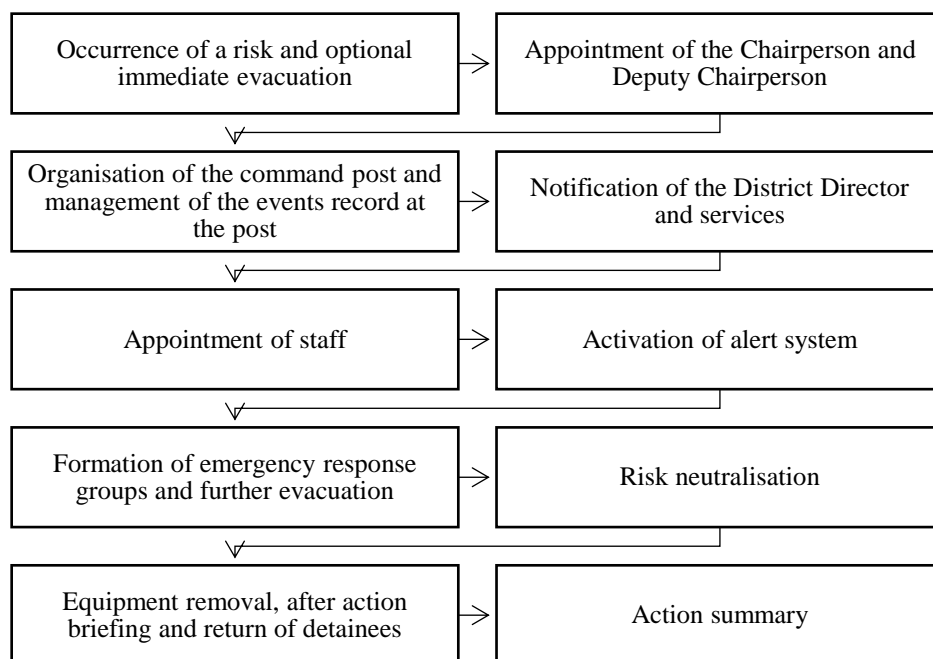


Fig. 4. Evacuation in the scheme of activities responding to a threat on the example of the Prison Service unit

Source: from the information from the Detention Centre in Jelenia Góra. Own studies

The above diagram is based on exercises conducted in the Detention Centre in Jelenia Góra. The starting point was the occurrence of a threat. If the fire crisis were to occur, an immediate evacuation would take place. However, it is different when we are talking about the threat of flooding. In this case, evacuation will only take place after the headquarters have been formed and will be carried out in a planned manner at the appropriate time. At the same time, it seems necessary to state that the evaluation is only an element of the actions undertaken by the Prison Service, which aim to perform an adequate response to the crisis. Figure 5 presents elements related to the evacuation of the Prison Service units.

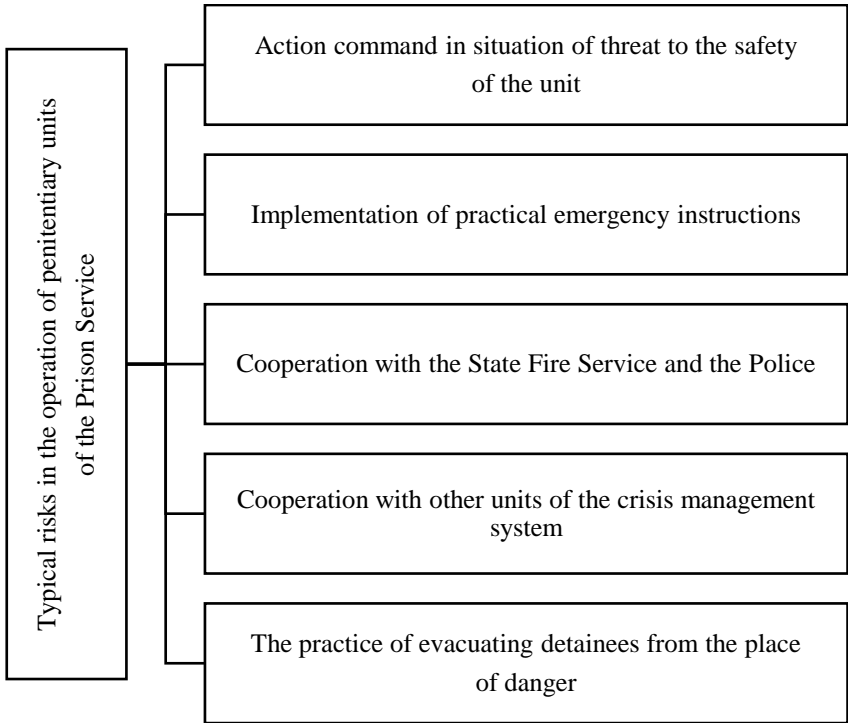


Fig. 5. Elements related to evacuation of Prison Service units
 Source: Detention Centre in Jelenia Góra, own studies

The first critical component is the command of action in situations where the safety of individuals is threatened. This is a demanding task, as it takes place under time pressure and in conditions of human threat factors, resulting from the specificity of the risk. The action commander should carry out practical alarm instructions and evacuate inmates from places of danger to areas where they are safe and still protected by the Prison Service. It includes cooperation with other units. A typical action requires cooperation with the State Fire Service and the Police, but cooperation often involves other services belonging to the crisis management system of the considered level. Each action is different, and it is necessary to approach it as an individual challenge, which is very likely to follow an unforeseen pattern that will increase the risk. Chart 1 reveals the scale of necessary evacuations that are carried out in the practice of the Prison Service.

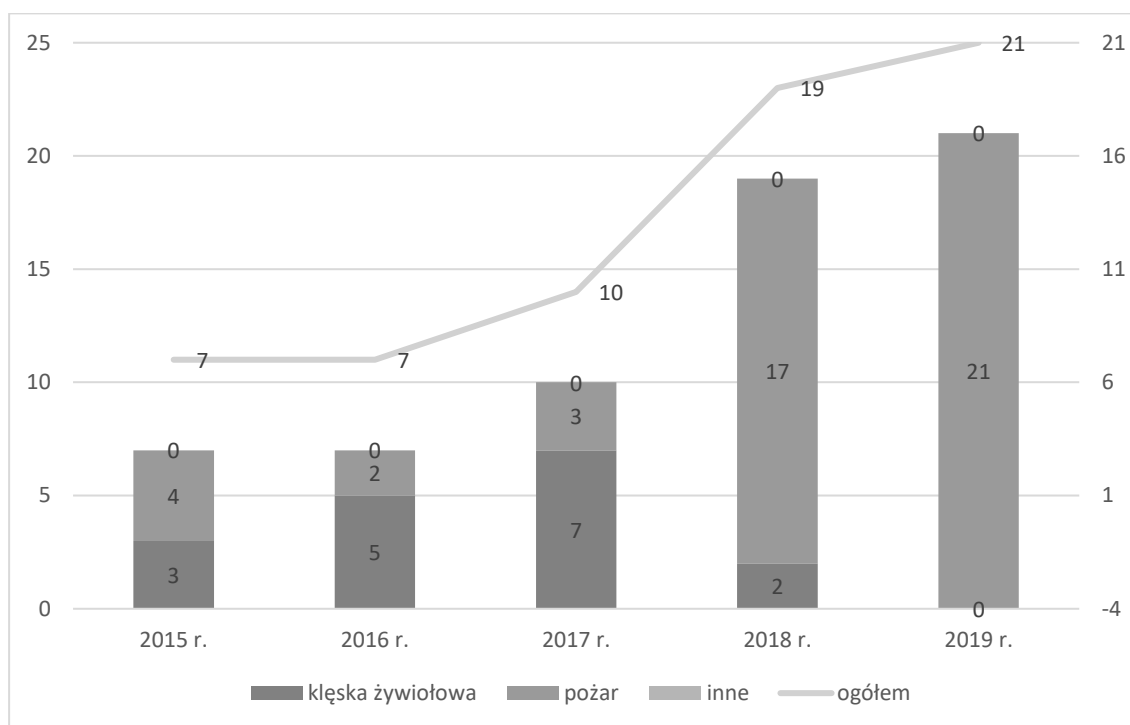


Fig. 6. Number of local threats in the Prison Service in 2015-2019 as circumstances giving rise to evacuation measures from penitentiary units

Source: <https://sw.gov.pl/dzial/Statystyka>

When considering the issue of evacuation, localised risks are of crucial importance, as they are usually the prerequisite for carrying out evacuation operations. These, as noted earlier, are divided into fires, natural disasters, and other risks. There have been various such incidents over the period under review, ranging from 7 in 2015-2016 to 21 in 2019. Between 2015 and 2017, there were both natural disasters and fires, while in 2018-2019, fires dominated or occurred exclusively (at the same time, there were no other local threats in the whole period considered here). In 2019, there were as many as 21 fires, while the year before, there were 17 (The Prison Service website, n.d.). In previous years, these were isolated incidents, indicating that fire classification has probably changed. A fire generally requires evacuation action, as does a natural disaster, and is a challenge for the Prison Service.

Conclusion

The article aimed to present the evacuation specificity because of an exceptional occurrence in the functioning practice of the Prison Service. The task of each professionally organised formation is to prepare for various circumstances, including crises. Events that require evacuation in the Prison Service are relatively rare (compared to escapes, assaults on an officer, or attempted suicides). However, this does not mean they are less important; on the contrary, they can lead to an extensive range of damage. For instance, a fire or a flood may render not only the prison's functioning impossible but may even lead to a situation in which the health and lives of officers and inmates are endangered. Evacuation under the conditions of the Prison Service is, therefore, usually a derivative of local threats: fires, natural disasters, and others, which require leaving the penitentiary institution. It should be emphasised that as

prisoners serve their sentences of acute deprivation of liberty, penitentiary units must ensure their safety. This means acting in ordinary, everyday activities and responding to complex and unusual situations, including those requiring evacuation.

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