

06 May 2022

C149013

S 9(2)(a)

Tēnā koe S 9(2)(a)

Thank you for your request of 8 March 2022 to the Department of Corrections – Ara Poutama Aotearoa, requesting information about fires lit in prison cells. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

I apologise for the delay. Providing a response to your request required some analysis of the data you have requested, which took longer than anticipated.

You requested:

- *total number of incidents where an inmate started a fire in their prison cell across New Zealand for the years 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021*
- *total number of incidents where an inmate started a fire in their prison cell in prisons in Auckland for the years 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021*
- *total number of incidents where an inmate started a fire in their prison cell in prisons in Auckland prison (paremoremo) for the years 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021*

Corrections manages some of the most dangerous people in New Zealand in a complex and challenging environment. We are constantly working to provide the safest possible environment for both staff and people in prison, however, it is the unfortunate reality that some people in prison will attempt to cause intentional disorder. Our staff recognise the importance of understanding individuals in our custody and actively engage with them to reinforce positive behaviour.

Staff anticipate and attempt to resolve problems through the active management of people in prison, and are trained in de-escalation techniques, and interpersonal and tactical communication skills. The goal is always to manage a potentially volatile situation in a manner that minimises the likelihood of dangerous or violent behaviour.

Corrections' main priorities are public safety, the safety of our staff and those in our custody. Any person in prison who resorts to disorderly behaviour will be held to account. This may include a change in security classification, an internal misconduct or referral to New Zealand Police to decide if criminal charges will be laid.

Attached as Appendix One is a record of 'fire or arson incidents' in the timeframes requested. In accordance with Corrections' standard reporting conventions, figures are provided by financial year.

You will note a number of fire/arson incidents occurred at Auckland Region Women's Corrections Facility (ARWCF) in 2021/22. This is attributable to a small number of individuals involved, with several incidents occurring within a short time-frame.

ARWCF had a number of measures in place to manage this behaviour, including but not limited to reviewing security classification, limiting association between those that were influencing each other to engage in this type of behaviour and regular multi-disciplinary meetings to discuss and determine what is needed in order to manage the behaviour and support positive behaviour change.

Additionally, the site also implemented a notification protocol to make sure the Prison Director and Deputy Prison Director were notified promptly whenever these incidents occurred. This was in the interest of ensuring that the incidents were dealt with promptly to ensure the safety and security of all individuals in prison, and the public. All staff and people in prison involved in the incident were monitored for injury and smoke inhalation at the time. I understand that there were no injuries as a result of those fires, however, there was smoke inhalation which was able to be addressed by both prison health care and ambulance services.

We note that you have specifically requested information regarding fires in individual cells. However, the figures we can provide represent fire/arson incidents that occurred in any part of a prison. These incidents are not further categorised according to location within the prison and in order to ascertain whether that event occurred in a cell, Corrections would be required to manually review each of the incident reports. We do not consider that this would be an appropriate use of publicly resourced funds. Accordingly, your request is partially refused under section 18(f) of the OIA, as the information requested cannot be made available without substantial research or collation.

In accordance with sections 18A and 18B of the OIA, we have considered whether affixing a charge, extending the time limit or consulting you would remove the reason for refusal. However, we consider that this would not be possible in this instance.

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, consisting of a series of connected loops and a long horizontal tail.

Rachel Leota
National Commissioner

Appendix One – Fire and Arson, Activates Sprinkler and Activates Smoke Alarm Data as at 13 March 2022

Disorder event: Fire or Arson						
Number of Fire or Arson incidents, by location						
Location	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	*2021/22	Total
Auckland Prison	0	2	0	0	4	6
Auckland South Corrections Facility	3	1	8	0	0	12
Christchurch Men's Prison	0	1	1	1	0	3
Hawke's Bay Regional Prison	0	0	1	2	0	3
Invercargill Prison	1	0	0	0	0	1
Manawatu Prison	0	0	6	1	1	8
Mt Eden Corrections Facility	1	0	0	3	5	9
Northland Region Corrections Facility	0	0	1	0	0	1
Otago Corrections Facility	0	1	0	0	1	2
Rimutaka Prison	0	0	0	1	1	2
Rolleston Prison	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spring Hill Corrections Facility	0	0	1	0	7	8
Tongariro Prison	0	0	0	0	0	0
Waikeria Prison	2	0	0	1	0	3
Whanganui Prison	1	2	0	0	0	3
Arohata Prison	0	0	3	0	0	3
Auckland Region Women's Corrections Facility	3	0	3	3	22	31
Christchurch Women's Prison	0	0	0	0	4	4
<i>* Financial year 2021/22 is to 13-Mar-2022</i>						