



STAFFORDSHIRE
POLICE

10 January 2025

FOI Ref 17562

Request - You asked us the following:

Please could you disclose -

1. From April 1st 2024 to present:

- a. The number of reports where sodium nitrite was recorded.
- b. The number of attendances where sodium nitrite was recorded.
- c. The number of deaths attended where sodium nitrite was recorded.
- d. The number of welfare checks made relating to sodium nitrite.

2. From April 1st 2023 to March 31st 2024:

- a. The number of reports where sodium nitrite was recorded.
- b. The number of attendances where sodium nitrite was recorded.
- c. The number of deaths attended where sodium nitrite was recorded.
- d. The number of welfare checks made relating to sodium nitrite.

3. From April 1st 2022 to March 31st 2023

- a. The number of reports where sodium nitrite was recorded.
- b. The number of attendances where sodium nitrite was recorded.
- c. The number of deaths attended where sodium nitrite was recorded.
- d. The number of welfare checks made relating to sodium nitrite.

4. April 1st 2021 to March 31st 2022

- a. The number of reports where sodium nitrite was recorded.
- b. The number of attendances where sodium nitrite was recorded.
- c. The number of deaths attended where sodium nitrite was recorded.
- d. The number of welfare checks made relating to sodium nitrite.

5. April 1st 2020 to March 31st 2021

- a. The number of reports where sodium nitrite was recorded.
- b. The number of attendances where sodium nitrite was recorded.
- c. The number of deaths attended where sodium nitrite was recorded.
- d. The number of welfare checks made relating to sodium nitrite.

If you are minded refusing on time and cost grounds, please answer as much as possible sequentially from question 1.

We received your request on 09/12/2024 and have processed this under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Staffordshire Police's response to your enquiry is as follows:



Staffordshire Police holds the requested information.

- 1. From April 1st 2024 to present:
 - a. The number of reports where sodium nitrite was recorded.
 - b. The number of attendances where sodium nitrite was recorded.
 - c. The number of deaths attended where sodium nitrite was recorded.
 - d. The number of welfare checks made relating to sodium nitrite. – **Withheld.**
- 2. From April 1st 2023 to March 31st 2024:
 - a. The number of reports where sodium nitrite was recorded.
 - b. The number of attendances where sodium nitrite was recorded.
 - c. The number of deaths attended where sodium nitrite was recorded.
 - d. The number of welfare checks made relating to sodium nitrite. – **Withheld.**
- 3. From April 1st 2022 to March 31st 2023
 - a. The number of reports where sodium nitrite was recorded.
 - b. The number of attendances where sodium nitrite was recorded.
 - c. The number of deaths attended where sodium nitrite was recorded.
 - d. The number of welfare checks made relating to sodium nitrite. – **Withheld.**
- 4. April 1st 2021 to March 31st 2022
 - a. The number of reports where sodium nitrite was recorded.
 - b. The number of attendances where sodium nitrite was recorded.
 - c. The number of deaths attended where sodium nitrite was recorded.
 - d. The number of welfare checks made relating to sodium nitrite. – **Withheld.**
- 5. April 1st 2020 to March 31st 2021
 - a. The number of reports where sodium nitrite was recorded.
 - b. The number of attendances where sodium nitrite was recorded.
 - c. The number of deaths attended where sodium nitrite was recorded.
 - d. The number of welfare checks made relating to sodium nitrite. – **Withheld.**

The following exemption has been applied:

In accordance with Section 17(1) of the Freedom of Information Act, this letter represents a refusal notice for this particular request.

- Section 31 (1) (a) (b) - Law Enforcement.

Information is exempt from disclosure under S31 (1) (a) (b) where the release of Information would, or would likely to, prejudice the prevention and detection of crime and/ or the apprehension or prosecution of offenders. This exemption is qualified and prejudice-based and, as such, we are required to evidence the harm in disclosure and apply the public interest test.

Harm:

The FOI Act is 'applicant blind'. This means that we cannot, and do not, ask about the motives of anyone who asks for information. In providing a response to one person, we are expressing a willingness to

provide the same response to anyone. In this instance the information requested relates to the use of a specific substance as a cause of death, and would reveal the extent by which its use has had tragic effect as a poison.

Death as a result of poisoning could be caused by accident, but also on purpose. Disclosure of a total figure would reveal any ongoing investigations, which would have an undermining effect in the event that any criminal matters are under inquiry, thus hindering the prevention and detection of crime.

To disclose the number of deaths relevant to one specific substance would set a precedent over disclosure in relation to any other named substances; revealing the viability of each substance set against any other. This would have an adverse risk on public safety, whether that means vulnerable members of society who seek to end their own life, or any other person with mal-intent.

Public Interest Test

Factors favouring disclosure under Section 31(1)(a)(b)

There is some recent media reporting in relation to poisonings and the use of Sodium Nitrate. Disclosure would be informative, and allow for wider public discussion over such matters.

Factors favouring non-disclosure under Section 31(1)(a)(b)

Disclosure of information that undermines the operational integrity of law enforcement capabilities is highly likely to have an adverse impact on public safety and a negative effect on law enforcement generally. This risk to public safety cannot be said to be in the public interest.

Balance test

When considering whether disclosure is appropriate, we must weigh the strongest reason for disclosure against the strongest reasons for non-disclosure. In this case, whilst the factors favouring disclosure are important in that it would adhere to the basic principle of being open and transparent, we believe when weighed against the risk of disclosure undermining our ability to prevent and detect crime and hindering our ability to protect the public, then non-disclosure takes precedence.

Freedom of Information Request Appeals Procedure

1. Who Can Ask for a Review

Any person who has requested information from Staffordshire Police, which has been dealt with under the Freedom of Information Act, is entitled to complain and request an internal review, if they are dissatisfied with the response they received.

2. How to Request a Review

Requests for review of a Freedom of Information request must be made in writing within two months of the date of receipt of this email, and should be addressed to:

foi@staffordshire.police.uk

Or by Post to:

Central Disclosure Unit
Staffordshire Police HQ
PO Box 3167
Stafford
ST16 9JZ

The reference number, date of the request and details of why the review is being requested must be included. Requests for review should be brought to the attention of the Central Disclosure Unit within two months of the Force's response to the original FOI request.

3. Review Procedure

Receipt of a request for review will be acknowledged in writing. The review will be conducted by another Decision Maker who is independent from the original Decision Maker. The Central Disclosure Unit will set a target date for a response. The response will be made as soon as is practicable with the intention to complete the review within 20 working days. In more complex cases the review may take up to 40 working days.

The independent Decision Maker will conduct a review of the handling of the request for information and of decisions taken, including decisions taken about where the public interest lies in respect of exempt information where applicable. The review enables a re-evaluation of the case, taking into account the matters raised by the complaint.

4. Conclusion of the Appeal

On completion of the review the Independent Decision maker will reply to the complainant with the result of the review. If the complainant is still dissatisfied following the review they should contact the Information Commissioner to make an appeal. The Information Commissioner can be contacted via the following details:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

ICO Website for complaints link: <https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/foi-and-eir-complaints/foi-and-eir-complaints/>

Freedom of Information
Central Disclosure Unit