

Rise in self-inflicted prisoner deaths for 2002

The number of self-inflicted deaths among prisoners has risen in 2002 to 94. This compares to 73 in 2001, an increase of 29 per cent.

The provisional rate of self-inflicted deaths this year is 133 per 100,000 prisoners compared to 110 in 2001, but is lower than the peak rate of 140 per 100,000 prisoners in 1999.

Prisons Minister Hilary Benn said:

“I am saddened and very concerned about this year’s rise in suicides, which is particularly troubling after significant falls in the previous two years. Every death in custody is devastating for the victim’s family and has a profound effect on other prisoners and staff. Over the last 18 months we have worked hard to develop our suicide prevention strategy, and we will continue to do all that we can to try to keep safe those vulnerable prisoners in our care.”

Martin Narey, Director General said:

“Tragically there has been an increase in deaths this year. My heart-felt sympathy goes to the relatives and friends of those who have died. Staff skill and alertness have undoubtedly saved many other prisoners from killing themselves, but the Service faces a very challenging time due to a combination of the effects of increased prisoner throughput and an increasingly risk-laden population. We will continue our work to better identify and care for those most at risk of suicide.”

The Prison Service is midway through a three-year strategy to develop policies to reduce prisoner suicide and self-harm in prisons. This involves a targeting of efforts where the risks are highest, particularly during the crucial early period of custody.

Significant numbers of lives have been saved in recent years as a result of prompt actions of staff. The number of prisoners resuscitated following self-harm incidents totalled 130 in 2000; 147 in 2001 and 141 in 2002 (up to 1 December 2002).

Table showing self-inflicted deaths in prisons 1998-2002

Year	Number of Self-Inflicted Death	Average Annual Population (thousands)	Rate per 100,000 population
1998	82	65.5	125
1999	91	64.8	140
2000	82	64.6	127

2001	73	66.3	110
2002	94 [†]	70.9*	133 [†]

[†]number of deaths as at 30 December 2002

*population as at 30 November 2002

NOTES TO EDITORS

- 1) The Prison Service suicide and self-harm prevention strategy developed through the Safer Custody Programme is being piloted primarily in six establishments at a cost of £21.69 million over the three year programme (to April 2004).
- 2) New healthcare screening procedures have started in ten pilot prisons. Wing staff will be supported in their work by in-reach mental health teams and by the establishment of dedicated drug detoxification units.
- 3) The Prison Service's outreach support team have visited and advised staff in over 100 establishments in 2002. This ongoing work involves assisting establishments in problem areas, identifying and spreading good practice and developing new approaches.
- 4) A new Prison Service Order (2700) *Suicide and Self-harm Prevention* comes into effect 1 January 2003. This sets out and clarifies current practices and procedures for staff to identify prisoners at risk of suicide and self-harm, and to provide the subsequent care and support for such prisoners.