

8 November 2017

C89773

Mark Hanna  
[fyi-request-6675-8abe31e5@requests.fyi.org.nz](mailto:fyi-request-6675-8abe31e5@requests.fyi.org.nz)

Dear Mr Hanna

Thank you for your email of 10 October 2017, requesting information about strip searches. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

Strip searches are carried out when a prisoner is first admitted to a prison, immediately before the prisoner is transferred to another prison, when the prisoner is received in a prison on transfer from another prison, or leaves or returns to or from a prison for outside employment, court appearances, medical appointments, or any other reason in accordance with the Corrections Act 2004 (the Act).

The safety and security of prisoners and staff is paramount. We place considerable emphasis on preventing contraband from entering prisons, apprehending those who attempt to smuggle it in, and eliminating opportunities for organised crime. These measures all contribute toward our bottom line of improving public safety, and our ultimate goal of reducing re-offending.

Contraband in prisons includes alcohol, communication devices, drugs, drug paraphernalia, tattoo equipment, weapons and other items. Items that are prohibited may include everyday and seemingly innocent items that while not illegal, may be used inappropriately by prisoners.

There are generally three occasions where staff can consider strip searching a prisoner. Each occasion has different legislative standards that must be met before a prisoner is searched. These occasions are:

- Event based – mandatory (section 98(7) of the Act);
- Event based – specified (section 98(6) of the Act); or
- Reasonable grounds (section 98(3) of the Act).

When determining the appropriate type of search to detect an unauthorised item staff always use the least intrusive search method that will be sufficient to retrieve the unauthorised item in each particular situation.

You requested the following information from July 2015 until the most recent month the data is available:

1. *The number of strip searches conducted on prisoners. Please break this data down by month, prison, and grounds of the strip search (e.g. section 98(3)(a) of the Corrections Act 2004).*
2. *The number of strip searches that resulted in finding contraband. Please break this data down in the same way as per 1.*
3. *The nature of the contraband items found. Please break this data down in the same way as per 1 and 2.*

I note that although numbers of strip searches have been provided to you in 2015, Corrections is not able to provide robust numbers about strip searches. We have consulted extensively within the department to establish if the requested data can be provided. Strip searches are not identified as a specified search type. Searches by way of metal detector, x-ray machine, rub-down and strip searches are all recorded in the strip search section of the Integrated Offenders Management System (IOMS), and we are unable to separate these without reading the free text field of each record.

Corrections is also unable to report on contraband found during strip searches undertaken in prisons. In addition to the aforementioned reasons, if prohibited items are found during a strip search it is recorded in the incident reporting system. Categorising searches by contraband found can only be done by reading the free text of several hundred searches (strip searches and other) and cannot be specifically identified.

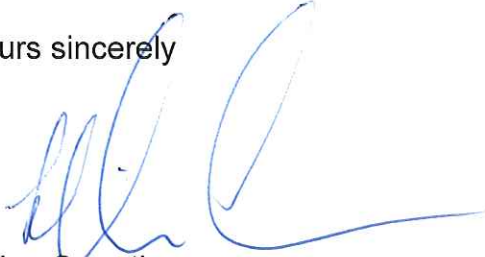
Unfortunately, this means that data provided to you previously is not accurate. We apologise unreservedly for this.

For the reasons outlined above, we cannot readily extract the number of strip searches from our electronic records. In order to identify this type of specific information, we would be required to manually review a large number of files.

In accordance with the OIA, we have considered whether to affix a charge or extend the time limit for responding. However, given the scale of the request we do not consider that this would be an appropriate use of our publicly funded resources. Therefore, this part of your request is declined under section 18(f) of the OIA, as the information cannot be made available without substantial collation or research.

I trust the information provided is of assistance. Should you have any concerns with this response, I would encourage you to raise these with the Department. 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 'Gillon Carruthers', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Gillon Carruthers  
General Manager Public Affairs  
Corporate Services