

Army suicides increase for fifth year

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The rate of Army suicides has exceeded the 2008 total with 147 reported through November of this year, making 2009 the fifth consecutive year the service's suicide rate has increased.

In November, the Army says 12 potential suicides were reported among the active-duty personnel, all of which are still under investigation. In addition, two potential suicides were reported among reserve-component soldiers not serving on active duty.

For October, the Army says three of the 16 active-duty suicides reported have been confirmed.

For 2009, 45 reports of possible active-duty suicides remain unconfirmed, along with 30 of the 71 reported suicides in the reserve components.

According to the Army, more than one-third of the service's suicides in 2009 occurred with soldiers who have never deployed.

The Army is working to combat its rising suicide rate through the recently launched Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program, the Suicide Prevention Task Force and its five-year research partnership with the National Institute of Mental Health.

Army Gen. Peter W. Chiarelli, Army vice chief of staff, is expected to meet this month with National Institute of Mental Health officials to receive a report and briefing on the institute's initial findings. The institute is charged with studying every Army suicide to better understand the rising pattern to complement the service's internal research, the general explained in last month's discussion.

"We conduct an exhaustive review of every suicide within the Army," said Army Brig. Gen. Colleen McGuire, director of the Army's Suicide Prevention Task Force. "What we have learned is that there is no single or simple answer to preventing suicide. This tells us that we must continue to take a holistic approach to identifying and helping soldiers and families with issues such as behavioral health problems, substance abuse, and relationship failures."

The Army is testing pilot programs in virtual behavioral health counseling, enhanced behavioral counseling before and after deployment, and expanded privacy protections for soldiers seeking substance-abuse counseling. These programs are part of the Army's overall campaign to increase health promotion, risk reduction and suicide prevention.

Officials are studying the results to determine the programs' future roles in the Army's prevention efforts, the statement said.

The 147 suicides reported this year are the highest number since the Army began recording such data in 1980.

(Compiled by report from Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael J. Carden for the American Forces Press Service)