Suicide awareness, code of conduct tops NKO list of training

By Susan Lawson, Center for Personal and Professional Development Public Affairs

A wide variety of topics are included in the new list of general military training (GMT) announced via NAVADMIN message Jan. 30.

Top topics this year include code of conduct, suicide awareness, law of war and stress management training. The curriculum materials for the first six GMT topics have been distributed to commands and are also posted on Navy Knowledge Online (NKO). Seven additional topics will be delivered to commands in March and will also be available for download on NKO.

"The effectiveness of this training will be enhanced by the presence and participation of officers and chief petty officers, who can mentor their fellow shipmates by passing on knowledge of the Navy's core values through the four main GMT subject areas," said Cmdr. George Michaels, training director for the Center for Personal and Professional Development. The development command oversees curriculum updates and manages the development and distribution of GMT materials for command use throughout the fleet.

GMT is non-occupational general training, taught at the command level, and is required periodically for all Navy uniformed personnel.

Topics are values-based, emphasizing commitment to integrity and effective decision making. Each of the 2009 topics falls under one of the four subject areas: Navy heritage, personal growth and professional relationships, managing risk and wellness.

The 2009 topics include: code of conduct, introduction to stress management, combating trafficking in persons awareness training, introduction to anger management, sexual health – unplanned pregnancy prevention, equal opportunity – religious accommodations, introduction to the Navy's hazing policy, introduction to time-critical risk management, law of war, domestic violence, personal financial management – surviving the holidays, alcohol awareness - enabling alcohol misuse and introduction to stress response continuum and suicide awareness.

Web-based lessons are available through Navy e-Learning located on NKO. Once training is completed, it is automatically recorded in Fleet Training Management and Planning System (FLTMPS) and reflected in the Sailor's electronic training jacket. Commands can also download the GMT topics from NKO and deliver them locally.

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Image courtesy of NKO Web site

Commands using this delivery method will have to ensure course completion for their Sailors is recorded in FLTMPS by their command training officer.

For more information read NAVADMIN 033/09, or visit the NKO Web site at www.nko.navy.mil and select the Personal Development link. Information on 2009 topics can be found on the GMT page.

Taking care of our own must take priority, Adm. Mullen says

By Linda D. Kozaryn, American Forces Press Service

As the nation enters its eighth year of war, the military's highest-ranking officer says he is concerned about the health of the armed forces. He wants to ensure the country takes care of its men and women in uniform.

"We are asking an extraordinary amount from them, and they are giving it in ways that are so, so very special," Adm. Mike Mullen, 17th chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Feb. 2 at Grove City College, Pa., delivering the 2008-2009 Pew Memorial Lecture.

"We have asked our young men and women to deploy in ways they never could have imagined – active duty, reserve and Guard – and they have stood up to the challenge," he said. Yet multiple deployments of 12 to 15 months, he noted, have taken a toll on service members and their families.

"I was with 500 soldiers not too long ago, many of whom had just gotten back from Iraq, and I asked them how many deployments they had been on," Mullen said. "Forty to 50 percent of the soldiers in the room at an all hands call had just completed their fourth deployment. That is not much time at home; that is not much time raising kids; that is not much time just taking a break."

The chairman said he finds the force "incredibly resilient, and at the same time, very pressed."

"We need to pay attention to the entirety of our people and their families and the programs which support them in order to make sure that they are well positioned for the future," Mullen said. The totality of that support, he said, will determine whether or not they remain in the military.

Life long support is especially important for wounded service members, their families and the families of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice. "We are a wealthy enough country, even in these financially difficult times, to make sure they are taken care of and their needs are met for the rest of their lives," he said, drawing applause from the estimated 700 Grove City College students and guests.

The chairman said a community-based approach is needed to provide support, because the Department of Defense (DoD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) can't do it all. "It's really DoD, the VA and literally communities throughout the country reaching out and touching these people to make sure their needs are met," he said.

Mullen pointed out that the Army's suicide rate now exceeds the national norm. He said suicide is a huge challenge that military leaders are focused on to find near-term and long-term solutions.

"Part of it has got to be the pressure of these constant deployments into combat, where young individuals... whose lives change forever, see things and do things they had never imagined," the chairman said. "We have got to be able to support those individuals in ways that, in some cases, we haven't quite figured out yet."

In a speech at the Reserve Officers Association earlier in the day, Mullen said there is a need to double the amount of "dwell time," or time a service member spends at home.

"Right now, for the most part on the active side, you're home about as long as you've been deployed," he said. "We have the goal on the reserve and Guard sides to be one year out, five years back. We're clearly not there."

Identifying troops suffering from post-traumatic stress is another challenge facing the military, Mullen said.

"I've been told by enough young soldiers, Sailors, airmen and Marines that they just check the block and move through [the health assessment], because they know if they check the wrong block, they're not going to be able to go home," the chairman told the reserve officers.

He said the stigma associated with post-traumatic stress till is significant, and military leaders need to work to eliminate people's unwillingness to seek help. They have to figure out a way to get every single person, not just those who raise their hand, to go through a meaningful assessment for post-traumatic stress disorder, Mullen said.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen.

U.S. Navy file photo

For example, he said, soldiers coming back from a horrendous combat tour get out and fly home. They've been through hell. Things have affected them in ways that they can't even see. They've seen buddies die, and they have the nightmares that go with it. Now, the structure the military provided is gone. They may or may not have family there to support them. They're alone.

"Right now, we only track individuals for 120 days when they get out," Mullen said. "We've got to have a tracking system that stays in touch with individuals so they know where the life lines are. It needs to be transparent and seamless so that we make sure we can support individuals who have sacrificed so much."

While the military has come a long way and understands post-traumatic stress better than a few years ago, he said, there's still a long way to go.

"I am 100 percent convinced that no matter what happens, if we get it right for our people and our families, we'll be able to continue to sustain and develop a military second to none," he said.