



26 June 2012

C58410

Alex Harris  
Fyi.org

Dear Alex Harris

Thank you for your email of 24 April 2012, asking for information about strip searches on prisoners. I apologise for the delay in my response.

Public safety is our top priority and we place considerable emphasis on achieving this. Stopping contraband entering prisons, apprehending those who attempt to smuggle it in, and stamping out opportunities for organised crime all contribute toward making that priority a reality.

Contraband in prisons includes communication devices (cellphones, SIM cards, and chargers), drugs, drug paraphernalia (utensils), pornographic material, tattooing devices, and improvised weapons. It can also include everyday and seemingly innocent items that while not illegal, may be used inappropriately by prisoners. For example, even sugar may be contraband in prisons if stockpiled, as it could be used for making "homebrew". On 1 July 2011 smoking was banned in all prisons and all tobacco and related items (e.g. lighters) are considered contraband from this date.

Corrections currently employs a range of screening methods to prevent drugs and contraband from entering prisons. These measures include:

- Prison perimeter security and limiting the number of entry points to prisons
- Camera surveillance in prison visit rooms, perimeter and entry points
- Completing background checks on all potential prison visitors
- Searches of any vehicle and its occupants entering prison property
- Using scanners and x-ray machines to search prison visitors
- Banning visitors who attempt to bring contraband into prisons
- Requiring prisoners to wear closed overalls when in visiting areas, to prevent the smuggling of contraband
- All prisoner mail and property being subject to checks for contraband
- Specialist drug detection dog teams patrolling prison perimeters, visitor areas, and cells
- Identifying and analysing criminal activities in prisons through operational intelligence teams
- The Crimestoppers free telephone service (0800 555 111) that enables information about crime to be provided anonymously by offenders, staff, or members of the public.

Searches of prisoners; their property; and the places where they work, sleep and congregate is also an important part of our contraband prevention strategy. Searches are a means of finding contraband, and they are also vitally important as a deterrent, because our search policy deters prisoners and their associates from even attempting to introduce contraband into prisons.

Strip searches are carried out when a prisoner is first admitted to a prison; immediately before the prisoner is transferred to another prison; when the prisoner is received in a prison on transfer from another prison; or leaves or returns to or from a prison for outside employment, court appearances, medical appointments, or any other reason for external transportation. There are some 200,000 prisoner external transports in any given year.

Strip searching is a task that staff do not undertake lightly. Staff are extremely careful to ensure they follow the correct legislation and procedures and to conduct the search with decency and sensitivity, maintaining the prisoner's dignity and privacy. Strip searches are not conducted in view of other prisoners, and staff conducting the search are required to be the same gender as the prisoner who is searched. One half of the prisoner's body (upper or lower) must be kept clothed at all times, and where possible, staff ensure that the prisoner is unclothed for the minimum time required to conduct the search satisfactorily. It is an unpleasant task for staff and prisoners, but it is essential for the detection and prevention of contraband.

Corrections staff are not permitted to conduct any internal examinations of prisoners. An internal search can only be carried out by a Police Surgeon after a person has been arrested by the police under the 1975 Misuse Of Drugs Act Section 18(A)(2).

With respect to section 98 of the Corrections Act 2004, you have asked for:

*The number of strip searches carried out last year under s98(3)(a), and the number of those searches which resulted in finding unauthorised item(s).*

*The number of strip searches carried out last year under s98(3)(b), and the number of those searches which resulted in finding unauthorised item(s).*

Information about whether a strip search is undertaken under s98(3)(a) or s98(3)(b) of the Act is not electronically collated as it is not required for operational reasons. However, I can inform you that a total of 208,661 strip searches were carried out between 1 July 2010 and 30 June 2011.

With respect to your request for *the number of those searches which resulted in finding unauthorised item(s)*, of the 208,661 strip searches, 511 have been identified as finding unauthorised items.

The importance of strip searches as a deterrent to prisoners smuggling contraband into prisons cannot be underestimated. While it may seem

intrusive to search prisoners following every external transport, strip searches are necessary to keep our staff, prisoners and the public safe.

You have the right to ask an Ombudsman to investigate and review my response. Contact details for the Office of the Ombudsmen are:

Office of the Ombudsmen  
PO Box 10152  
Wellington

I trust this information is of assistance to you. If you have any further queries, please contact the Department's Communications Service Desk on (04) 460 3365 or email [commdesk@corrections.govt.nz](mailto:commdesk@corrections.govt.nz).

Yours sincerely



P.P. Jeanette Burns  
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