

# Use of Force by Police in BC (2020)

## INTRODUCTION

This report presents 2020 data across a range of different force options<sup>1</sup> for police in BC. The data and analyses cover both displays and applications (e.g., weapon discharges or baton strikes). More detailed data and analyses of specific force options, including agency-specific data and trend analyses across years, can be found in additional reports available on [BC's crime, police, and police resource statistics web site](#).

The analyses in this report are based on aggregate use-of-force data reported to Policing and Security Branch (PSB) by all BC police agencies. It's important to note that the method for counting displays and applications varies between different force options included in this report. For example, firearm discharges are counted by the number of incidents with a firearm discharge reported, and baton applications are counted by the number of subjects. Further details are available in [Key Definitions and Data Qualifiers](#).

This data is collected by Policing and Security Branch (PSB) through an annual request. The request for 2020 summary data, included new fields for general occurrence (GO) reports, intended to provide context to the use-of-force data.

GO reports are typically written when officers are involved in an operational policing response to an incident. Specific definitions and procedures vary between agencies. GO report data do not represent all interactions with police – only those for which a GO report was written.

PSB uses the information collected from police agencies about the use of force to monitor compliance with provincial policing standards and identify priorities for further study, standards, or training. The information is also used by police agencies to inform local training and policies.

## SUMMARY

- Most operational policing responses in BC are carried out without the use of force, and most use of force is limited to display only without application. Police agencies across BC reported 4,750 total uses of force in 2020 (displays and applications) for a rate of 3.12 uses of force per 1,000 GO reports, which corresponds to about 0.3% of all GO reports ([Table 3](#)).
- Similar to the observations in 2019, in 2020, the most frequent force option reported was firearm display (without discharge), followed by CEW display. The least frequent force option reported was firearm discharge ([Table 1](#) and [Figure 1](#)). For both 2019 and 2020, over 99% of firearm use reported was display only, and firearm displays accounted for just under half (48%) of the total uses of force.
- In this publication, firearm displays are counted by number of officers who displayed their firearm (without discharge) per subject, in an incident. As such, there can be multiple firearm displays in the same incident. For example, among BC's municipal police departments in 2020, there were roughly 1.4 displays per incident involving a firearm display. If this ratio is used to estimate the number of incidents in which a firearm was displayed across all BC police agencies, firearm display incidents would still be the most frequent force option (40% of all force options reported).
- Over three-quarters (77.8%) of the total use of force reported by BC police in 2020 was limited to display of a force option only, consistent with 2019 ([Table 1](#)). The overall rate of displays (2.42 displays per 1,000 GO reports) was about three-and-half times higher than the overall rate of applications (0.69 applications per 1,000 GO reports; [Table 3](#)).
- All force options had more displays than applications, except for oleoresin capsicum (OC) spray and baton use, where applications represented 88.3% and 63.0% of OC spray and baton uses in 2020, respectively, similar to 2019.

<sup>1</sup>The specific force options analyzed include the use of firearms, extended range impact weapons, oleoresin capsicum spray, batons, and conducted energy weapons, as well as deployments of police service dogs (PSD) with a PSD bite.

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- The records management system used by police agencies in BC includes a field for noting whether a subject was perceived by the officer to be emotionally disturbed. Subjects were scored as perceived to be emotionally disturbed<sup>2</sup> (EDP) in 26.3% of all uses of force in 2020, which was similar to 2019.
- The data suggest that EDP subjects may be over-represented in certain force options. In 2020, EDP subjects made up a higher proportion of force applications (36.5%) than displays (23.4%), particularly in applications of extended range impact weapons (49.7%) and conducted energy weapons (55.5%), similar to 2019. In addition, while displays were still more frequent than applications for EDP subjects, the display-to-application ratio for EDP subjects was lower than the overall display-to-application ratio.
- The records management system also includes a field for noting whether a GO report is mental health-related. Of the 1,524,168 GO reports that police agencies recorded in 2020, 87,611 had the mental health flag selected, constituting 5.7% of all GO reports ([Table 2](#)). Caution must be used when comparing proportions of EDP subjects of use of force (26.3% of all subjects) to the proportion of GO reports with the mental health flag selected (5.7%). The lower proportion of mental health flags may reflect an underutilization of the mental health flag in GO reports, as it is not a mandatory field and agency practices may differ.

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<sup>2</sup>EDP figures are based on whether the subject was perceived by the officer to be, and recorded by the officer as, an emotionally disturbed person (EDP). As counts of EDP subjects are reflective of an officer's perception and records, they may not be completely reflective of the actual number of EDP subjects. The term "emotionally disturbed person" in the police records management system is defined as "a subject who appears to be mentally unstable and who might pose a threat to an investigator, him/herself, or others."

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## OVERALL SUMMARY TABLES

See [Key Definitions and Data Qualifiers](#) for more detailed information about the variables presented in the below tables.

**Table 1: Use of Force by Specific Force Options for BC Police, 2020**

	All Force Options	Firearms	ERIWs	OC Spray	Batons	CEWs	PSD
		Applications: # of incidents Displays: # of officers	# of subjects	# of subjects	# of subjects	Applications: # of subjects Displays: # of officers	# of deployments with bites
<b>Total uses</b>	4,750	2,290	697	206	100	1,143	314
<b>Applications (% total uses)</b>	1,056 (22.2%)	8 (0.3%)	145 (20.8%)	182 (88.3%)	63 (63.0%)	344 (30.1%)	314
<b>Displays (% total uses)</b>	3,694 (77.8%)	2,282 (99.7%)	552 (79.2%)	24 (11.7%)	37 (37.0%)	799 (69.9%)	
	All Force Options	Firearms	ERIWs	OC Spray	Batons	CEWs	PSD
<b>Total uses involving EDP subject (% total uses)</b>	1,250 (26.3%)	396 (17.3%)	248 (35.6%)	79 (38.3%)	30 (30.0%)	468 (40.9%)	29 (9.2%)
<b>Applications involving EDP subject (% total applications)</b>	385 (36.5%)	3 (37.5%)	72 (49.7%)	68 (37.4%)	22 (34.9%)	191 (55.5%)	29 (9.2%)
<b>Displays involving EDP subject (% total displays)</b>	865 (23.4%)	393 (17.2%)	176 (31.9%)	11 (45.8%)	8 (21.6%)	277 (34.7%)	

**Note 1:** All force options is the sum of all uses of firearms, extended range impact weapons (ERIWs), oleoresin capsicum (OC) spray, batons, and conducted energy weapons (CEWs), as well as deployments of police service dogs (PSDs) with a PSD bite (applications).

**Note 2:** The counting method for each force option is listed below the force option, such as number of subjects or number of deployments with a PSD bite. Force options where there are different counting methods for applications or displays have both methods listed. For more information, see [Key Definitions and Data Qualifiers](#).

**Note 3:** EDP figures are based on whether the subject was perceived by the officer to be, and recorded by the officer as, an emotionally disturbed person (EDP). As counts of EDP subjects are reflective of an officer's perception and records, they may not be completely reflective of the actual number of EDP subjects. The term "emotionally disturbed person" in the police records management system is defined as "a subject who appears to be mentally unstable and who might pose a threat to an investigator, him/herself, or others."

**Table 2: General Occurrence (GO) Reports for BC Police**

	GO Reports	GO Reports with Mental Health Flag (% of all GO Reports)
<b>2020</b>	1,524,168	87,611 (5.7%)

**Table 3: Total Use of Force in Relation to GO Reports for BC Police, 2020**

	Overall	Involving EDP Subjects
<b>Rate of Use of Force per 1,000 GO Reports</b>	3.12	0.82
<b>Rate of Applications</b>	0.69	0.25
<b>Rate of Displays</b>	2.42	0.57

**Note 1:** Total use of force includes all uses of firearms, ERIWs, OC spray, batons, and CEWs, as well as PSD applications.

**Note 2:** EDP figures are based on whether the subject was perceived by the officer to be, and recorded by the officer as, an emotionally disturbed person (EDP). As counts of EDP subjects are reflective of an officer's perception and records, they may not be completely reflective of the actual

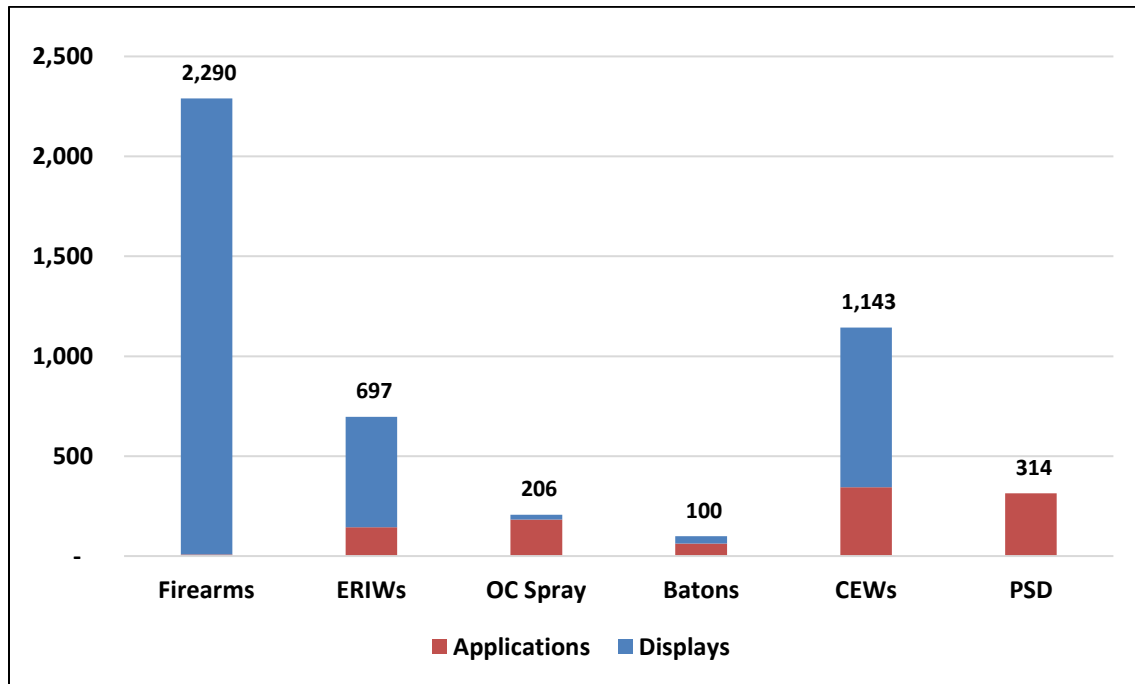
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number of EDP subjects. The term “emotionally disturbed person” in the police records management system is defined as “a subject who appears to be mentally unstable and who might pose a threat to an investigator, him/herself, or others.”

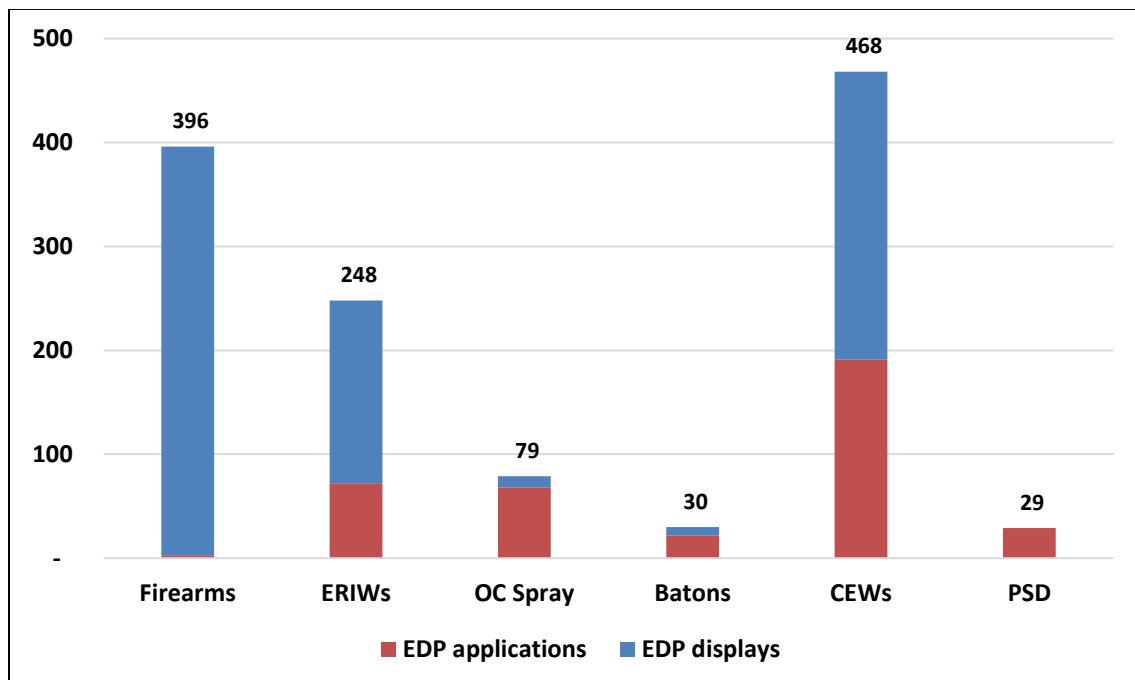
**Note 3:** Rates are rounded to the nearest 0.01, which may affect calculations.

### OVERALL SUMMARY CHARTS

**Figure 1: Use of Force by Specific Force Options for BC Police, 2020**



**Figure 2: Use of Force involving EDP Subjects by Specific Force Options for BC Police, 2020**



## KEY DEFINITIONS AND DATA QUALIFIERS

### General Occurrence (GO) Reports

A GO report is typically written when officers are involved in an operational policing response to an incident. Specific requirements beyond the policies of the Police Records Information Management Environment (PRIME-BC) may vary by agency. PRIME-BC is the records management system used by all police agencies in BC.

Numbers of GO Reports in this report are intended to reflect all GO reports extracted from PRIME-BC for the requested year by all agencies in BC. As such, figures may include counts that some agencies may typically exclude, such as records that may not involve reportable occurrences as per PRIME-BC or agency policies.

### General Occurrence Reports with the Mental Health Flag

GO reports with the mental health flag represent only GO reports where the mental health study flag translation was selected and as such, the number of mental health flags likely underestimates the prevalence of incidents that involved persons with mental health concerns. A lower number may reflect an underutilization of the mental health flag in GO reports, as it is not a mandatory field and agency practices may differ.

For example, the flag data would not include GO reports that **did not** record any mental health concerns at all. As well, the flag data would not include GO reports where the flag was **not** selected and the mental health concern was noted elsewhere, such as in another field, another report, or in an agency-specific template.

This counting method is intended to ensure consistency between agencies' mental health figures, and the mental health flag was determined to be the most practical and reliable way for agencies to extract their data on the number of incidents involving persons with mental health concerns.

### Use-of-Force Data

The data in this report include numbers on police operational use of **firearms**, **extended range impact weapons** (ERIWs), **oleoresin capsicum** (OC) **spray**, **batons**, **conducted energy weapons** (CEWs), and **police service dogs** (PSDs). Data include applications (including discharges) and displays, except that PSD data only include deployments with a PSD bite (applications).

Data for different force options are combined in this report and are comparable, even though different force options may be counted in different ways in these publications. Specifically:

- Firearm discharges are presented by number of police incidents with a firearm discharge;
- Firearm displays, CEW displays, and PSD applications are presented by number of officers who used the force option per subject of the force option in a police incident; and
- All uses of ERIWs, OC spray, batons, as well as CEW discharges, are presented by number of subjects of the force option in a police incident.

Use of force may be attributed to a different police agency from where the involved officer was employed in some cases, such as incidents involving seconded police officers, integrated emergency response teams, or requests for assistance from other police agencies.

### Use-of-Force Data and Perceived Emotional State of Subject

Data on emotional state are based on whether the subject was perceived by the officer to be, and recorded by the officer as, an emotionally disturbed person (EDP). The term "emotionally disturbed person" in PRIME-BC is defined as "a subject who appears to be mentally unstable and who might pose a threat to an investigator, him/herself, or others."

As counts of EDP subjects are reflective of an officer's perception and what the officer recorded in the use-of-force report, counts may not be completely reflective of the actual number of EDP subjects.