



28 April 2026

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 26 March 2026, requesting information about security incidents against Ministry staff at Work and Income offices for the past 5 years.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Please find my decision on each part of your request set out separately below.

The safety and security of our staff and the people we serve is our top priority.

Our frontline teams work with a wide range of people every day, and while most interactions are positive, there are occasions when our staff must manage challenging or inappropriate behaviour.

Many organisations have seen an increase in the complexity and stress in clients post-COVID, and the circumstances they are dealing with, and we are no different.

The evidence we're seeing is that our overall security environment is working to de-escalate situations, and functioning as intended to keep people safe.

We are seeing the benefits of significant, long-term improvements to how our sites are designed and how our security systems operate. MSD has invested \$78 million to upgrade service centres across Aotearoa, so that they support safety.

Trends that are coming through in the data from reported events are:

- The number of security events involving damage or attempted damage were at their lowest in four years in 2025
- The number of security events involving physical injury to staff were at their lowest in three years in 2025
- Lockdowns reduced in 2025 compared to 2024

While there has been an increase in security incidents where weapons or other objects were involved or were observed, the other data on damage and injury shows those incidents are being well-managed by our security processes and security environment.

Security events are categorised into 'security (with injury)' and 'security (no injury)' so that staff who receive a physical or psychological injury can be provided additional support if required.

Please see attached the Severity Ratings guidance used by staff.

1. *How many violent or threatening incidents have been recorded against MSD staff at Work and Income offices in the past five years?*
2. *What proportion of those incidents are coded as minor, moderate or serious incidents of violence or threats?*
3. *How many staff have been injured in Work and Income offices in the past five years?*

Please see the below **Appendix**, containing **Table One**, detailing the number of security events in Work and Income offices for the years 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025, broken down by with or without injury and severity.

Please note that this table details all reported security events, including abusive language and obscene behaviour.

4. *How many of these incidents have involved weapons, including knives, chainsaws, or guns? Specifically, how many incidents have involved staff having knives or guns pulled on them in the past five years?*

Please see the below **Appendix**, containing **Table Two**, detailing the number of security events in Work and Income Offices for the years 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025 with weapons and other objects used offensively involved, broken down by severity.

Events involving 'weapons' may include anything that the person reporting considered to be used (or able to be used) offensively. Examples include sticks, cups, phones, vape pens etc that may be thrown or threatened to be thrown, as well as knives or other bladed weapons. Reporting also includes events where the weapon was observed (or believed to be present) or voluntarily declared without necessarily being presented or used in a threatening manner.

The Ministry would like to note that event descriptions do not consistently include information to accurately answer 'specifically, how many incidents have involved staff having knives or guns pulled on them', and this question would require reading through the details of all events, including event details and any investigation findings.

Therefore, this request has been refused under section 18(f) of the Act. as substantial manual collation would be required to collate this information. If held, this information would only be contained within individual client files, which would each require manual review to respond to your request. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

5. *How many incidents have involved damage to Work and Income offices in the past five years?*

Please see the below **Appendix**, containing **Table Three**, detailing the number of security events in Work and Income Offices for the years 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025 that involved damage, including attempted damage, broken down by severity.

6. *How often are Work and Income offices going into lockdowns due to threats against staff or unsafe situations for them?*

Our standard process is to go into lockdown when there is an immediate or imminent threat. Many of these incidents are threats over the phone. We work closely with our partners at NZ Police to ensure any threats or events are managed in the appropriate way.

Many lockdowns are for short periods, and we work to get back to business as usual as soon as possible.

Please see the below **Appendix**, containing **Table Four**, detailing the number of lockdowns of Work and Income Offices for the years 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025, broken down by severity.

Lockdowns may be called any time there is a present or threatened risk – sites have full authority to call a lockdown whenever they think it may be required.

7. How many complaints about safety have staff made to Ministry of Social Development in the past five years?

All staff are encouraged to report security events. Increased reporting of all security events is a sign of a strong safety culture.

Support after any event and debriefing also plays an important role, as does engagement with staff about any changes in security settings.

In terms of any complaints about safety, the Ministry of Social Development does not have a centralised reporting system that records all complaints made by staff about safety. To locate all information in scope of your request would require substantial manual collation. As such, I refuse your request under section 18(f) of the Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

I will be publishing this decision letter, with your personal details deleted, on the Ministry's website in due course.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with my decision on your request regarding security incidents at Work and Income offices, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi nui



Anna Graham
General Manager
Ministerial and Executive Services



Table One: The number of in-person security events in Work and Income offices for the years 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025, broken down by with or without injury and severity in relation to MSD staff.

Incident type/severity	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
Security (no injury)	1636	2202	3200	3707	3609	14354
0. No Consequence	73	168	189	214	275	919
1. Minor	765	1103	1667	1830	1743	7108
2. Moderate	708	839	1226	1387	1373	5533
3. Major	89	80	117	274	214	774
4. Severe	1	12	1	2	4	20
Security (with injury)	4	9	25	18	10	66
1. Minor	1	1	3	3	2	10
2. Moderate	1	3	7	3	3	17
3. Major	0	1	12	10	5	28
4. Severe	2	4	3	2	0	11
Grand Total	1640	2211	3225	3725	3619	14420

Table Two: The number of security events in Work and Income Offices for the years 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025 with weapons involved, broken down by severity.

Incident severity	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
0. No Consequence	0	4	0	1	0	5
1. Minor	6	12	5	5	6	34
2. Moderate	17	11	12	17	20	77
3. Major	7	6	18	16	21	68
4. Severe	0	2	1	0	0	3
Grand Total	30	35	36	39	47	187

Table Three: The number of security events in Work and Income Offices for the years 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025 that include damage or attempted damage, broken down by severity.

Incident severity	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
0. No Consequence	7	7	4	3	6	27
1. Minor	30	47	43	41	25	186
2. Moderate	44	66	79	86	63	338
3. Major	16	27	39	55	41	178
4. Severe	2	3	3	3	1	12
Grand Total	99	150	168	188	136	741

Table Four: The number of lockdowns of Work and Income Offices for the years 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025, broken down by severity.

Incident severity	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
0. No Consequence	2	0	4	6	4	16
1. Minor	16	48	102	105	77	348
2. Moderate	81	107	201	236	212	837
3. Major	49	51	75	192	146	513
4. Severe	2	6	7	5	2	22
Grand Total	150	212	389	544	441	1736

Notes:

All tables:

- All data is from STAR, MSD's Health Safety and Security reporting system.
- All reported security events have been included in this count, including e.g. abusive language and offensive behaviour, and other behaviours intended or likely to cause harm.
- Staff are encouraged to report all such events, regardless of how serious they may have been.
- Event severity is assigned locally, based on how people have been affected.
- These counts generally exclude events where the contact was via phone or email (exception is Table Four, lockdowns, where a phone-based threat may result in a lockdown).

Severity Ratings

STAR doesn't automatically determine the severity of an event or incident. It's up to the manager to determine the severity when they review the event or incident. These guidelines will assist in determining the severity of an event or incident.

Security Severity Rating

No Consequence

No Consequence means the incident does not directly impact on the safety or wellbeing of MSD staff. It will be recorded as 'No Consequence', even if there may be more serious consequences for another party. (e.g. a client threatens to commit a crime against a third party.) Depending on the situation, such as someone in danger, it may still be appropriate to notify the police.

Examples of No Consequence incidents include:

- a client threatens to harm a landlord
- a client mentioned that they damaged non ministry property
- a disagreement has taken place between the client and someone else

Minor

A minor incident has very little impact on staff or others present. Staff are momentarily unsettled but then move on with their day unaffected. There is no lasting impact on the staff member and they are able to carry on.

Examples of Minor incidents include but aren't limited to:

- A client is denied entry due to intoxication
- A client threatens to commit a crime (eg burglary, shoplifting or harm to a third party)
- A client becomes aggressive or swears when unhappy about a decision, but the situation is easily de-escalated (and the staff member does not feel impacted by the behaviour)
- Clients have a fight outside the office (no impact on staff)
- A client threatens to self-harm*

*if the staff member is affected by this threat then the severity should be increased to reflect the impact on the staff member.

A minor incident may still have a significant impact on a third party (ie someone not present and not an MSD employee.) For example, a threat to harm someone's landlord should still be taken seriously and reported to Police but as it did not impact on MSD staff or clients present the consequences for MSD in STAR are minor.

Moderate

A moderate incident has some impact on staff or others present. The impact may be physical (e.g. heart racing, or becoming flustered) or psychological. Those affected by the incident may require reassurance or support and the client causing the incident may need to be warned (or if this is repeat behaviour, it may result in the client being trespassed.) The staff member is affected and may want to debrief both the situation and the actions that were taken with a Trainer/Manager/colleague in relation to what happened technically and interpersonally.

Examples of Moderate incidents include but aren't limited to:

- Unauthorised access to MSD property (including a breach of trespass)
- Threats to harm (including veiled or indirect threats)
- Inappropriate emails or nuisance phone calls
- A client is aggressive or abusive and this cannot be easily de-escalated
- A client threatens to self-harm and the staff member is impacted by this threat

Major

A major incident will have had quite an impact on staff or others present. This may be physical or psychological and includes situations where staff weren't physically harmed, but could have been. The client will almost certainly be warned, and may be trespassed depending on the situation. The staff member may require the assistance of EAP. The staff member is upset and shaken, they may need a break from work and perhaps to leave the office environment altogether until they have had a chance to gather themselves and debrief – this could be for a short period, or potentially for the remainder of the day.

Examples of Major incidents include but aren't limited to:

Attempts to harm staff (by throwing objects, trying to hit/spit or kick, etc.)

Bringing a weapon to a site

Direct threats to the safety of staff (including any threats to kill)

Damage to property

As a general rule if the site is put into lockdown, or there is Police involvement

Severe

A severe incident will have had a significant impact on staff or others present. People will likely require follow up support. It is highly likely the client will be trespassed as a result of the incident. The staff member may require the assistance of EAP. The staff member is significantly / seriously impacted (physical or psychological injury). They are unable to continue work and are likely to require a serious debrief and support to return to work. The incident has impacted them to a level where they have ongoing effects e.g.: sleepless nights, constantly reflecting on what happened. EAP or other support is likely to be required.

Examples of Severe incidents are but aren't limited to:

A client assaults a staff member (including spitting, etc.)

Arson causing the site to be evacuated or closed

Fatality

Fatality is the highest severity rating if a staff member passes away due to an accident, it's not to be used for death threats or suicide threats.

Accident or Injury, Pain and Discomfort, Near Miss or Hazard Severity Rating

Minor

Nil recovery time required

Pain and/or discomfort that does not require medical attention

Nil recovery time required

Moderate

Injury or illness with non-severe temporary disabling effects, including to a person's health

First aid and/or referral to medical professional

Psychological trauma requiring some counselling support

Requires up to 1 month for recovery

Major

Injury or illness with temporary severe disabling effects, including to a person's health

Advanced first aid and a visit to a medical practitioner or hospital

Psychological trauma requiring long-term counselling support

Requires 1-3 months for recovery

Severe

Injury or illness with permanent or long-term severe disabling effects, irreversible health damage and/or death

Severe psychological trauma requiring long-term counselling support

Immediate emergency extensive medical assistance and hospitalisation

Requires 3+ months for recovery