



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2023-01534

Keyword: Crime/Incident Statistics Drugs and Alcohol

Subject: Drink Spiking

Request and Answer:

Your request for information below has now been considered. In respect of Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) We can confirm that the Police Service of Northern Ireland does hold the information you have requested however 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. We have explained to you below that when PSNI estimates whether the appropriate limit is likely to be exceeded, it can include the costs of complying with two or more requests if certain conditions are met. In this case those conditions are met and complying with all of your requests would in our estimation exceed that appropriate limit set out in Regulation. We have explained this further below but also we followed the Information Commissioner’s Office guidance ‘*Requests where the cost of compliance exceeds the appropriate limit*’ in relation to this request, which also provides further detail on the application of Section 12 (1) of the FOIA. This guidance is available on the ICO website at the following link:

https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1199/costs_of_compliance_exceeds_appropriate_limit.pdf

Request 1

How many women and men have reported that they have had their drinks spiked or have been spiked by needle injection between January 1st, 2021, to 30th November 2022?

Request 2

Please can you specify the ages of these men and women who have reported that they have had their drinks spiked or have been spiked by needle injection between the dates listed above.

Request 3

Can you please specify the location for where these spiking’s have been reported?

Request 4

Out of these men and women who reported they were spiked; do you have any evidence of this, i.e., toxicology reports to show that they were spiked. If you do, please can you provide the evidence to show this?

Request 5

How many men and women have reported the following crime - Administering a substance with intent to commit a sexual offence since January 1st, 2021, to 30th November 2022?

Request 6

Please can you specify the age of these men and women who have reported this specific crime.

Request 7

How many men and women have taken a urine test after reporting that they have had their drink spiked since January 1st, 2021, to 30th November 2022?

Request 8

Please can you specify the age of these men and women who have reported this specific crime and have taken a urine test to check if they have had their drink spiked?

Request 9

Please can you confirm out of these men and women who have taken a urine test, how many actually showed that they had their drink spiked?

Answers

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.

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. Section 12 of FOIA allows a public authority to refuse to deal with a request where it estimates that it would exceed the appropriate limit to either comply with the request in its entirety or confirm or deny whether the requested information is held. The estimate must be reasonable in the circumstances of the case. The 'appropriate limit' is currently £600 for central government and £450 for all other public authorities including PSNI. The relevant Regulations which define the appropriate limit for section 12 purposes are The Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulation 2004 SI 2004 No 3244. These are known as the 'Fees Regulations' for brevity.

Regulation 4(3) of the Fees Regulations states that a public authority can take into account the costs it reasonably expects to incur in carrying out the following permitted activities in complying with the request:

- (i) determining whether the information is held;
- (ii) locating the information, or a document containing it;
- (iii) retrieving the information, or a document containing it; and
- (iv) extracting the information from a document containing it.

Under those regulations PSNI can calculate the time spent on each of these permitted activities at £25 per hour (thus if the activity(s) takes more than 18 hours PSNI will be in excess of the 'appropriate limit').

When a public authority is estimating whether the appropriate limit is likely to be exceeded, it can include the costs of complying with two or more requests if the conditions laid out in Regulation 5 of the Fees Regulations can be satisfied. Those conditions require the requests to be:

- made by one person, or by different persons who appear to the public authority to be acting in concert or in pursuance of a campaign;
- made for the same or similar information; and
- received by the public authority within any period of 60 consecutive working days.

Regulation 5(2) of the Fees Regulations requires that the requests which are to be aggregated relate “to any extent” to the same or similar information. This is quite a wide test but public authorities should still ensure that the requests meet this requirement.

Enquiries made in relation to your request has identified that retrieval of information to respond to your request would exceed the FOI legislative cost of 18 hours as set by the Secretary of State.

During the time period 1st Jan 2021 – 30th Nov 2022, there were around a total 1,150 offences during this period for the following offences for drink spiking offences of '5E Endangering Life - Administering poison so as to endanger life', '8N Assault with injury - administering poison with intent to injury or annoy' and '88C Other Miscellaneous Sexual Offences - Administering a substance with intent'. Although this information is held electronically it is not held in format that provides the information without manual intervention. To respond to Request numbers 1- 3, 4 and 7-9 would require to be manually examined to determine whether the circumstances matched with 'drink spiking'. For needle spiking/spiking by injection, all offences of grievous body harm (GBH) and wounding (as this is where at attack with a sharp instrument is likely to be recorded), would require all of these offences to be manually examined to determine whether the circumstance matched with needle spiking. It is estimated it would take a conservative ten minutes to examine each occurrence so therefore would take approximately 190 hours to collate this data, and would therefore be significantly over cost. Thus putting these requests grossly over the FOI legislative cost limit.

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.

Advice and assistance

You may wish to submit a refined request in order that the cost of complying with your request may be facilitated within the 'appropriate limit'. In compliance with Section 16 of the Act, we have considered how your request may be refined to bring it under the appropriate limit.

- Request 1 – PSNI branch can provide **total numbers of persons** who have reported that they have had their drinks spiked, for the following offences: '5E Endangering Life - Administering poison so as to endanger life', '8N Assault with injury - administering poison with intent to injury or annoy' and '88C Other Miscellaneous Sexual Offences - Administering a substance with intent'.
- Request 2 – We are able to provide this information limited as per refinement in request 1.
- Request 3 – This will be subject to whether the information is completed and/ or contained in the 'modus operandi' (MO) field, which would be limited as per refinement in request 1.

However, it should be noted that these offences will not have been checked and therefore the circumstances may not match 'spiking'.

- Requests 5 and 6 – We can provide the total number of offences for the following offence '88C Other Miscellaneous Sexual Offences - Administering a substance with intent' and the ages of the victims.

For information, keyword searches are an unreliable method of collecting data from the Niche recording database because they rely on searching through unstructured data. This means that you cannot automatically determine the context of the term found in the search result and a manual review is almost always be required to decide if the result meets the criteria of the FOI request and retrieval will often exceed the appropriate cost limit.

For unstructured data fields we also cannot rely on the data having been entered in such a way as to

identify those records that are relevant. Spelling mistakes, abbreviations and aliases can all affect the reliability of a keyword search. In addition, we do not have the ability to search for keywords within external documents stored in the database, so the scope with which we can do a keyword search is limited.

Submission of a refined request would be treated as a new request, and considered in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, including consideration of relevant Part II exemptions.

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 Corporate Information Branch, 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 Corporate Information Manager, Corporate Information Branch, PSNI Headquarters, 65 Knock Road, Belfast, BT5 6LE or by emailing foi@psni.police.uk.

If, following an Internal Review carried out by an independent decision maker, you remain unhappy about how your request has been handled you have the right to apply in writing to the Information Commissioner, under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, at 'Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. There are a number of other platforms you can use to contact the ICO and these can be found on the ICO's website at the following link: [Make a complaint | ICO \(https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/\)](https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/).

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 their discretion.

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

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