

The Army has approved new guidance to military commanders in an effort to stem the rising toll of soldier suicides, officials said late Thursday. The plan includes hiring more mental health workers and tightening the way officials handle drug testing, health screening and a host of other long-standing **procedures that in some cases became lax**, according to officials, as the Army focused on fighting two wars.

Army leadership has become more alarmed as suicides from January through March rose to a reported 56 \_ 22 confirmed and 34 still being investigated and pending confirmation. Usually, the vast majority of suspected suicides are eventually confirmed. The 2009 number compares to 140 for all of last year, a record blamed partly on strains caused by repeated deployments for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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