



## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



**Request Number:** F-2013-03541

**Keyword:** Operational Policing

**Subject:** Chemical Suicide Incidents

### Request and Answer:

#### Question 1

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 I seek the following information about the number of 'chemical suicides' the police force has dealt with. By 'chemical suicide' I mean incidents where one or more people have used household chemicals within an enclosed space in order to commit suicide. This is sometimes referred to as a 'detergent suicide'. The number of suspected 'chemical suicides' which have been responded to by police since January 2010.

#### Question 2

Details of each incident including:

- a. date.
- b. location.
- c. number of people involved.
- d. number of fatalities.
- e. Names of people who died (if released by police at the time)
- f. number of people injured/ requiring hospital treatment.
- g. How many officers were involved with response to the incident.
- h. Brief details of the police response to the incident.
- i. How many police officers were injured/required hospital treatment and details of their injuries/treatment.

#### Question 3

Details of the force's policy/guidelines when dealing with suspected chemical suicides.

**Answer**

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

I have today decided to:

- disclose information in response to questions 1 and 3 in full and;
- disclose information in response to question 2, withholding the full date and location, pursuant to the provisions of Section 38 (1)(a)(b) of the Act.

**Question 1**

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 I seek the following information about the number of 'chemical suicides' the police force has dealt with. By 'chemical suicide' I mean incidents where one or more people have used household chemicals within an enclosed space in order to commit suicide. This is sometimes referred to as a 'detergent suicide'. The number of suspected 'chemical suicides' which have been responded to by police since January 2010.

**Answer**

Since 2010 there have been four incidents of suspected Chemical Suicides.

**Question 2**

Details of each incident including:

- a. date.
- b. location.
- c. number of people involved.
- d. number of fatalities.
- e. Names of people who died (if released by police at the time)
- f. number of people injured/ requiring hospital treatment.
- g. How many officers were involved with response to the incident.
- h. Brief details of the police response to the incident.
- i. How many police officers were injured/required hospital treatment and details of their injuries/treatment?

**Answer**

Section 17(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires the Police Service of Northern Ireland, when refusing to provide such information (because the information is exempt) to provide you the applicant with a notice which:

- (a) states that fact,
- (b) specifies the exemption in question and
- (c) states (if not otherwise apparent) why the exemption applies.

The exemption, as well as the factors the Department considered when deciding where the public interest lies, are listed below:

Section 38(1)(a)(b) – Health and Safety

The exemption applied at Section 38 of the Act is applied because the release of all the requested details would likely identify the victim and cause harm or distress to surviving relatives. Section 38 is a prejudiced based exemption and this means it is the Public Authority's responsibility to evidence the harm. It is also a qualified exemption and a Public Interest Test must be carried out.

### **Harm Test**

Releasing the actual dates and locations where a suicide has occurred has the potential to identify the victims. This would likely cause distress and upset to the surviving relatives or friends of the deceased.

### **Public Interest Test**

#### Factors Favouring Release – Section 38

Releasing the information would promote openness and transparency. The public would be better informed of such incidents in their communities.

#### Factors Favouring Retention – Section 38

Releasing the exact date and location of these incidents would be likely to identify the victims and subsequently cause distress and suffering to the families and surviving relatives.

### **Decision**

A disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act is a release of information to the world in general and not just to an individual applicant, as once information is disclosed by FOI there is no control or limits as to who or how the information is shared with other individuals.

Disclosure of dates and locations specific to an incident of suicide has the potential to identify victims, either through a comparison of what is already in the public domain or as an incidental coincidence. There is a risk that release of the information could be used in conjunction with what is already known and assist the identification of the victims. These incidents have only occurred in the past few years and a full disclosure could cause distress to surviving friends and relatives if the victims could be identified. Information should not be released, if it is likely to endanger the physical or mental health of any individual.

I have therefore decided that it would not be in the public interest to release the dates and locations and have instead disclosed the year of the incident and the policing district in which the incident occurred.

Please see the table provided at the end of this correspondence providing details of the four incidents subject to the exemption as previously outlined. Please note: victims' names were not released by police at the time and therefore these have not been included in the response.

### **Question 3**

Details of the force's policy/guidelines when dealing with suspected chemical suicides.

### **Answer**

PSNI follow guidance from The Home Office Document 'The Safe Handling of Contaminated Fatalities' published in 2009. Please see the PSNI decision log at the end of this correspondence which refers to chemical fatalities and provides an indication of the issues considered, when responding to such incidents.

If you have any queries regarding your request or the 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](mailto: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.psnipolice.uk](http://www.psnipolice.uk)

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

	<b>Incident 1</b>	<b>Incident 2</b>	<b>Incident 3</b>	<b>Incident 4</b>
<b>Date</b>	2011	2011	2012	2012
<b>Location</b>	G District	C District	D District	C District
<b>Number of people involved</b>	1	1	1	1
<b>Fatalities</b>	1	1	1	1
<b>Names of deceased</b>	Not released	Not released	Not released	Not released
<b>Number of people injured/requiring treatment</b>	None	None	None	None
<b>Number of officers involved</b>	Approx 12	Approx 8	Approx 8	Approx 6
<b>Police response to the incident</b>	Police response was in respect to investigation of incident and identification of deceased, co-ordination of CBRN multi-agency response involving Fire, Ambulance, Public Health, recovery of body on behalf of coroner, search of vehicle re: other chemicals.	Police response was in respect to investigation of incident and identification of deceased, co-ordination of CBRN multi-agency response involving Fire, Ambulance, evacuation of adjoining properties, recovery of body on behalf of coroner, search re: other chemicals.	Police response was in respect to investigation of incident and identification of deceased, provision of CBRN advice to responders, recovery of body on behalf of coroner,	Police response was in respect to investigation of incident and identification of deceased, co-ordination of CBRN multi-agency response involving Fire, Ambulance, recovery of body on behalf of coroner, search re: other chemicals.
<b>Number of officers injured/required hospital treatment and details injuries/treatment</b>	4 Police officers (first on scene) taken to hospital as precaution.	None	None	None

## **Contaminated Fatality Section**

Scenes which involve a contaminated fatality should be dealt with in accordance with the guidance contained in the Home Office Document 'the safe handling of contaminated fatalities' published in 2009.

*This section should be completed when discussions / actions are commenced regarding the removal of the deceased from the scene*

## CBR incident report – contaminated fatality

Life declared extinct: Yes / No

Signs of life not present Yes / No

If **yes**:

Date and Time:

Person pronouncing:

If **no** give reasons:

Coroner advised: Yes / No

Coroner attended: Yes / No – unable due to contamination of scene / No – declined

Pathologist attended: Yes / No – unable due to contamination of scene / No – declined

S.I.M. appointed Yes / No Name:

CBRN DVI team tasked: Yes / No Name:

Is identification an issue: Yes / No

State reasons:

Can the remains be removed from the scene: Yes / No

If **no** contact PNCBRN Centre for further actions

If **yes** log the following in respect of each fatality:

How was the deceased contaminated: adsorption / ingestion / inhalation / inoculation / nk

What is the nature of the contamination: chemical / biological / radiological / nk

### **Actions taken to decontaminate the deceased at scene:**

*Include details of assessment of risk the contaminant presents to responders, how the risks were mitigated to enable a safe system of work, the choice of PPE and any limitations of the PPE. Also include details of DIM equipment used by staff to support working.*

## CBR incident report – contaminated fatality

### Coroners requirements:

Is a post mortem required: Yes / No  
Is identification required: Yes / No

Details:

### Actions taken to remove the deceased from the scene:

What type of body bag will be used: Normal / CBRN / other  
Requirements for storage in body bag during transport (*filter changes, ongoing DIM monitoring etc*):

Does the body bag require decontamination before transport from scene: Yes / No  
(*details*)

Body bag labelled with CB or R warning prior to transport:  
Date: Time: By

Transport method to mortuary (*reasons*):

### Risk assessment shared with undertaking staff

Date: Time: By:  
Person briefed:

### Mortuary actions:

#### Risk assessment shared with mortuary staff

Date: Time: By:  
Person briefed:

Advice provided re contaminant:

Advice provided re storage:

Advice provided re opening of body bag:

Advice provided re post mortem activities: Full PM / ID only / invasive / non-invasive



## Decision / specialist advice index

Page No.	Decision / Advice – key words only for reference	Key Task No.