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Prisons Bureau eyes policy in wake of inmate escape

By Theresa Churchill
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A four-month delay in notifying local authorities of the escape of a federal penitentiary inmate as he was enroute from a federal prison hospital to a St. Louis halfway house may produce a change in policy for the federal Bureau of Prisons.

The prisoner was John Larry Ray, brother of James Earl Ray, the convicted assassin of Dr. Martin Luther King.

Ray disappeared while enroute from a Springfield, Mo., prison hospital to the Dismas Halfway House in St. Louis. Earlier reports that Ray was being transferred from the federal penitentiary at Marion to either the prison hospital or the halfway house were incorrect, according to the Bureau of Prisons spokesman.

"We are re-evaluating our policy in light of a situation like this," said James Meko, executive assistant to the director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. "We are considering notifying specific local authorities for escapes."

Ray was serving an 18-year sentence for a Missouri armed robbery when he was paroled to the St. Louis halfway house and ordered to report there Feb. 4.

Ray was at the Medical Center for Federal Prisoners at Springfield, Mo., at the time, although he had served a portion of his sentence at the Marion prison, Meko said.

Following the man's disappearance, the U.S. Bureau of Prisons notified U.S. marshalls in eastern Missouri and central and Southern Illinois, Meko said.

Those authorities were not directly notified, Meko said, because it is not in the bureau's policy.

John Larry Ray

* At large