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## Suicide No. 1 cop killer, expert says Several departments tried to find Kaiser, prevent death



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The death of Holland Police Chief Doug Kaiser at his own hand with his own gun doesn't shock people like Robert Douglas, Jr., a former Baltimore police officer who started the National P.O.L.I.C.E. Suicide Foundation.

"Suicide is not looked at as being one of the real danger issues with law enforcement but unfortunately it is. It is the No. 1 killer of law enforcement officers," Mr. Douglas said in a telephone interview yesterday.

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Stress on the job, difficulties with family relationships, exposure to trauma, and easy access to firearms are among the factors that play into the phenomenon, according to those who have studied the topic.

On Friday night, Chief Kaiser, 45, became one of those statistics.

#### MULTIMEDIA

- This police dashcam video of the [pursuit of the Holland police chief's car](#) has been edited.

handgun to his head, and ended his life.

Following a search for the chief that wound through two southwest Ohio counties, police officers and sheriff's deputies converged in Sidney, Ohio, in an attempt to help the man they had been warned was armed and suicidal, but he ignored his fellow officers, raised his

"The information was we had a police officer who was off-duty that was threatening suicide," Piqua Police Chief Wayne Willcox said yesterday. "Every indication was he was drinking heavily. We were not given any explanation of any of the underlying causes or any other background, but the end result certainly indicates there was something very, very wrong with that gentleman's life.

"We don't have a clue here in Piqua, first, as to what led him to be here in this area and, second, what possibly was going through his mind that he felt the solution he chose was his only recourse."

While Holland officials have said the chief had asked to take the day off to go camping, Holland police apparently became concerned about the chief's whereabouts by that afternoon.

Lucas County Sheriff James Telb said a Holland police officer notified the sheriff's office Friday afternoon that Holland police were trying to locate Chief Kaiser. Sheriff Telb said the FBI was consulted and apparently was able to track credit card and cell phone records to find Chief Kaiser's approximate location in an area just north of Dayton.

The sheriff said he believed Chief Kaiser's wife wanted to contact her husband, which prompted the search, but the sheriff said he did not know why she was trying to locate him.

Lucas County Sheriff's Sgt. William Talbott was sent to the Kaiser home where he and a Holland police officer remained throughout the search. Sergeant Talbott kept in contact with local authorities attempting to locate Chief Kaiser through dispatch and cell phones.

"It was clear early on that it was a serious matter and he was contemplating suicide, so we attempted to track his activity by his cell phone use and also his credit card," the sergeant said.

Sergeant Talbott declined to discuss the reason Chief Kaiser's wife was concerned for her husband's safety after she had spoken to him several times.

The sheriff's office issued a teletype to law enforcement agencies up and down I-75 in an attempt to locate Chief Kaiser, who was driving his personal vehicle, a Dodge Durango.

Sgt. Scott Carrico, of the Piqua post of the Ohio Highway Patrol, said the post was in communication throughout the evening with the Lucas County Sheriff's Office, starting with a call shortly after 8 p.m. indicating the chief was at the Travelodge off I-75 in Tipp City. Police in Tipp City went to the hotel, but Chief Kaiser had left, he said.

"He had left the motel prior to the police arriving there, and he had made a comment that if he was stopped, he would shoot himself," Sergeant Talbott said.

A state trooper passed the chief's sport utility vehicle on northbound I-75 just before 10 p.m., Sergeant Carrico said, but Chief Kaiser exited the interstate at Piqua. About 10:30 p.m., a Piqua officer spotted him on Shelby County Road 25A, another north-south road, he said.

Chief Willcox said his officer did not activate his emergency lights and siren to stop Chief Kaiser but simply followed him into Sidney where police officers and Shelby County sheriff's deputies, including trained negotiators, were gathering. He said he hoped they could have diffused the situation.

"I am confident had he given officers an opportunity to engage him in conversation that we could have resolved it," he said. "We were not given that opportunity."

Sergeant Talbott knew Chief Kaiser on a professional basis through the police department and sheriff's office working together during his 21 years with the sheriff's department. He said even

though he instantly knew what happened and was the one who told the chief's wife that he had taken his life, it's still hard for him to comprehend.

"He was an absolutely great guy. It's unbelievable," the sergeant said. "I have nothing but praise for him, and he always seemed to be in such a great mood."

Just how many police officers take their own lives each year is not known.

John Violanti, a research professor in social and preventative medicine at the State University of New York at Buffalo, said a comprehensive nationwide study has never been done, although he estimates there are around 130 such deaths a year.

Mr. Douglas believes the number is much higher. He said his organization documented 450 suicides nationally in 2004 and 447 in 2005.

In either event, Mr. Violanti said there is clearly a higher suicide rate among law enforcement officers than the general population. Studies he has conducted indicated a suicide rate in 2004 among police officers of 17 in every 100,000, compared to the suicide rate of the general public of 10.2 in every 100,000.

A number of factors come into play, he said, including exposure to trauma and relationship issues on and off the job.

"Sometimes alcohol enters the picture. Sometimes there are marital difficulties, trouble on the job," Mr. Violanti said. "Some people run out of the ability to cope with everything, and they just end it all."

Mr. Douglas said he is convinced the criminal justice system is good at training law enforcement officers to do their jobs but fails to teach officers how to separate themselves from their work when they go home at night.

"We have not taught them how to make the transition from the street to home," Mr. Douglas said.

"How do I know that's true? Police have one of the highest divorce rates, one of the highest alcoholism rates, one of the highest rates of domestic violence. ... There's a lot of trauma going on because the officer- he or she - finds it very difficult to communicate with their families."

Mr. Violanti said in too many instances, officers do not seek the help they need. They do not want to be perceived as weak or jeopardize their jobs.

"It's the idea that police are problem-solvers, not people with problems," he said. "That's part of the culture, and it's bad because a lot of officers are reluctant to go for help when they need it."

Staff writers Clyde Hughes and Meghan Gilbert contributed to this report.

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