

21 November 2022

C160196

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email of 28 October 2022 to the Department of Corrections – Ara Poutama Aotearoa, requesting information about cell phones in prisons. 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 family, 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 detect drugs, mobile phones, tobacco, and illicitly brewed alcohol.

When a person in prison is found to be in possession of contraband, they can be charged with an internal misconduct and depending on the type of item found, they may be referred to the New Zealand Police who are responsible for laying criminal charges. If a visitor is found to be in possession of contraband, they are issued a prohibition notice that prohibits the person from entering prison grounds for a specific timeframe.

You requested:

Can you please tell me how many cellphones have been seized/confiscated (or whatever term is used) from prisoners (and in situations where a cellphone was found on visitors who it is believed intended to supply it to a prisoner) in each prison in the calendar years 2020, 2021 and 2022 to date?

The table below provides the total number of reported communication devices found in prisons by calendar year, from 2020 to 2022, as at 28 October 2022.

Communications Device / Calendar Year	2020	2021	2022*
Cell Phone	266	176	160
Cell phone battery	18	16	16
Network Device	4	3	9
Other	36	29	27
Phone Charger	156	115	97
SIM Card	99	52	55
Total	579	391	364

*as at 28 October 2022

The category 'other' is used when all other categories do not apply. This category could include items that are suspected to be used for communication.

When reviewing these figures, please note that we rely on individual sites to enter information into a central system in a timely manner. Corrections does not categorise contraband finds according to where the item was found or the manner in which it was located or intercepted. Contraband may be found in a number of locations within or around a prison, including in prison cells, during perimeter searches, or on a prisoner's person. Contraband can also be found on a visitor's person or in their vehicles.

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 black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Neil Beales
Acting National Commissioner