

10 April 2024

██████████
Reporter
Wairarapa Times-Age
████████████████████

REF: OIA-14939

Dear ██████████

Request made under the Official Information Act 1982

Thank you for your email of 18 March 2024 requesting the following information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act):

- *Is there any data for how many times road crews may have been verbally abused by drivers while working in Wairarapa? Maybe in the past 12 months.*

NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi (NZTA) has only received and recorded three reports in the last 12 months as follows:

- In 2023 two instances of abuse occurred towards road workers in the Wairarapa region. One incident involved a member of the public verbally abusing a road worker, and the second involved another member of the public verbally abusing then physically assaulting and injuring a road worker.
- In 2024, a driver of a vehicle behaved in a threatening manner that caused a group of road workers in the Wairarapa to take evasive action to prevent being struck.

It should be noted that the above information may not confirm an accurate number as it is based on anecdotal evidence, as NZTA does not hold reports of abuse to road workers in the Wairarapa prior to 2023. In saying this, engagement with our contractors and data collected from worksites throughout New Zealand indicate that occupational violence is increasing each year.

While serious instances of abuse are recorded, the feedback from our contractors is that many less serious incidents are not, which means that official statistics may not tell the whole story. NZTA takes any threats to our staff, partners, contractors and the public very seriously and will report all serious incidents to New Zealand Police. We also encourage our contractors to report all instances of abuse.

- *Has there been an increase [statistically or anecdotally] in either verbal abuse [...] over the past few years?*

Again, we cannot accurately answer this question. We can, however, comment that verbal abuse towards road workers frequently occurs, particularly when the Remutaka Hill (State Highway 2 (SH2)) is closed for routine maintenance or other work as required.

Unfortunately, abuse towards road workers is commonly regarded as “part of the job”. But we know anecdotally that, from talking with our contractors, there is an increase in instances such as abusive language, threats of violence, items being thrown at road workers, and drivers ignoring traffic management which endangers the safety of road workers.

- *Any other comments on drivers behaviour around road crews?*

Crews regularly receive comments from people driving through work sites, but these are mostly not reported. This is especially as not all comments to road workers can be considered abusive or offensive.

The people you see on worksites are doing their jobs to keep our state highways and local roads safe and up to standard for everyone that uses them. We recognise that the delays caused by roadworks can be frustrating, but our contractors deserve to work in a safe environment like everyone else. There is no excuse for the appalling abuse and threats which are unfortunately directed at roadworkers in New Zealand every day.

It is the responsibility of every driver to treat road workers with respect, comply with the law and not endanger others through their actions. Incidents where roadworkers are threatened or harmed only increase travel delays. Our priority is the safety of our road crews and, if they are being threatened and abused, we have to stop work to keep them safe – which means the job takes longer to complete and delays for drivers.

The following video links to our YouTube channel, include road workers’ reflections about encounters with drivers:

- <https://youtu.be/02RB1yg1EZI?si=VpVL0nDNZEKOW9UU>
- <https://youtu.be/TGEHljYnqOU?si=rpgF-4UN5cRrbH13>
- <https://youtu.be/WcU5xSntux8?si=8zd7-RgQLakPIJ1y>

In line with NZTA policy, this response will soon be published on our website, with personal information removed.

If you would like to discuss this reply with NZTA, please contact Felix Marwick, Media Manager, by email to felix.marwick@nzta.govt.nz or by phone on (021) 370 481.

Yours sincerely



Anthony Fewster

Head of Health, Safety and Wellbeing