



Ministry  
of Defence

Defence Equipment & Support  
Secretariat  
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Mr M Drew

request-551429-  
b7994a0e@whatdotheyknow.com

Our Reference:  
FOI2019/03105

Date:  
08 April 2019

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Dear Mr Drew

I am writing to provide you with a substantive response to your recent request for information about 5.56mm ammunition. It has been handled in accordance with the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000.

You previously submitted the following:

***How many rounds of ammunition below 0.50 or 12.7mm calibre does the UK Armed Forces use per year? (i.e. small arms ammunition) by year since 2014. If possible - 1. by calibre, and 2. whether on training or live usage***

The Army Secretariat responded on 8 March 2019 (Reference: FOI2019/1714/18/3), asking you to refine your request and advising that while the Ministry of Defence (MOD) holds the information, to provide it would exceed the financial limit of £600 as set out in Section 12 of the FOI Act. This equates to the estimated cost of one person spending 3.5 working days to determine whether the information is held and locating, retrieving and extracting it. For example; data relating to the amount of ammunition used on operations is not centrally held and could only be obtained by consulting every military unit. It was estimated that it would take over six working days to do this. You were also advised that even this were possible, the information would likely fall within the scope of qualified exemptions of the FOI Act, including Section 26 (Defence).

Following advice from the Army Secretariat about how you could refine your request, you resubmitted it. Thank you for doing so. The details are:

***How many rounds of 5.56mm calibre ammunition was used by the UK MOD by year since 2014. Whether used on training or live usage?***

It has been passed to the Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S) area of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and I can confirm that some of this information is held.

Details of the total rounds of 5.56mm ammunition issued for use by the Armed Forces in calendar years 2014 and 2015 are no longer held, while the total amounts issued in each full year since then are provided in the following table:

Calendar year	Total rounds of 5.56mm calibre ammunition issued to UK Armed Forces
2016	71,543,151
2017	99,161,225
2018	78,001,020

It is not possible to provide a breakdown of ammunition provided for operational and training purposes for these years. Aside from the fact that this information is not centrally held and could only be provided if all military units were consulted, it also falls within the scope of qualified exemption Section 26(1)(a) and (b) of the FOI Act. This exemption relates to information which if disclosed would or would likely prejudice: the defence of the British Islands or any colony; plans for future military capabilities; and the capability, effectiveness or security of the Armed Forces of the Crown or any forces cooperating with them.

When considering the application of Section 26 it was necessary to undertake a Public Interest Test, to weigh the factors in favour of disclosure against those for withholding. There is public interest in releasing the information, which would enhance the accountability of government and demonstrate a commitment to openness and transparency, thus increasing trust and making the Government more accountable to the electorate. However, releasing could also provide known and potential adversaries with details about the general amounts of ammunition provided for use by the Armed Forces on operations. This could be used to make considered estimates about our general stockholdings which could prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of the Armed Forces; potentially endangering military personnel and civilians.

The amount of 5.56mm ammunition used for training purposes does not fall under the provisions of Section 26. While the amounts of some other types of munitions have previously been published, to do so as part of this request would allow a simple deduction of those numbers to be taken from the amounts provided in the table above so that the operational numbers could be determined.

In conclusion, while there are general arguments in favour of disclosing the numbers of 5.56mm ammunition issued for training and operational purposes, these are outweighed by the arguments in favour of withholding the information.

If you are not satisfied or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact us in the first instance at the address above. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, Ground Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review must be made within 40 working days of the date on which the attempt to reach informal resolution has come to an end.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not normally investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website, <http://www.ico.org.uk>.

Yours sincerely

Defence Equipment and Support Secretariat