

28 May 2019

C107661

Simon Slurpeigh
fyi-request-10235-4a9bcfca@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Simon

I refer to your email of 2 May 2019 crushed ice drink machines. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

You requested:

What's your favourite kind of slushie? What's the most popular flavour of your employees?

How many slushies did you drink/provide last year? By 'you' I mean the Department of Corrections.

Do you eat or drink a slushie?

We have decided to refuse your request under section 18(h) of the OIA because we think it is frivolous or vexatious.

Corrections officers do an incredibly difficult and challenging job and come to work every day to keep New Zealanders safe.

As an organisation, our role is to support the safety and wellbeing of our staff. It is important to invest in the areas that will make a real difference to them and their ability to keep safe and do their job properly, while always being conscious of delivering value for money for taxpayers.

We take our duty of care and the health and safety of our more than 9,000 staff very seriously. During the summer of 2017/18, New Zealand experienced significantly higher temperatures than usually experienced, with Wellington recording its hottest January since records began in 1927. The heat caused significant discomfort for many people, including our staff.

At the time, the prisoner population was also increasing, exceeding 10,700 in February 2018 and peaking at 10,820 in March 2018.

Our staff worked tirelessly to manage an increased number of prisoners in hot and confined spaces and conditions. For example, at Mt Eden Corrections Facility where temperatures ranged between 27-29 degrees daily, over 1,000 prisoners were accommodated with no access to traditional external yards. The situation had the potential for significantly increased prisoner tension and aggression, and the real risk that prisoners or staff would be seriously hurt as a result.

Prisons can be volatile environments, with over 75 percent of the prisoner population having convictions for violence in their offending histories.

The heat, combined with the increasing number of prisoners, had the potential for significantly increased prisoner tension and aggression, and the real risk that a staff member or prisoner would be seriously hurt. We have a duty of care to prisoners and staff, and are legislatively obliged to operate prisons that are safe for everyone.

At the time, we took proactive steps to ensure the safety and wellbeing of staff and prisoners. These steps included:

- Ensuring that frontline staff have the ability to take breaks every few hours in a cool location, with the opportunity to safely remove their six kilogram stab resistant vests
- Providing staff with access to cold water, hand held fans and cold flannels to place on the backs of their necks.
- Considering opportunities to increase prisoners' time out of their cells
- Providing prisoners with increased access to cold showers
- Ensuring that all staff were aware of the signs of heat exhaustion and dehydration to ensure that they could intervene immediately if anyone was showing signs of being unwell.

These actions, combined with the efforts of our staff, were effective – with no major incidents occurring despite the conditions.

In preparation for the 2018/19 summer and the potential for a repeat of the previous summer's conditions, we provided crushed ice mixture (including electrolyte replacement mixtures) for staff to consume when required to reduce core body temperatures in excessive heat conditions, while minimising the risk of sodium depletion from dehydration.

Research shows that the machines offer an immediate and effective means of significantly reducing core body temperature in most situations, up to three times more effective when compared to drinking water. The machines offer an ongoing benefit by increasing safety and wellbeing, therefore improving staff performance during extreme hot weather.

Should you have any concerns with this response, I would encourage you to raise these with Corrections. Alternatively you are advised of your right to also raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Contact details are: Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M Morehu', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Michelle Morehu
Manager Ministerial Services
Corporate Services