

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Official: Suicide a growing concern

Rehder says Idaho facing 'desperate time,' needs to create suicide prevention hotline

By KATHY HEDBERG
OF THE TRIBUNE

GRANGEVILLE — It's time to get Idaho back in the loop by establishing its own suicide prevention hotline, says the chairman of the Region 2 mental health board.

Several entities have joined with the Idaho Council on Suicide Prevention and the Suicide Prevention Action Network to re-establish a hotline for people to call who are contemplating ending their lives.

It's a turn for the better, says Jim Rehder, chairman of the regional mental health board.

"We know, through research, that hotlines do work," Rehder said. "There's so much pain and there's a sense of hopelessness and helplessness and absolutely no happiness whatsoever. So it's a real desperate time ... and you get yourself into a mess and the hotlines are set up to call people back and touch base. ... Once you get somebody talked down,



Jim Rehder

then an intervention can take place."

More people in Idaho die by suicide than in 39 other states. Yet, the state's prevention hotline closed in December 2006.

According to the Suicide Prevention Action Network Region 2, which includes the five counties of north central Idaho, is third in the nation in the rate of completed suicides. In 2009, the last year for which data was available, there were 18.2 suicides per 100,000 people. The Twin Falls area was first with 27.2 suicides per 100,000, and the Coeur d'Alene area was second with 24.3 suicides per 100,000.

"There was a youth issue, but now it's shifted more to 25- to 30-year-olds and military personnel," Rehder said. "The economic times are just part of that process. But we think that this is something that is preventable; something that with awareness and access to the hotline would be a tremendous advantage in curtailing this problem."

Since the state's own suicide hotline

closed, the national Lifeline network based in New York has been handling Idaho's calls as a professional courtesy. More recently a locally funded hotline in Portland, Ore., has taken care of calls from Idaho — more than 3,700 calls, or 10 per day — in 2010.

A 2010 study by Idaho State University found the economic toll in Idaho from suicides is more than \$800,000 in lost productivity due to early loss of life. In comparison, an Idaho-based hotline would cost about \$130,000 a year.

The plan is to develop the hotline incrementally over the next two years with a start-up budget of \$93,000. Rehder said Sen. Joe Stegner has been supportive of the proposal and Rep. John Rusche has promised to introduce legislation that would help fund the hotline in the next legislative session.

"It hits really close to home for some folks," Rehder said. "It's incredible. It's just like we're waiting for the next shoe to drop."

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Firefighters get one Garfield County blaze under control

By ERIC BARKER
OF THE TRIBUNE

Firefighting crews contained one of the fires burning in Garfield County Tuesday and are working to make sure larger fires there don't grow.

"We are getting a pretty good wind event and so far it's holding," said Kris Darby, director of emergency management for Garfield County.

He said some of the 200 firefighters working on the Bell Plain Complex could be released today if efforts to contain the fires continue to progress. New mapping of the fires showed they burned about 4,500 acres of grass and grain.

They were started by a lightning storm Sunday night that swept through the region and left a wake

tained. The Crooked Fork Contour Road and the East Fork Crooked Fork Road have been closed because of the fire and the White Sands Campground is being used as a fire camp.

All but one of the 10 fires started by the storm are on the Pomeroy District of the Umatilla National Forest. Fire crews are working to contained a 10-acre blaze burning in steep terrain in the Devil's Tailbone area.

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