

Connecticut

Fight erupts on death row in Somers prison

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SOMERS — State police and Correction Department officials are investigating a fight between two death row inmates Wednesday afternoon, a day after another inmate was killed in a fight at a Suffield prison.

State police spokesman Lt. J. Paul Vance would only say today that state police are investigating an assault that occurred between two inmates on Wednesday.

Sources have identified the death row inmates involved in the fight as Russell Peeler and Daniel Webb, both of whom are housed at Northern Correctional Institution, the state's maximum-security facility.

A source said Webb stabbed Peeler in the head with a pen.

Webb, 45, is on death row for the 1989 kidnapping and murder in Hartford of Diane Gellenbeck, 37, a Connecticut National Bank vice president.

Peeler, 36, is on death row for ordering his younger brother to kill Karen Clarke and her son, Leroy "B.J." Brown Jr., in their Bridgeport home in 1999.

The Associated Press reported that one of the death row inmates was being treated for injuries sustained in the fight, which occurred about 1:45 p.m. at Northern Correctional Institution. No staff members were hurt.

State police also are continuing to investigate a fight at MacDougall-Walker Correctional Institution in Suffield Tuesday where an inmate killed fellow inmate Kevin Cales, 34, of New Britain.

It remains unclear when charges will be brought against Cales' attacker, who police have yet to identify.

Cales, who had recently started a 79-year sentence on manslaughter charges, was pronounced dead Tuesday night at St Francis Hospital and Medical Center in Hartford.

He was found responsible for a car crash in 2006 that killed his ex-girlfriend and her four passengers.

It's unclear how the two death row inmates came into contact with each other. Prison protocol calls for the men to be separated, but that may not necessarily be the case, says Jon T. Pepe, president of state prison employees' union.

Since 1995 death row inmates have been treated as Level 4 prisoners in a Level 5 facility, he said.

"I'm not sure how much restriction is put on their contact, but they're just like regular inmates — their cells are right next to each other," he said. "You would assume they're the worst of the worst, but they're not. They have TVs in their cells. They have it better than the regular inmates."

Pepe said the recent attacks do not bode well for the Correction Department, which he says is dangerously overcrowded.

"The concern is the raising of violence as I predicted," he said. "It has been increasing, and it will continue to increase."