

20 March 2025

FOI Ref 17809

Request - You asked us the following:

I'm writing under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to request information about sodium nitrite.

Please tell me the following:

The number of incidents or crimes or reports received or attended by your police department referencing "sodium nitrite" or logged as relating to sodium nitrite.

In each case, please include a brief description which summarises what happened.

Please provide the results broken down by year for the past two years - 2023 and 2024, as well as the start of 2025, up to and including 10 February.

Please provide the data as an Excel spreadsheet.

We received your request on 11/02/2025 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.

- The number of incidents or crimes or reports received or attended by your police department referencing "sodium nitrite" or logged as relating to sodium nitrite.
In each case, please include a brief description which summarises what happened.
Please provide the results broken down by year for the past two years - 2023 and 2024, as well as the start of 2025, up to and including 10 February. – **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 Freedom of Information Act is applicant blind which 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 number of incidents and crimes received by, or attended by, police departments that reference sodium nitrate. This nitrate has been linked in recent media with self-harm incidents by ingestion in large quantities of it.

Crime reports for sodium nitrate is likely to only be reported as a theft or self-harm or forced self-harm incidents. The use of sodium nitrate could be used in big quantities 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 incidents/crimes 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)**

In recent media stories, sodium nitrate has been reported on with allegedly being related to multiple self-harm deaths following ingestion in large quantities of the product. 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

The public interest is best served by maintaining the exemption and withholding the total figure information.

Please be advised that all Freedom of Information request responses are published on the Staffordshire Police website although personal details are not included.

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.



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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