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BUPERSINST 1640.26A
BUPERS-00D
17 May 2022

BUPERS INSTRUCTION 1640.26A

From: Chief of Naval Personnel

Subj: SUICIDE WATCH COMPANION PROGRAM FOR MILITARY CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Ref: (a) BUPERSINST 1640.18L
(b) SECNAV M-1640.1

1. **Purpose.** To provide policy and procedures for the implementation of the Suicide Watch Companion (SWC) Program within the Navy Corrections Program.

2. **Cancellation.** BUPERSINST 1640.26.

3. **Scope and Applicability.** This policy applies to Navy level II and III military correctional facilities (MCF) per reference (a).

4. **Policy**

a. Suicide risk (SR) status prisoners are to be housed in the special quarters (SQ) housing unit. The SWC program authorizes the use of a prisoner observer to assist staff in meeting the continuous observation requirement. Under the SWC program, screened and trained post-trial prisoner observers may be used to provide continuous observation of an SR status prisoner. The SWC prisoner observer will be indirectly supervised by staff members within SQ, via periodic video observation, of the SR prisoner and observer prisoner.

(1) Only the MCF commanding officer (CO) may authorize the use of SWCs to participate in the SWC program. Where the SWC program is utilized, an SWC program coordinator will be assigned (in writing) by the MCF CO. The SWC program coordinator will be responsible for the selection, training, assignment, and removal of individual SWCs. The program coordinator must be a fully credentialed and privileged doctoral-level psychologist or social worker.

(2) Authorization for use of an SWC is made by the MCF CO on a case-by-case basis.

(3) The decision to use an SWC will be predicated on the fact that it only takes 3 to 4 minutes for a suicide to occur.

(4) SWCs will perform this duty in addition to their normal work assignment. However, SWCs who work a shift between 1700 and 0600 will have the option of working their regularly scheduled job the following day or taking the day off.

5. Background. A comprehensive suicide prevention program can reduce the risk of suicide in an MCF. While reference (b) provides general policy on prisoner SR management, it also allows for the use of an SWC Program when authorized by Bureau of Naval Personnel (BUPERS) Corrections and Programs Office (BUPERS-00D). This instruction provides the MCF CO, at their discretion, the authorization to utilize post-trial prisoners as SWCs to assist correctional staff in observing suicidal prisoners.

6. Definitions

a. SR Status - A category to manage potentially suicidal prisoners, requiring implementation of a continuous observation watch. SR status is utilized when staff have past or present evidence that a prisoner has recently had or currently has thoughts or actions of self-inflicted behavior with intent to die as a result of the behavior. Usual situations include:

(1) New arrival prisoners who have been deemed fit for confinement by medical authorities, but are experiencing suicidal thoughts or threatening suicide at the time of intake. These individuals are also deemed SR status if they have experienced suicidal thoughts or made an attempt within the last 3 months, or

(2) Prisoners who have completed indoctrination and are currently experiencing suicidal thoughts or suicide attempts and require continuous observation.

b. SWC - Specially screened, trained, and selected prisoners who may provide one-on-one, continuous observation of SR status prisoners.

c. Continuous Observation (also known as “eyes-on” observation) - Direct physical presence or direct viewing by camera as an individual’s primary duty (no other duties can be performed during this level of observation). Continuous observation employed by an SWC or staff member exceeds the requirement of reference (b) to document 5-minute physical checks.

d. Periodic Observation - Observation occurring occasionally and as required.

7. Procedures

a. Selection of SWCs. Because of the sensitive nature of such assignments, the selection of SWCs requires considerable care. To provide round-the-clock observation of potentially suicidal prisoners, a sufficient number of observers should be trained and alternate candidates should be available. SWC selection will be based on a good conduct record and the ability to perform tasks described below:

(1) Referred by the unit team as mature, reliable, emotionally stable, and have credibility with both staff and prisoners;

(2) Able to protect the suicidal prisoner's privacy from other prisoners while being accepted in the role by staff;

- (3) Able to perform their duties with minimal need for direct supervision;
- (4) Have a minimum of 6 months remaining in confinement for purposes of training and to minimize turnover;
- (5) Have not been found guilty of a category V offense at a disciplinary and adjustment board within the last 6 months (guilty findings of other offenses may be a disqualifying factor, but should be considered on a case-by-case basis);
- (6) Not be in a program or treatment refusal status; or
- (7) Not be at the current MCF for less than 6 months as an adjudged prisoner.

b. SWC Training. There must be a written training plan approved by the SWC program coordinator. Each SWC program participant will receive at least 4 hours of initial training, to include 2 hours of on-the-job training before being assigned to an SWC shift. Each SWC must also receive quarterly refresher training. Each training session will review policy requirements and instruct program participants on their duties and responsibilities during a suicide watch, including:

- (1) The location of suicide watch areas;
- (2) Summoning staff during all shifts;
- (3) Recognizing behavioral signs of stress or agitation;
- (4) Recording observations in the suicide watch log; and
- (5) Appropriate and inappropriate topics that can and cannot be discussed with individuals in an SR status.

c. SWC Agreement. An agreement titled “Suicide Watch Companion Program Prisoner Observer Position Description, Standards, and Orientation Agreement of Understanding and Expectation” will be developed as outlined in subparagraph 7i, below. The SWC program coordinator or designee must review this agreement with each SWC program participant at the onset of initial training. A completed and signed agreement will be signed by the clinical services department head and the SWC program participant acknowledging that the SWC observer has read and understood the conditions in the agreement.

d. SWC Oversight and Supervision

(1) SWCs will meet at least quarterly with the program coordinator or designee to review procedures, discuss issues, and supplement training. At any given time, the program coordinator or designee may debrief SWCs, individually or in groups, to discuss their experiences and identify potential program changes. Otherwise, these issues will be discussed and addressed at quarterly meetings.

(2) SWCs must not be assigned to a suicide watch without adequate staff supervision (or the ability to obtain immediate staff assistance). SWCs will perform duties only when the SR prisoner is in a camera cell. When an SWC alerts staff to an emergency situation, staff will immediately respond to the cell and take necessary action.

(3) Although SWCs are selected on the basis of their emotional stability, maturity, and responsibility, the following level of staff supervision must be provided while a SWC performs a suicide watch:

(a) Indirect supervision by staff members within SQ via periodic video observation of the prisoner and observer.

(b) Supervision will consist of staff checks at least every 15 minutes. Staff will initial the chronological log upon conducting checks and annotate the prisoner's DD 509 Inspection Record of Prisoner in Segregation.

e. SWC Shifts. SWCs ordinarily will work a 4-hour shift. Except under unusual circumstances, SWCs will not work longer than one 4-hour shift in any 24-hour period.

f. SWC Records. The program coordinator must maintain a file that contains:

(1) An SWC agreement signed by each SWC program participant (an unsigned agreement is available to supervisory correctional staff during non-regular working hours);

(2) Documentation of attendance and topics discussed at training meetings;

(3) A list of prisoners available to serve as SWCs (available to supervisory correctional staff during non-regular working hours); and

(4) Documentation of the removal of an SWC program participant.

g. SWC Removal. At the discretion of the program coordinator or designee, an SWC may be removed from the SWC program. Removal of an SWC will be documented in the SWC records kept by the program coordinator and the program coordinator will update the file available for correctional staff.

h. Earned Time (ET) Abatement. SWC program participants are eligible for ET under the support activities category of abatement per reference (b). SWCs will receive 1 day of ET per month, provided at least one shift was worked during the month. Credit will be given if an SWC was not required to work an entire shift (e.g., if only needed 3 hours of a 4-hour shift, credit for an entire shift would be granted). Regardless of how many shifts were worked by an SWC during a month, 1 day of ET is the maximum amount of credit that will be awarded.

i. SWC Program Acknowledgement. SWC program participants will be required to review and sign an SWC agreement which will contain the following information:

(1) Introduction. The introduction will cover that the position of an SWC program participant assigned to the SWC program entails important responsibilities and duties, which include observing prisoners placed in an SR status, and that all SWCs will receive specific training for such responsibilities.

(2) Major Duties and Responsibilities

(a) The most important duty assigned to the SWC program concerns the observation of prisoners placed in an SR status. SWCs who are fatigued, ill, or emotionally distressed should inform the appropriate staff and be excused from their watch until their condition improves.

(b) SWCs will position themselves directly outside of the SR prisoner's cell with a clear line of vision to all of the prisoner's actions through the observation window/opened food tray slot. Prisoners in an SR status must be under constant observation by either an SWC prisoner observer or a staff member. Reading, listening to radios or compact disks, and use of headphones or ear buds are not permitted when conducting a suicide watch. Staff, rather than SWCs, must observe showers and use of toilets.

(c) SWCs will be responsible for continuous observation of the behaviors of SR prisoners, noting any changes and making (at a minimum) regular 15-minute entries on an SWC observation log. This is separate from the responsibility of staff to make 15-minute checks on the prisoner and recording them on a DD 509. The SWC observation log (maintained by the SWC) will be transferred at the end of each watch to the relieving SWC or to staff, if watch has been secured, for placement into the SWC program binder (maintained by the program coordinator). Significant changes in SR behavior will be closely monitored and immediately reported to the on-duty quarters supervisor to be relayed to the program coordinator as soon as possible. SWCs will log and pass on all pertinent information to staff and SWC relief. SWCs will respect confidentiality and must not disclose any information regarding their watch or shift to persons not involved in the program.

(d) SWCs must follow all rules and policies outlined during training and in the position description. SWCs must not have physical contact with, or pass items to, SR prisoners. When SR prisoners require food, clothing, or other items, it will be reported to staff.

(e) Working as an SWC can be very difficult. Prisoners suffering from mental illness can be loud, demanding, and insulting. SWCs are expected to speak to clinical services staff when confronted with these types of difficult behaviors. SWCs must not taunt, make fun of, or become involved in verbal arguments with SR prisoners. If an SR prisoner reacts negatively toward an SWC, the SWC will notify the on-duty quarters supervisor and the command duty officer (CDO) immediately. The CDO must excuse the SWC from watch and assign staff observers for the remainder of the watch. SWCs will log such incidents after reporting them to the quarter's supervisor.

j. Safety and Personal Appearance

(1) SWCs will report to the quarter's supervisor and log any unsafe condition, equipment, material, accident, injury, or evidence of impaired health observed during their shift.

(2) In case of an emergency requiring evacuation of the berthing area, SWCs will follow the direction of the quarter's supervisor. SWCs must familiarize themselves with the emergency exits in their watch area.

(3) SWCs must comply with the MCF dress code per the plan of the day or week. The shift's uniform will be the uniform prescribed at the time the watch is assumed.

(4) Restroom or other breaks are authorized as long as they are coordinated with staff to ensure there is no break in the continuous observation.

(5) No personal items are authorized, with the exception of a water bottle (subject to respective MCF policy).

k. Job Controls

(1) A work schedule is maintained to provide continuous 24-hour coverage with one SWC working each shift, unless there is an on-the-job trainee. Each SWC will be assigned to watch for a 4-hour set period. The time frame (hours of the day) for each 4-hour watch is the same each day. The 24-hour SWC roster will be worked in its entirety, unless the SR prisoner is removed from an SR status prior to the 24-hour period ending. The entire 24-hour SWC roster should be utilized prior to switching, unless otherwise required.

(2) SWCs must not enter the SR prisoner's cell. The SWC's meals and medications must be provided internal of the SQ.

(3) The CDO must be notified prior to an SWC's absence (due to illness, etc.) to ensure that another prisoner observer can cover that particular watch or shift.

(4) Each SWC must sign in and out of the SQ. The program coordinator will confirm and track the hours worked by each SWC. If an SWC is unable to work a shift, staff is required to document the absence and ensure continuous observation is in place.

(5) As required, the SWC program coordinator will meet with pertinent staff members to review procedures, discuss issues, and supplement training.

(6) SWCs must be of the same gender as the SR prisoner they are observing.

8. Responsibilities. BUPERS-00D will:

- a. Implement the provisions of this instruction within applicable MCFs, and
- b. Provide the required SWC program technical assistance and oversight.

9. Action. Levels II and III MCF COs, if adopted, implement the provisions of this instruction in both, application and standard operating procedures.

10. Records Management

a. Records created as a result of this instruction, regardless of format or media, must be maintained and dispositioned for the standard subject identification codes (SSIC) 1000 through 13000 series per the records disposition schedules located on the Department of the Navy/Assistant for Administration (DON/AA), Directives and Records Management Division (DRMD) portal page at <https://portal.secnav.navy.mil/orgs/DUSNM/DONAA/DRM/Records-and-Information-Management/Approved%20Record%20Schedules/Forms/AllItems.aspx>.

b. For questions concerning the management of records related to this instruction change transmittal or the records disposition schedules, please contact your local records manager or the DON/AA DRMD Program Office.

11. Review and Effective Date. Per OPNAVINST 5215.17A, BUPERS-00D will review this instruction annually around the anniversary of its issuance date to ensure applicability, currency, and consistency with Federal, Department of Defense, Secretary of the Navy, and Navy policy and statutory authority using OPNAV 5215/40 Review of Instruction. This instruction will be in effect for 10 years, unless revised or cancelled in the interim, and will be reissued by the 10-year anniversary date if it is still required, unless it meets one of the exceptions in OPNAVINST 5215.17A, paragraph 9. Otherwise, if the instruction is no longer required, it will be processed for cancellation as soon as the cancellation is known following the guidance in OPNAV Manual 5215.1 of May 2016.

12. Form. DD 509 Inspection Record of Prisoner in Segregation may be obtained from the DoD Forms Management Program Web site at: https://www.esd.whs.mil/Directives/forms/dd0500_0999/.



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Deputy Chief of Naval Personnel

Releasability and distribution:

This instruction is cleared for public release and is available electronically only, via BUPERS Web site: <https://www.mynavyhr.navy.mil/References/Instructions/BUPERS-Instructions/>.