

29 April 2024

C178810

Liam Gardiner

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Tēnā koe Liam

Thank you for your email of 28 February 2024 to the Department of Corrections – Ara Poutama Aotearoa, requesting information about Corrections’ use of iced drink machines. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

As an organisation, our role is to support the safety and wellbeing of our almost 10,000 staff. Almost 90 percent of Corrections’ staff work in frontline roles, managing people in prison and on community-based sentences and orders. It is important to invest in the areas that will make a real difference to them and their ability to keep safe and do their job properly, while always being conscious of delivering value for money for taxpayers.

Corrections has a duty of care to minimise the risk of heat stress to staff, so far as is reasonably practicable, under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015. As has been widely reported in the media, Corrections is continuing to manage staffing pressures. It remains vitally important that we take appropriate measures to maintain the safety and comfort of our prison-based staff.

Prisons can be volatile environments, with over 80 percent of the prisoner population having convictions for violence in their offending histories. In the summer months frontline staff work tirelessly to manage prisoners in hot and confined spaces and conditions, sometimes while wearing heavy equipment such as stab resistant vests.

The heat, combined with the increasing number of prisoners, has the potential for significantly increased prisoner tension and aggression, and the real risk that a staff member or prisoner could be seriously hurt. We have a duty of care to prisoners and staff, and are legislatively obliged to operate prisons that are safe for everyone.

In 2019, we began to provide crushed ice drinks for prison staff to consume to reduce core body temperatures in excessive heat conditions, while minimising the risk of sodium depletion from dehydration. The iced drinks are not available to prisoners.

The decision to introduce iced drink machines in prisons followed the summer of 2017/18, when New Zealand experienced significantly higher temperatures than usual, with Wellington recording its hottest January since records began in 1927. The heat caused significant discomfort for many people, including our staff.

At that time, the prison population was also increasing, exceeding 10,700 in February 2018 and peaking at 10,820 in March 2018. In subsequent years the prison population has fluctuated, but is increasing and currently includes around 9,500 prisoners.

Research shows that crushed ice drinks offer an immediate and effective means of significantly reducing core body temperature in most situations, up to three times more effective when compared to drinking water. The machines offer an ongoing benefit by increasing safety and wellbeing, therefore improving staff performance during extreme hot weather.

You requested:

1. *How many of the 193 slushy machines that were purchased/installed in 2019, are still in use as of February 2024?*
2. *If the answer to Q1, is that they are no longer in use can you please provide a brief explanation of what happened to the 193 slushy machines (i.e sold, returned to supplier etc) and when this occurred (Month and Year)*

Of the 193 machines, 160 were in use as at February 2024.

3. *Other than the original purchase/installation costs in 2019, what are/were the ongoing operating cost of these slushy machines? (I.e Concentrate Syrups, Cups, Straws, Maintenance on the machines etc). Ideally if this can be broken down for each year, and for each type of expense.*

Please see attached Appendix One which provides Corrections' spend on iced drink machines, since 2018/19.

Maintenance includes professional cleaning and sterilisation of the machines to ensure they are compliant with food safety standards and do not cause our staff to become unwell.

Please note, these costs are not centrally collated, and this figure relies on the accuracy of records held by each prison site.

4. *If known, how many Corrections staff/Officers utilised these slushy machines (from date of install to February 2024)?*

Crushed iced drinks are available to a large number of staff in all Corrections-managed prisons. The number of staff members that have used these machines is not recorded.

This part of your request is therefore refused under section 18(g) of the OIA, as the information is not held by Corrections, and we have no reason for believing it is held by another department or agency.

5. *In total (from date of install to February 2024) how many bottles of concentrate syrup were purchased to refill the slushy machines nationally?*

As at 18 March 2024, 4,761 bottles of concentrate syrup have been purchased for use in Corrections-managed prisons.

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



Leigh Marsh
Commissioner Custodial Services