

14 December 2022

C160485



Tēnā koe 

Thank you for your email of 1 November 2022 to the Department of Corrections – Ara Poutama Aotearoa, requesting further information about contraband at Otago Corrections Facility. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

The safety and security of our sites, staff, visitors and the people we manage is our top priority. Contraband can create significant safety risks in prisons. We place significant emphasis on the prevention and detection of contraband introduction in prisons and we are constantly working to stay one step ahead of new methods used to introduce contraband.

Contraband includes alcohol, communication devices, drugs, drug paraphernalia, tattoo equipment, tobacco, tobacco paraphernalia, weapons, and other miscellaneous items that people in prison could use in inappropriate ways.

Some people go to extreme and elaborate lengths to introduce contraband into prison. Contraband may be concealed on a person's body when they come into the prison, posted in with mail or property, thrown over perimeter fencing, or smuggled into the prison by visitors. Sometimes the people we manage place a significant amount of pressure on their partners, friends, or associates to risk attempting to bring contraband into prison for them.

Methods we use to prevent contraband from entering our prisons include:

- searches of vehicles and people entering prisons
- using scanners and x-ray machines at entry points
- extensive prison perimeter security
- camera surveillance in prison visit rooms, along perimeter fences and at entry points
- requiring people in prison to wear closed overalls when in visiting areas to prevent contraband being hidden on them
- checking prisoner mail and property for contraband
- random and targeted monitoring of prisoner telephone calls
- specialist detector dog teams that patrol prison perimeters, visitor areas and cells
- prohibiting visitors who attempt to bring contraband into prisons.

We were also the first agency in New Zealand to train our detector dogs to detect new psychoactive substances, including synthetic cannabis. Our detector dog teams have a range of searching capabilities and can also detect drugs, mobile phones, tobacco and illicitly brewed alcohol.

You requested:

Following up an earlier OIA here, C154969, regarding contraband found at OCF since 2016.

I'd like to request copies of all photographs, handover notes, incident reports, contraband reports or any other reports including electronic communication such as emails.

In relation to the three incidents where commercial alcohol products were found, the two incidents where a network device was found, the one incident where a 'network device-other' was found, the two incidents where a club/ baton was found, the one incident where an item of weaponized recreational equipment was found, and the one incident where ammunition/ explosives were found.

please ensure any images are not obscured by watermarks.

If reports are not available or cannot be found, please provide a written summary of the contraband seizure incident.

please provide a breakdown of any disciplinary outcomes as a result of each contraband incident.

It is not a requirement or common practice for handover notes and emails to be created or photographs to be taken as a result of contraband being found. However, an item may be photographed if it is perishable or is of significant interest to Corrections or New Zealand Police.

We have collated all available photos in relation to the incidents you have requested to assess whether these would be released under the OIA; however, we believe that releasing these photos would prejudice the maintenance of the law, including the prevention, investigation and detection of offences. These photos can reveal details of how people can make weapons and the methods used to hide contraband.

Corrections also considers that the incident reports you have requested would be likely to prejudice the maintenance of the law, including the prevention, investigation, and detection of offences. These reports contain detailed operational information and the methods used to hide contraband. Therefore, your request for incident reports and photos is refused in accordance with section 6(c) of the OIA.

Where photos, handover notes or emails have not been taken, your request is refused in accordance with section 18(e) of the OIA, as the document alleged to contain the information does not exist or, despite reasonable efforts to locate it, cannot be found.

In accordance with section 18B of the OIA we have considered whether consulting with you to enable the request to be made in a form that would remove the reason for refusal. However, we do not consider that the request can be refined in this instance as your request is specific, but the information does exist.

In order to be as helpful as possible we have provided a summary of each incident you have requested in accordance with section 16(e) of the OIA. Please find attached Appendix One which contains a summary of each incident. Of the incidents you have requested, only six relate to a specific person. In other cases, contraband was found by staff, however, no perpetrator(s) could be identified to be held to account. We have noted the outcome in cases where it is known.

Please note that this response may be published on Corrections' website. Typically, responses are published quarterly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

I trust the information provided is of assistance. I encourage you to raise any concerns about this response with Corrections. Alternatively, you are advised of your right to also raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Contact details are: Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Ngā mihi

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Leigh Marsh', written in a cursive style.

Leigh Marsh
Acting National Commissioner

C160485 – Appendix One

Alcohol - Commercial Alcohol (2020-21)

In November 2020 a vehicle was observed outside the prison. Staff searched the area shortly after and found a box containing alcohol. They checked the surrounding area with nil found. On returning to the site the contents of the box were examined. Inside the box was alcohol, a piece of paper with writing on it and a homemade cigarette. The cigarette was Narcotic Identification System tested and it returned a positive reading for the presence of Marijuana, Harish, Hash Oil and/or THC. The contents were placed into an evidence bag and secured in a safe.

Alcohol - Commercial Alcohol (2020-21)

In July 2020 staff were processing incoming visitors to the site. One visitor appeared to be under the influence of alcohol. The visitor allowed permission for staff to conduct a search of their vehicle, where alcohol was located. The alcohol was secured into an evidence bag and the visitor was given a warning for bringing an unauthorised item onto prison property.

Alcohol - Commercial Alcohol (2021-22)

In April 2022 information was received that a group of prisoners had obtained a bottle of hand sanitiser. CCTV footage was reviewed which confirms this. CCTV footage was saved and the prisoner was charged with a misconduct.

Communications Device - Network Device (2021-22)

In December 2021 a vehicle was observed outside the prison. Staff searched the area shortly after and located a package which contained cell phones, batteries and phone chargers.

Communications Device - Network Device (2021-22)

In August 2022 a prisoner was observed by the fence line. Staff conducted a search and located various items including cell phones, tobacco, smoking papers and cannabis oil. The items were placed in an evidence bag. The prisoner was interviewed, underwent a drug test and was relocated to another unit and charged with a misconduct.

Communications Device – Other (2021-22)

In November 2021 a phone charger was found hidden in the ground.

Weapon – Club/Batton (2019-20)

In July 2019 staff were conducting a search and located a large piece of metal shaped like a cricket bat inside a wheelie bin. The item was handed to the Security Officer.

Weapon – Club/Batton (2020-21)

In November 2020 staff were conducting a cell search and located various improvised blunt weapons. The items were placed in an evidence bag and the prisoner was charged with a misconduct.

Weapons – Recreational Equipment (2020-21)

In November 2020 a prisoner used a guitar as a weapon against another prisoner. Staff ordered them to stop, and they were both moved to their respective cells and locked without further incident. Both prisoners were examined by a nurse and neither reported any injuries. Corrections' Incident Line was informed and one of the prisoners was charged for the assault.

Weapons – Ammunition/Explosives (2020-21)

In December 2020 staff located a round of ammunition in property. The ammunition was secured and Police were contacted to remove it from the site.