

# Down the hatch: Army cracks down on alcohol dependance, binge drinking

By Sgt. A.M. LaVey, Ft. Bragg website, December 21, 2012



Soldiers are expected to work hard and, as it is popularly understood, to party just as hard. While excessive alcohol consumption and binge drinking are thought to be part of the military lifestyle, the Army is cracking down on such behavior, as it is deemed detrimental to the force.

"Soldiers and their Families have come to realize that irresponsible consumption of alcohol can be a career ender," said Col. Chad B. McRee, commander, 16th Military Police Brigade and the director of Emergency Services at Fort Bragg.

Army doctrine charges its leadership to use the Army values and warrior ethos to set the example for their Soldiers in terms of not abusing alcohol.

"Leaders must lead from the front," said McRee. "We must set proper examples and model the same behaviors that we want to see in our Soldiers. Leaders cannot set double standards and we cannot ask our people to do things that we are unwilling or incapable of doing ourselves. That is the essence of leadership."

Leaders also educate, train and motivate subordinates to create a climate that rejects substance abuse and reinforces positive individual and social activity on and off duty.

"We have many outlets for Soldiers to blow off steam that do not include the consumption of alcohol," said McRee. Participation in these alcohol-free alternatives to drinking can reduce alcohol related incidents."

Alcohol abuse education is provided to all incoming Soldiers at the time of initial entry and Soldiers are required to receive annual training at the unit level.

The Army Substance Abuse Program's prevention branch is actively involved in doing their part to help, said Susan Jones, a clinical counselor with the ASAP Fort Bragg. "They provide outreach to units, offer classes, provide displays like the drunk driving (display) and also handle unit prevention leader training and biochemical testing."

ASAP, the Army's antisubstance abuse program also has a clinical branch, where civilian addiction specialists, clinical social workers, counselors and therapists provide services to Soldiers who admit they have an alcohol problem or have been referred there through command or medical channels.

"Our mission is to make sure you can meet your mission and the Army can meet theirs," said Jones. "What we really want to do is get Soldiers back to the point where they can function without the use of substances."

The program provides access to education, counseling and referrals to higher levels of care such as inpatient treatment.

"Once enrolled in the program, it's a flexible program, individually tailored to your needs," said Jones. "Everyone is different and the program is different for everyone."

Alcohol issues generally grow progressively.

"Alcohol is highly addictive -- it's everywhere, so it's the most difficult to treat. One doesn't jump right into to drinking daily," said Jones. Besides alcohol dependence, the number of reported binge drinkers in the Army has increased over the last 20 years according to a recent study by the National Institute of Medicine. The Center for Disease Control defines binge drinking when men consume five or more drinks, and when women consume four or more drinks, in about two hours.

"Most people who drink this way do not consider themselves binge drinkers," said Jones. "Binge drinking behavior really tends to be your weekend drinkers who hit it hard. What happens over time though, is that binge drinking develops into something more."

Many people might not know they have a problem, as alcohol dependency isn't always an obvious issue. Like suicide prevention, first line supervisors, peers and Family members might be the first or only one to notice that a Soldier has a problem with alcohol.

"It comes down to paying attention to people. If you're not paying attention to your Soldiers, you're going to miss all the signs," said Jones. "Just pay attention and know the people you work with -- it's part of being a Soldier."

With the trimming of the force, commanders are treating alcohol-related events with zero tolerance and are separating from the service substandard Soldiers.

"Abuse of alcohol affects everybody," said McRee. "Those who abuse alcohol are less reliable and often their performance at work is affected. They have higher rates of misconduct and illness, which means their fellow Soldiers have to cover down for them."

With the frequency of deployments decreasing, Soldiers are getting reacquainted with the 'garrison' lifestyle, which includes tougher and more literal definitions of Army regulations, like the one that says Soldiers are can only go to ASAP once in their career.

"If you have a second incident, the regulations say that the command must say that you are exceptional and need to be retained, otherwise chapter proceedings will be initiated," said Jones. "This is important for people to understand. And it's important for people not to get out of treatment before they are ready."

Soldiers are encouraged to seek help voluntarily for alcohol problems by self-referring to ASAP as soon as they feel they have a problem.

"I tell everyone I see that they need to stay as long as they need to stay and get everything they need out of this treatment, because if they come back, chances are they're going to be separated," said Jones.