NEWS RELEASE

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DeCA partners with military to help promote suicide prevention awareness

By Kevin L. Robinson,
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FORT LEE, Va. – Often a person contemplating suicide is crying for help – maybe not in words, but the signs are all there. Helping someone in turmoil is not the other person's job; it's everyone's job, said the acting director of the Defense Commissary Agency.

"We all have a vested interest in doing whatever it takes to help decrease the instances of suicide in the military community," said Thomas E. Milks, the military's top grocer. "You can stand by and do nothing, or you can get involved and help a person in crisis get professional help."

During National Suicide Prevention Week, Sept. 5-11, the Defense Commissary Agency is partnering with the Department of Defense to help spread the word that death by suicide is a tragedy that can be prevented.

As part of the national observance that began with Suicide Prevention Week and continues throughout the month, commissaries will display a special suicide prevention poster adapted from the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Prevention that bears the message, "Shoulder-to-Shoulder: No One Stands Alone." By displaying this poster, commissaries hope to draw much-needed attention to the importance of everyone getting involved to help prevent suicide.

While each of the services has its own suicide prevention program tailored to its force, they share the same basic philosophy: Make mental health support and suicide prevention

available to service members before, during and after deployment.

One of the keys to suicide prevention awareness is the concept that total wellness involves good mental and physical health. There is a definite link between improving physical health through nutritious food choices, exercise and addressing psychological health needs, said Lt. Col. Karen Hawkins, DeCA dietitian.

"Recent medical studies are drawing strong correlations between exercise and mental health and wellness," Hawkins said. "The idea is that nutrition and exercise help improve a person's physical self perception and ultimately their self esteem. This is key to helping combat the effects of stress and depression."

The friends, family and co-workers of someone undergoing an emotional crisis should look for the following warning signs for suicide, according to the http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org:

- Threatening to hurt or kill oneself or talking about wanting to hurt or kill oneself
- Looking for ways to kill oneself by seeking access to firearms, available pills or other means
- Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person
- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling rage or uncontrolled anger or seeking revenge
- Acting recklessly or engaging in risky activities – seemingly without thinking
- Feeling trapped – like there's no way out
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family and society
- Feeling anxious, agitated or unable to sleep or sleeping all the time
- Experiencing dramatic mood changes
- Seeing no reason for living or having no sense of purpose in life

For more information about suicide prevention, talk to your installation chaplain or behavioral health professional, or call Military OneSource at 1-800-342-9647. You can also visit http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2010/0810_restoringhope/, http://www.mentalhealthscreening.org/military, or the American Society of Suicidology website at http://www.suicidology.org.

If you are thinking of hurting yourself, or if you are concerned that someone else may be suicidal, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number at 1-800-273-TALK (8255); it is

open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Department of Veterans Affairs also has established a national suicide prevention hotline for veterans in emotional crisis. Veterans can call the same National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number and press "1" to be routed to the Veterans Hotline.

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About DeCA: *The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and secure shopping environment. Authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. Shoppers save an average of more than 30 percent on their purchases compared to commercial prices – savings worth more than $4,400 annually for a family of four. A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America's military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.*