

Center says new security gates still unused

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The Staten Island Developmental Center had installed an electronic security system several days before the disappearance Tuesday of a center employee, but the system was not working Tuesday, and remains inoperable, center officials revealed yesterday.

Elin Howe, director of the Willowbrook center, said the system was ordered "some time ago" and was installed "as soon as we got it," but it still does not work because of difficulties encountered during the installation.

The system, installed at the entrances and exits to the 382-acre campus, consists of a metal arm similar to toll gates at the entrances to bridges and tunnels. The arm is attached to a slot apparatus.

Center employees can insert their identification cards into the slot apparatus, which would "validate" the card and raise the arm to allow cars to enter and exit the grounds.

Miss Howe said state officials are taking other measures to beef up security at the facility, as the search for 46-year-old Ethel Atwell of Newark, a mental hygiene therapist at the center, enters its fourth day today.

Miss Howe said the institution's guards are being paid overtime to work 12-hour shifts. In addition, she said the center hired a dozen new guards, bringing the security complement to 39. The increased security plans, she added, "had been in progress for a number of weeks."

Mrs. Atwell's disappearance Tuesday followed the disappearance in July of

another center employee, Shin (Emma) Lee. Mrs. Lee's body was found by relatives buried in a shallow grave on the grounds of the 2,200-bed state institution for the retarded. No arrests have been made in the Lee murder case.

Since Mrs. Lee's death, state workers have complained of poor lighting and lack of security at the center. "Employees are understandably very anxious," Miss Howe said, adding she would consider any employee suggestions on how to improve security.

Felton King, president of the 3,500-member Civil Service Employees Association chapter at the center, however, said the administration has not responded adequately to repeated requests for improved lighting and security. He said the chapter is organizing a demonstration at Gov. Carey's midtown Manhat-

tan office to demand more security.

In another development, Island Police Chief Patrick Murphy asked the National Guard yesterday to enter the search for Mrs. Atwell. The National Guard has not yet responded to the request.

City police temporarily suspended their search yesterday, but indicated they would keep open the temporary police headquarters set up in Building 47 to coordinate information from the hundreds of volunteer workers still searching the area.

The search thus far has turned up no physical evidence other than Mrs. Atwell's purse and belongings found beside her car Tuesday morning, police said. Articles of women's clothing, including a pair of underpants found by

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searchers Wednesday, did not belong to Mrs. Atwell, police said yesterday.

Police Inspector Vincent Brogan said detectives would continue to interview center employees. "We've collected reports from other women who had been followed by men they didn't recognize," he said, "but so far, there is very little we can connect with Mrs. Atwell's disappearance." Police now believe Mrs. Atwell may have been abducted from the grounds, Brogan indicated.

But he said helicopter searches of the grounds would continue, and police also plan to drain Willowbrook Pond if necessary. "We will leave no stone unturned," Brogan said.

City police, he said, are working with New York State Police and Newark police, as well as the Auxiliary Police Force.

Mrs. Atwell, who was described as 5 feet 5 inches tall, weighing 156 pounds, and wearing a long blue coat and black shoes, was last seen by her mother when she left her home in Newark at 5:30 a.m. Tuesday.

She had arrived at work and parked her car in the parking lot behind Building 47, when fellow employees say they heard screams and yelling. When they ran outside, they discovered Mrs. Atwell's belongings beside her car.

Friends and persons connected with the case described Mrs. Atwell as a well-liked, "wonderful woman."

Police ask that anyone with information concerning Mrs. Atwell's disappearance call 727-4200, or a special 24-hour number, 979-4633. All information will be kept confidential, police said.