



Response Date:21/03/2025

2025/185 - Sodium Nitrite

In response to your recent request for information regarding;

The number of incidents or crimes or reports received or attended by your police department referencing "sodium nitrite" or logged as relating to sodium nitrite.

In each case, please include a brief description which summarises what happened.

Please provide the results broken down by year for the past two years - 2023 and 2024, as well as the start of 2025, up to and including 10 February.

North Wales Police do hold some information in relation to your request, however concerns have been raised in relation to providing the information requested. Therefore, a public Interest Test has been carried out to weigh up the reasons for and against disclosure; to ensure the release is in the interest of the public as a whole and not just the applicant.

Section s31(1) Law Enforcement

Section 31 (1) is a prejudice based qualified exemption, therefore there is a requirement to articulate the harm that would be caused in confirming or not that the information is held as well as carrying out a public interest test.

The Harm Test process requires North Wales Police to consider any possible harm that might arise as a result of placing the requested information into the public domain. This process considers the potential harm to:

- Individuals
- The community as a whole
- North Wales Police and the wider policing service
- Other bodies

Harm in respect of s31(1) Law Enforcement

The FOI Act is applicant blind which 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 number of incidents and crimes received by, or attended by, police departments that reference sodium nitrate. This nitrate has been linked in recent media with self-harm incidents by ingestion in large quantities of it.

Crime reports for sodium nitrate is likely to only be reported as a theft or self-harm or forced self-harm incidents. The use of sodium nitrate could be used in big quantities 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.

To disclose the number of incidents/crimes 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.

Considerations in favour of disclosure

In recent media stories, sodium nitrate has been reported on with allegedly being related to multiple self-harm deaths following ingestion in large quantities of the product. Disclosure would be informative, and allow for wider public discussion over such matters.

Considerations in favour of withholding the information

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.

Balancing Test

Law enforcement is of paramount importance and the Police service will not disclose information if to do so, it would undermine its purpose and place the safety of individual(s) at risk. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of using public money in policing appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat posed by criminals, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding the integrity of police investigations and operations.

As much as there is public interest in knowing that policing activity is appropriate and balanced in matters of law enforcement, this will only be overridden in exceptional circumstances. Any disclosure which hinders our capability and assists criminals cannot be in the public interest.

The public interest is best served by maintaining the exemption and withholding the information.

Therefore, in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this letter acts as a Refusal Notice under section 17 (1) of the legislation.

THIS INFORMATION HAS BEEN PROVIDED IN RESPONSE TO A REQUEST
UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000, AND IS CORRECT AS AT 20/03/2025