

SEVERE THUNDERSTORM WATCH OUTLINE UPDATE FOR WS 419



War Veterans Screened Before Return to Work as Deputies

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OLATHE, Kan. - The Johnson County Sheriff's Department has launched a mandatory program requiring deputies returning from war duty to seek counseling.

"You are on a heightened sense of alert all the time, always looking for something," Tyrone Hudgins said, explaining the change in perspective after wartime service.

Hudgins is back at the Johnson County Jail after a second tour of duty in Iraq.

More than half the days on Iraqi roads commanding army convoys, Hudgins said he faced enemy fire.

"There's IED blasts, there's going to be some mortar, some indirect fire," Hudgins recalled. "Gunfire, sporadic."

The Army says soldier suicides are up and post-traumatic stress disorder cases have jumped 50 percent.

Hudgins is one of about 14 Johnson County deputies who've returned from Iraq.

"You may have trouble sleeping," said Johnson County Sheriff's spokesman Tom Erickson. "You may have all sorts of symptoms, that at the time, you don't realize are a problem, but may be affecting your life."

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Erickson says law enforcement culture is steeped in an attitude reluctant to seek help, so the department is making the assistance program mandatory.

Sleep is an issue Hudgins faced, but he says he's coping well.

"My big thing was always thinking I had to go back to Iraq the next day," Hudgins said.

The program screens deputies to ensure they're fit for duty, and to see if they need additional counseling.

"I don't think I suffer PTSD or anything," Hudgins said. "The program for me was nice to talk though and clear up a couple questions I had about coming back and everything from the first time and this time. Sleep is a big thing."

Hudgins is scheduled for a follow-up in three months.

The sessions are confidential, unless the psychologist determines the officer's wartime trauma would make him unfit for service.



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