

Date: 10/01/2025
Our ref: 01/FOI/24/013784/A

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST REFERENCE NO: 01/FOI/24/013784/A

I write in connection with your request for information dated 09/12/2024, received by Greater Manchester Police (GMP) for 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

- 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.**

If you are minded refusing on time and cost grounds, please answer as much as possible sequentially from question 1.

Result of Searches

Following receipt of your request searches were conducted within Greater Manchester Police (GMP) to locate the requested information and I can confirm the information requested is held by GMP.

However, I am not obliged to provide the information requested as exemption applies.

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires Greater Manchester Police, 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 that would not otherwise be apparent) why the exemption applies

This request is exempt from disclosure under the following exemption.

Section 31(1)(a)(b) – Law enforcement

Section 31 is a qualified and prejudice-based exemption and as such, subject to a harm and public interest test.

Harm

The FOI 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.

The safety of the public is of a paramount importance to Greater Manchester Police and 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 mal-intent.

Factors favouring disclosure under Section 31

There is some recent media reporting in relation to poisonings and the use of Sodium Nitrate; disclosure would be informative and allow for wider public discussion over such matters.

Factors favouring non-disclosure under Section 31

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.

Any disclosure of information which is likely to undermine the Police Service's ability to serve the public in preventing crime can only be considered as being harmful to the public.

Balance Test

When balancing the public interest Greater Manchester Police has to consider whether the information should be released into the public domain. Arguments need to be weighed against each other. The most persuasive reason for disclosing the information would be Greater Manchester Police's accountability. This needs to be weighed against the strongest reason for non-disclosure which is the police service is charged with enforcing the law; preventing and detecting crime and protecting the people/communities we serve.

In this case this is the fact that individuals may be placed at risk and the affect it may have on the prevention and detection of crime. In this case, I believe the case for disclosure is not made out.

The police will not divulge any information that would place the safety of an individual at risk or undermine law enforcement. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing, and in this case providing assurance that the police service is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat posed by criminal activity or in this case the use of sodium nitrite and its effects, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding the tactical resource capability which could highlight which forces are focussing more on this type of investigation than other force areas.

In accordance with the Act, this letter represents a Refusal Notice for this request.