



Making Northern Ireland Safer For Everyone Through Professional, Progressive Policing

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2010-01559
Keyword: Human Resources
Subject: Ballistic Body Armour

Request and Answer:

I am writing to confirm that the Police Service of Northern Ireland has now completed its search for the information.

Question 1

I request the following information if available. From date 1972 to present time. (Please bear in mind that OHU may have come into existence after 1972).

The following is requested from OHU: -

Can OHU provide a figure reference the number of Officers both male and female who have made medical complaints reference the use and wearing of overt Heavy Ballistic Type Body Armour?

Question 2

Can OHU list the type of Injuries received or complained of?

Question 3

Can OHU provide details of any measures taken to address any complaints/injuries?
E.g. Lighter body armour provided, Officers placed on light duties etc.

Question 4

Can OHU provide figures on the number of Officers if any who were placed on other duties as a result of complaints or injuries received by wearing Ballistic Body Armour?

Question 5

Can OHU provide any Documents relating to Statistics, Research, Information or Advice given to Officers in respect of the use and wearing of overt Heavy Ballistic Type Body Armour?
E.g. General Order 89/96 B(e) (Cancelled).

Please note that in respect of 1 - 4 above. I have initially spoken with OHU on these matters. I have been informed that without checking the Personal medical files of every Officer since approximately 1972 this information would not be easily or readily available. It has been explained to me that this would take some considerable time and place an erroneous burden on the Staff at OHU.

I fully appreciate the response from OHU and do not wish to burden staff at OHU with undue work. I would if agreeable, accept and appreciate a covering report from OHU covering the issues I have raised in points 1 - 4 above. The basis of a covering report from OHU is to make Capita and the Medical Appeals Board aware if there is or has been a history of medical issues associated with the wearing of overt Heavy Ballistic Body Armour.

Answer

Section 17(5) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires the Police Service of Northern Ireland, when refusing to provide such information (because the cost of compliance exceeds the appropriate limit) to provide you the applicant with a notice which states that fact.

To provide the information to this request all records of officers who had served in PSNI or RUC since the wearing of body armour was introduced would have to be checked. The request for a report not factually based on the evidence would not appear to be possible without at least some scrutiny of the records but would also be expressing an opinion rather than reporting on held records. The evidence would need to be clearly established first. This would be a labour intensive and time consuming exercise.

It is estimated that the cost of complying with your request for information would exceed the "appropriate costs limit" under Section 12(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which is currently set by the Secretary of State at £450.

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this letter should be considered as a Refusal Notice, and the request has therefore been closed.

PSNI did take part in research on this issue in 1996 which was published on 15 November 1996, Volume 21, Issue 22 of SPINE Journal – Occupational risk factors for first onset and subsequent course of low back trouble – a study of serving police officers. You can view this using the attached link:

http://journals.lww.com/spinejournal/Abstract/1996/11150/Occupational_Risk_Factors_for_the_First_Onset_and.11.aspx.

You could request your own records where any reference to problems with body armour will be recorded, under the Data Protection Act 1998.

If you wish to make a request for 'personal data' under the Data Protection Act 1998 you will need to complete a DAT1 form, which should be completed and returned to the Data Protection Unit including the appropriate fee and proof of identity. Please see how to make a subject access request using the attached link:

www.psni.police.uk/index/support/support_subject_access_requests.htm.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland have also considered whether we can be of any assistance in terms of helping you refine your request to bring it under the cost limit, however, the nature and structure of the information unfortunately makes this impossible.

If you have any queries regarding your request or this decision please do not hesitate to contact me on 028 9070 0164. When contacting the Freedom of Information Team, please quote the reference number listed at the beginning of this letter.

If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review. You should do this as soon as possible, or in any case within two months of the date of issue

of this letter. In the event that you require a review to be undertaken, you can do so by writing to the Head of Freedom of Information, PSNI Headquarters, 65 Knock Road, Belfast, BT5 6LE or by emailing foi@psni.pnn.police.uk.

If following an internal review, carried out by an independent decision maker, you were to remain dissatisfied in any way with the handling of the request you may make a complaint, under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, to the Information Commissioner's Office and ask that they investigate whether the PSNI has complied with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act. You can write to the Information Commissioner at Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. In most circumstances the Information Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out, however the Commissioner has the option to investigate the matter at his discretion.

Please be advised that PSNI replies under Freedom of Information may be released into the public domain via our website @ www.psnj.police.uk

Personal details in respect of your request have, where applicable, been removed to protect confidentiality.