



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY  
BUREAU OF NAVAL PERSONNEL  
5720 INTEGRITY DRIVE  
MILLINGTON, TN 38055-0000

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BUPERSNOTE 1640  
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**30 MAR 2010**

BUPERS NOTICE 1640

From: Chief of Naval Personnel

Subj: SUICIDE WATCH COMPANION (SWC) PROGRAM

Ref: (a) SECNAVINST 1640.9C  
(b) OPNAV (N135E) ltr 1640 Ser N135E/119 of 9 Jul 09  
(Subj: Sighting and Documenting the Sighting of  
Suicide Risk Prisoners)  
(c) DOJ FBOP PS P5324.08 of 5 Apr 07 (Subj: Suicide  
Prevention Program)  
(d) DoD Directive 1325.4 of 17 Jul 01  
(e) American Correctional Association (ACA) Standards for  
Adult Correctional Institutions, 4th Edition

Encl: (1) Proposed SWC Program Prisoner Observer Position  
Description, Standards, and Job Orientation

1. Purpose. To bolster a shore brig's suicide prevention program by authorizing screened and trained post-trial prisoner observers to participate in a Suicide Watch Companion (SWC) program to assist correctional staff in monitoring suicide risk prisoners.

2. Applicability. The SWC program is only applicable to Naval Consolidated Brigs (NAVCONBRIG).

3. Background

a. Increased suicide rates among military members have necessitated reviews of correctional suicide prevention policies to ensure best practices are being employed. Suicide awareness, prevention, and intervention program best practices are utilizing more peer-to-peer support as a standard of care. The Federal Bureau of Prisons' (FBOP) Suicide Prevention Program has experienced successful outcomes since it began using prisoner observers to participate in a related SWC program well over 10 years ago. Military suicide prevention programs have also begun focusing on minimizing suicidal behavior by encouraging help-seeking using "peer-to-peer" and buddy care.

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b. General guidelines of reference (a) and clarifying guidance of reference (b) require a correctional staff member to provide continuous observation of prisoners on suicide risk status.

c. Per reference (c), the FBOP has a Suicide Prevention Program in place that authorizes use of a prisoner observer to assist in meeting the continuous observation staff requirement. This instruction aligns military correctional policy with the FBOP policy contained in reference (c) and adopts military suicide intervention program strategy (i.e., peer-to-peer) advocated by the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine.

d. Screened and trained post-trial prisoner observers at NAVCONBRIGs may be used to provide "eyes-on" observation under the direct supervision of a correctional staff member. This effort complements the requirement of reference (a), article 4205.5c, that states suicide risk "... prisoners shall be berthed in special quarters and physically checked every 5 minutes." Additionally, suicidal prisoners will continue to be referred as needed to a local medical treatment facility for evaluation and possible inpatient mental health care.

e. Per reference (d), paragraph 4.9, "To the greatest extent possible, national accreditation standards issued by the American Correctional Association (ACA) shall be followed in determining corrections policies and administering correctional facilities and functions." Reference (e), ACA Standard 4-4373, provides national accreditation standards on managing suicide risk status prisoners. Reference (e), ACA Standard 4-4393, authorizes prisoners (under staff supervision) to perform some duties commensurate with their level of training, which includes serving as a prisoner observer in support of the SWC program.

#### 4. Definitions

a. Suicide Risk Status. Prisoners who previously have had recent suicidal thoughts, threatened suicide, or have made a suicidal gesture, but are found fit for confinement, may be placed in this category.

b. Suicide Watch Companion (SWC) Program Prisoner Observer. Specially trained and selected post-trial prisoners who provide one-on-one, continuous observation to suicide risk peers.

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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 taskings can be performed during this level of observation).

d. Special Quarters. Special quarters is a group of cells used to house prisoners who have serious adjustment problems or certain medical issues, are highly temperamental or emotional, anti-social, some medical cases, or who cannot get along with other prisoners, or are persistent custodial problems.

e. American Correctional Association (ACA). ACA is a private, nonprofit organization that administers a national accreditation program for all components of adult corrections. Its purpose is to promote improvement in the management of correctional agencies through the administration of a voluntary accreditation program and the ongoing development and revision of relevant, useful standards. NAVCONBRIGs (Miramar and Charleston) are ACA-accredited facilities.

## 5. SWC Program Elements

### a. General

(1) Only the NAVCONBRIG commanding officer (CO) may authorize the use of prisoner observers to participate in the SWC program. The authorization for the use of prisoner observers is to be made by the NAVCONBRIG CO on a case-by-case basis. If the NAVCONBRIG CO authorizes a SWC program, a Suicide Prevention Program Coordinator shall be assigned in writing by the NAVCONBRIG CO and is responsible for the selection, training, assignment, and removal of individual companions. The Program Coordinator shall be a fully credentialed and privileged clinical psychologist. Prisoner observers selected perform this duty in addition to their normal NAVCONBRIG work assignment.

(2) The decision to use prisoner observers must be predicated on the fact that it only takes 3 to 4 minutes for many suicide deaths to occur.

### b. Selection of Prisoner Observers

(1) Because of the very sensitive nature of such assignments, the selection of prisoner observers requires considerable care. To provide round-the-clock observation of

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potentially suicidal prisoners, a sufficient number of observers should be trained, and alternate candidates should be available. Prisoner observers will be selected based upon their ability to perform the specific task but also for their reputation within the NAVCONBRIG. In the program coordinator's judgment, they must be mature, reliable individuals who have credibility with both staff and prisoners. They must be able, in the program coordinator's judgment, to protect the suicidal prisoner's privacy from other prisoners, while being accepted in the role by staff. Finally, in the program coordinator's judgment, they must be able to perform their duties with minimal need for direct supervision.

(2) In addition, any prisoner who is selected as an observer must not:

(a) Be in pre-trial status;

(b) Have been found to have committed Category V disciplinary offense within the last six months; or

(c) Be in program/treatment refusal status.

c. Prisoner Observer Shifts. Prisoner observers ordinarily will work a 4-hour shift. Except under unusual circumstances, prisoner observers will not work longer than one 4-hour shift in any 12-hour period.

d. Training Prisoner Observers. Each prisoner observer will receive at least 4 hours of initial training before being assigned to a suicide watch observer shift. Each prisoner observer will also receive quarterly refresher training. Each training session will review policy requirements and instruct the prisoner observers 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;

and

(4) Recording observations in the suicide watch log.

e. Meetings with Program Coordinator. Prisoner observers will meet at least quarterly with the program coordinator or designee to review procedures, discuss issues, and supplement training. After prisoners have served as observers, the program coordinator or designee will debrief them, individually or in groups, to discuss their experiences and make program changes, if necessary.

f. Records. The program coordinator will maintain a file containing:

(1) An agreement of understanding and expectations signed by each prisoner observer;

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

(3) Lists of prisoners available to serve as observers, which will be available to supervisory correctional staff during non-regular working hours.

g. Supervision of Prisoner Observer During a Suicide Watch. Although prisoner observers will be selected on the basis of their emotional stability, maturity, and responsibility, they still require some level of staff supervision while performing a suicide watch.

(1) Indirect supervision will be provided by staff personnel within the special quarters unit via continuous video observation of the prisoner and observer.

(2) In all cases, when a prisoner observer alerts staff to an emergency situation, staff must immediately respond to the suicide watch cell and take necessary action to prevent the prisoner on watch from incurring debilitating injury or death. In no case will a prisoner observer be assigned to a watch without adequate provisions for staff supervision or without the ability to obtain immediate staff assistance.

(3) Supervision must consist of staff in-person checks at least every 15 minutes. Staff will initial the chronological log upon conducting checks and annotate the prisoner's DD Form 509.

h. Removal. The program coordinator or designee may remove any prisoner observer from the SWC program at their discretion.

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Removal of a prisoner observer should be documented in the records kept by the program coordinator.

#### 6. Policy

a. A SWC program is authorized at a NAVCONBRIG consistent with the provisions of paragraph 4, above.

b. Where authorized by the NAVCONBRIG CO, the provisions of reference (b) remain except that a screened and trained post-trial prisoner observer may perform such duties under the supervision of correctional staff.

c. Prisoner observers in support of the SWC program are eligible for earned time under the support activities category of abatement per article 9201.2(i)(5) of reference (a). Prisoner observers will receive one day of earned time per month provided at least one shift was worked during the month. Credit will be given if a prisoner observer was not required to work an entire shift (for example, if only needed three hours of a four hour shift, credit for an entire shift would be granted). Regardless of how many shifts worked during a month, one day of earned time is the maximum amount of credit that will be awarded.

#### 7. Action

a. NAVCONBRIG COs enabling the SWC program shall comply with policy and procedures contained above and revise local operating procedures accordingly.

b. Navy Personnel Command, Corrections and Programs (PERS-00D) shall incorporate the provisions of the above policy in future revision of correctional policy.

c. NAVCONBRIG Miramar is assigned as Curriculum Model Manager for the SWC program and shall support development of related policy, procedures, and training for the Navy Corrections program.

8. Records Management. Records created as a result of this instruction, regardless of media and format, shall be managed per Secretary of the Navy Manual 5210.1 of November 2007.

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9. Cancellation Contingency. This notice will remain in effect until revision of reference (a), publication of a related BUPERS instruction or for 1 year, whichever occurs first. This notice may be retained for reference purposes only.



D. P. QUINN

Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy

Deputy Chief of Naval Personnel

Distribution:

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**30 MAR 2010****PROPOSED SUICIDE WATCH COMPANION (SWC) PROGRAM PRISONER OBSERVER  
POSITION DESCRIPTION, STANDARDS, AND JOB ORIENTATION**

INTRODUCTION: The position of a prisoner observer assigned to the SWC program entails important responsibilities and duties. Prisoner observers will observe prisoners placed on Suicide Risk (SR) status. All prisoner observers will receive specific training for such responsibilities. Training will be developed and approved by the SWC program manager.

MAJOR DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. The most important duty assigned to the SWC program concerns the observation of prisoners placed on SR status. Prisoner observers who are fatigued, ill, or themselves emotionally distressed, should inform the appropriate staff and be excused from their detail until their condition improves.
2. The prisoner who assumes the duty of a prisoner observer will position themselves directly outside of the prisoner's cell with a clear line of vision to all of the prisoner's actions through the observation window / opened food slot. Prisoners on SR are to be under constant observation ("eyes on") by either a prisoner observer or a staff member. Reading, listening to radios/CDs, or any use of headphones/ear buds is not permitted when conducting a suicide watch. Staff will observe showers and toileting, not prisoner observers. Prisoner observers should serve no more than 4 hours on watch. Those on any shift between 1700-0600 will have the option of working their regularly scheduled job the following day or taking the day off.
3. Prisoner observers will be responsible for observing the behaviors of the SR prisoners, noting any changes and making regular, 15-minute entries on the SWC program observation form. The observation form will be transferred at the end-of-shift into the SWC program binder. Significant changes in behavior will be closely monitored and immediately reported to the quarters supervisor. Prisoner observers are to log and pass on all pertinent information to staff and their SWC program relief. Prisoner observers will respect confidentiality and are not permitted to disclose to persons not involved in the program any information discussed.
4. Prisoner observers will follow all rules/policies as outlined during training and in this position description.

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Prisoner observers are not allowed to have physical contact with or pass items to SR prisoners. When SR watch prisoners require food, clothing, or other items, it will be reported to the quarters supervisor.

5. Working as a prisoner observer can be very difficult at times. Prisoners suffering from mental illness can be loud, demanding, and insulting. Prisoner observers are not to taunt, make fun of, or become involved in verbal arguments with such prisoners. The prisoner observers are expected to speak to clinical services staff when confronted with these types of difficult behaviors. If the prisoner reacts negatively to having a SWC program monitor, the prisoner observer will notify the quarters supervisor. The command duty officer (CDO) will excuse the prisoner observer from duty. Prisoner observers will log such incidences and report them to the quarters supervisor.

6. Prisoner observers in support of the SWC program are eligible for earned time under the support activities category of abatement. Prisoner observers will receive one day of earned time per month provided at least one shift was worked during the month. Credit will be given if a prisoner observer was not required to work an entire shift (for example, if only needed three hours of a four hour shift, credit for an entire shift would be granted). Regardless of how many shifts worked during a month, one day of earned time is the maximum amount of credit that will be awarded.

SAFETY AND PERSONAL APPEARANCE STANDARDS:

1. Prisoner observers are to log and report any unsafe condition, equipment, or material to the quarters supervisor.
2. Prisoner observers are to log and report to the quarters supervisor any accident, injury, or evidence of impaired health, which occurs during their shift.
3. In case of an emergency requiring evacuation of the dorm, prisoner observers will follow the direction of the quarters supervisor. Prisoner observers are to become familiar with the location of the emergency exits.

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4. Prisoner observers will comply with the NAVCONBRIG dress code according to the plan of the day; thus, if at the time the shift begins the dress code in a relaxed uniform then that would be the SWC program uniform for that shift.

5. Restroom (or other) breaks are authorized as long as coordinated with staff to ensure there is no break in the eyes-on watch.

JOB CONTROLS:

1. The work schedule is maintained to provide continuous 24-hour coverage with primarily one prisoner observer working each shift. Each prisoner observer will be assigned to a particular shift for a 4-hour period. The work schedule includes days, evenings, weekends, and holidays and is subject to change. The 24-hour shift schedule will be worked in its entirety (unless the SR prisoner is removed from SR status prior to the 24-hour period ending). For example, if a prisoner is placed on SR status at 0100, one would utilize that entire 24-shift before going on to the next 24-hour shift as the schedule is based on a 24-hour shift not a 24-hour day.

2. The prisoner observer is not allowed in the SR prisoner's cell. Prisoner observer's meals and medications will be provided in male special quarters (MSQ) / female special quarters (FSQ). The supervising clinical services staff member or CDO will be notified prior to a prisoner's absence (due to illness, etc.) to assure that another prisoner observer can cover for that particular shift.

3. The prisoner observer should sign in and out of the log binder (maintained in the dorm) and is responsible for having the current SQ staff member initial the hours worked.

4. Regularly scheduled meetings, perhaps quarterly, will be held with pertinent staff to review procedures, discuss issues, and supplement training. As prisoner observers will occasionally need to be replaced (due to release, etc.), unit managers will submit new prisoner observer candidate names regularly to the clinical services staff member who will maintain a waiting list. Once the program is established, 2 hours of on the job training will occur before the new prisoner observers takes an initial shift.

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Clinical Services Department Head: \_\_\_\_\_

I have read and understand the conditions set forth in the  
Prisoner Position Description and Standards.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Prisoner Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Prisoner Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date