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[The Frog Men of Cedar Creek Corrections Center](#)

Thursday, July 30th, 2009

Prison labor has come a long way from the old road work chain gangs. Although inmates are still making license plates and doing road repair, they've also been put to work doing telemarketing and handling airline reservations.

In some states prisoners are doing [asbestos abatement](#), under close supervision, of course. Prisoner abatement teams work for less than private, professional asbestos abatement firms, which generates accusations that the prison programs undercut private enterprise. On the other hand, the prisons argue, the revenue helps pay for the prisons, and the prisoners learn real work skills.

And, of course, there is a growing need for asbestos abatement as older, asbestos-insulated buildings need to be demolished or repaired. Breathing asbestos fibers can cause [mesothelioma](#), a deadly lung cancer, and [asbestosis](#), a debilitating disease that interferes with breathing.

But a prison in Oregon has found other, useful work for its inmates that does not clash with free enterprise: frog fattening.

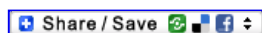
[Jennifer Sullivan writes for the Seattle Times](#) that inmates at Oregon's Cedar Creek Corrections Center are helping to save the endangered Oregon spotted frog (*rana pretiosa*) by raising frogs from eggs to tadpoles to adults inside the prison. Once the frogs are big enough to avoid being a snack for natural predators, they will be released into the wild.

Sullivan interviewed two inmates, Harry Greer (serving time for robbery) and Albert Delp (felony drunken driving) who are raising frogs together in a tank near their cell. They feed the frogs, change their water, and keep notes for researchers. The inmates' frog-raising skills are prodigious; their frogs are fatter and have better survival rates than the frogs of other program participants, including zoos.

Marc P. Hayes of the state Department of Fish and Wildlife credit the time the inmates can give to the project. "They have the time to address care on a level that is not possible with those other institutions," Hayes said. "They baby those things literally night and day. They can look at them every two hours and feed them at a higher rate. They have the time to give them a much closer level of care."

Greer and Delp earn 85 cents an hour for frog fattening, which is much less than the same prison's asbestos abatement work, which pays \$5 an hour. But the inmates are happy with what they're doing. "This is not that labor-intensive and it's interesting," Delp said. The program managers plan to expand the prison's frog program next year.

Barbara O'Brien



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