

Chief Constable
Chief Constable Robert Carden
Police Headquarters
Carleton Hall Penrith,
Cumbria
CA10 2AU



9th January 2025

Dear

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST – FOI 1102/24 SODIUM NITRITE

I refer to your request for information received by Cumbria Constabulary on 9th December 2024. I note you seek access to the following information:

Please find a Freedom of Information request for your consideration below.

Please could you disclose -

1. From April 1st 2024 to present:

- a. The number of reports where sodium nitrite was recorded.*
- b. The number of attendances where sodium nitrite was recorded.*
- c. The number of deaths attended where sodium nitrite was recorded.*
- d. The number of welfare checks made relating to sodium nitrite.*

2. From April 1st 2023 to March 31st 2024:

- a. The number of reports where sodium nitrite was recorded.*
- b. The number of attendances where sodium nitrite was recorded.*
- c. The number of deaths attended where sodium nitrite was recorded.*
- d. The number of welfare checks made relating to sodium nitrite.*

3. From April 1st 2022 to March 31st 2023

- a. The number of reports where sodium nitrite was recorded.*
- b. The number of attendances where sodium nitrite was recorded.*
- c. The number of deaths attended where sodium nitrite was recorded.*
- d. The number of welfare checks made relating to sodium nitrite.*

4. April 1st 2021 to March 31st 2022

- a. The number of reports where sodium nitrite was recorded.*
- b. The number of attendances where sodium nitrite was recorded.*
- c. The number of deaths attended where sodium nitrite was recorded.*
- d. The number of welfare checks made relating to sodium nitrite.*

5. April 1st 2020 to March 31st 2021



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- a. *The number of reports where sodium nitrite was recorded.*
- b. *The number of attendances where sodium nitrite was recorded.*
- c. *The number of deaths attended where sodium nitrite was recorded.*
- d. *The number of welfare checks made relating to sodium nitrite.*
- e. *If you are minded refusing on time and cost grounds, please answer as much as possible sequentially from question 1.*

Your request for information has now been considered and I can advise you Cumbria Constabulary does hold information relevant to your request, however, there is no requirement to disclose the information to you, as the duty under Section 1(1)(b) of the Freedom of Information Act does not apply, by virtue of Section 31(1) of the Act.

Section 31(1) (Law Enforcement) is a prejudice-based, qualified exemption which means there is a requirement to describe the harm that would be caused by release of the requested information and also to consider if the public interest considerations in favour of withholding the information outweigh the considerations in favour of its release. For your information, I have set out my views on these issues below.

Harm in respect of s31(1)

The Freedom of Information Act is 'applicant blind'. This means that we cannot, and do not, ask about the motives of anyone who asks for information. In providing a response to one person, we are expressing a willingness to provide the same response to anyone. In this instance the information requested relates to the use of a specific substance as a cause of death, and would reveal the extent by which its use has had tragic effect as a poison.

Death, as a result of poisoning, could be caused by accident, but also on purpose. Disclosure of a total figure would reveal any ongoing investigations, which would have an undermining effect in the event that any criminal matters are under inquiry, thus hindering the prevention and detection of crime.

To disclose the number of deaths relevant to one specific substance would set a precedent over disclosure in relation to any other named substances; revealing the viability of each substance set against any other. This would have an adverse risk on public safety, whether that means vulnerable members of society who seek to end their own life, or any other person with malicious intent.

Public Interest Test

Considerations in favour of disclosure – There is some recent media reporting in relation to poisonings and the use of Sodium Nitrite. Disclosure would be informative and would allow for a wider public discussion over such matters.

Considerations in favour of withholding the information - Disclosure of information that undermines the operational integrity of law enforcement capabilities is highly likely to have an adverse impact on public safety and a negative effect on law enforcement generally. This risk to public safety cannot be said to be in the public interest.

Conclusion – Having weighed up the competing interests for and against disclosure, on this occasion I believe the public interest is best served by maintaining the exemption and withholding the information, as the risk to the Constabulary's ability to prevent and detect crime carries the greatest weight.

Therefore, in accordance with Section 17(1) of the Freedom of Information Act this letter serves as a Refusal Notice for your request.



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Complaint Rights

Your attention is drawn to the attached sheet, which details your right of complaint.



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