

Subway system sees one suicide a month, statistics show

Brendan Kennedy, Staff Reporter, Toronto Star
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<http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/ttc/article/731536--subway-system-sees-one-suicide-a-month-statistics-show>

About one person a month commits suicide in Toronto by jumping in front of a subway train.

The TTC released that statistic reluctantly Thursday, in response to a freedom of information request by a local newspaper. It had earlier refused, citing concerns that it could lead to more such incidents. But on appeal, the Information and Privacy Commissioner ordered the numbers released.

The TTC's concern, according to a statement, "is rooted in medical literature and evidence that suggests a vulnerable person with suicidal tendencies may choose to end their life if they read or hear about such an incident in the media."

The World Health Organization and the Canadian Association of Suicide Prevention have issued similar cautions. Paul Links, a psychiatrist specializing in suicide prevention, said copycat suicides are more likely to occur when media reports are sensationalized, there is close attention to the method used and when the story draws a link between an event in a person's life and their decision to end it.

The *Star* does not report that a death was suicide unless there is an overriding public interest in doing so, and unless the person involved is otherwise newsworthy.

Besides providing counselling to operators traumatized by witnessing suicides, the TTC has partnered since 2005 with **Trillium Health Centre** to train staff in prevention. TTC spokesman Brad Ross said the **Gatekeeper Program** – created to help subway workers identify people contemplating suicide – is "literally saving lives."

Subway suicides and attempts have been trending downward since 2000, when there were 33. Since 1998, it has averaged 14.6 suicides and 9.8 attempts a year.

Where to go for help: Toronto Distress Centre, 416-408-HELP (4357) and the Kids Help Phone, 1-800-668-6868.

TTC takes action on suicides

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Tess Kalinowski, Transportation Reporter, Toronto Star

<http://www.healthzone.ca/health/news/gta/ttc/article/731532--ttc-takes-action-on-suicides>

Cindy Samulski has spent about half of her 24 years at the TTC as a subway operator.

In that time she's had two "jumpers," both teenagers.

The experience of subway drivers is one reason for the TTC's high rate of post-traumatic stress.

Last year, a Star investigation found that 319 bus, streetcar and subway operators were suffering from the condition, which is normally associated with combat soldiers and police officers.

That's why the transit system – which sees two to three suicide attempts a month – is setting up programs to more sensitively respond to the operators' experience and teach its employees how to recognize signs of distress in the public.

The first time Samulski experienced a suicide she was so traumatized she spent the ensuing four years working in the TTC's offices. Finally, she missed her old job so much, she got back on the trains.

But that incident came flooding back on April 30 at 9:25 a.m.

That's when, on the second run of the day, she rounded the bend into the station at about 60 to 70 km/h.

The kid didn't look her in the eye.

"He just kind of crouched and jumped. He had it all timed," she said.

"I threw the train into emergency very quickly. I screamed," said Samulski. "I knew I was going to hit and I hit him. You feel everything."

While there was nothing she could do to stop the train, she is lobbying for changes to the way drivers are treated after such events.

Samulski says she had to wait two hours in a janitor's closet while emergency crews cleared the scene. Then she was sent back to her division at Wilson Station on the bus because no ride could be found for her. There, she had to fill

out reports until her vision blurred, and deal with an employee assistance counsellor.

"All she wanted me to do was talk about it," she recalls. All Samulski wanted to do was go home.

Eventually she was allowed to drive to her home in Uxbridge, in what she calls an "impaired state."

Police called that evening to check on her and the officer put her in touch with a trauma counsellor, who helped her recover. In August, Samulski returned to work.

"I'm still shaky," she said. "If someone runs to the edge (of the subway platform) I freak out. It happened today. It doesn't leave you."