

Police Firearm Discharges (2007–2020) and Displays (2019–2020)

INTRODUCTION

Each year, Policing and Security Branch (PSB) collects summary data from police agencies in BC on the number of police firearm discharge incidents, including if the discharge resulted in injury or death.

Since 2019, the data request has included questions about police firearm displays, where an officer drew their firearm and displayed it to, or pointed it at, a person but did not discharge the firearm. This included questions about the perceived emotional state of the subject. The 2020 data request introduced new questions about general occurrence (GO) reports recorded by police agencies in BC ([Table 1](#)). A GO report is typically written when officers are involved in an operational policing response to an incident.

This report presents a 14-year summary of police firearm discharge data from 2007-2020 and a two-year summary of police firearm display data for 2019-2020. This report also presents 2020 firearm discharge and display data in relation to data on GO reports.

Throughout this report, firearm discharges are presented by number of police incidents with a firearm discharge, and an incident can include more than one discharge by the same or different officers. Firearm displays are presented by number of officers who displayed their firearm (without discharge) per subject of the display in an incident.

The firearm discharge and display data presented in this report include operational incidents involving a person. Excluded from analyses are firearm discharges involving animals (for humanitarian or self-defence reasons) and accidental firearm discharges in a non-operational context (e.g., while cleaning a gun).

Injuries and deaths included in this report only include those caused by a police firearm.

Firearm use is attributed to the police agency that was in command of the incident in which the firearm use occurred. This may be 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.

In addition to public reporting, 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

- In Canada, firearms are classified as a lethal force option and may only be displayed or discharged towards a person when the officer believes on reasonable grounds that their life or the life of another person is in danger¹.
- Firearm use by BC police is rare. Across all BC agencies in 2020, 2,282 firearm displays and 8 firearm discharge incidents were reported. The rate of firearm discharges was 0.005 per 1,000 GO reports, which corresponds to 0.0005% of all GO reports. Firearm displays had a GO report rate of 1.50 per 1,000, notably higher than for discharges but still rare, corresponding to 0.15% of all GO reports ([Table 1](#)).
- The subject was listed as perceived to be emotionally disturbed² (EDP) in a 17% of firearm displays in 2020 ([Table 3](#)), the same proportion as in 2019.

¹Specifically, in the *Criminal Code of Canada*, s. 25(1) authorizes police to use as much force as reasonably necessary in the administration or enforcement of the law and s. 25(3) clarifies that legal protections for police using lethal force only apply if the police believe "on reasonable grounds that it is necessary for the self-preservation of the person or the preservation of any one under that person's protection from death or grievous bodily harm."

²EDP 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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- Consistent with 2019 data, in 2020, more than 99% of police firearm use in BC was display only, with 2,282 firearm displays and 8 firearm discharge incidents reported. The data suggest that firearm displays are generally very effective in generating compliance without being discharged.
- In these publications, firearm displays are counted by number of officers who displayed their firearm (without discharge) per subject of the display in an incident. As such, there can be multiple firearm displays per incident. For example, for BC's municipal police departments in 2020, there were roughly 1.4 displays per incident with a firearm display. However, if this ratio is used to estimate counts of firearm display incidents for all BC police, firearm display incidents would still represent over 99% of firearm use.
- The number of firearm displays reported in 2020 was 25% higher than the 1,827 firearm displays reported in 2019 ([Table 3](#)). A number of factors may have contributed to this increase, including:
 - **A true increase in the number of firearm displays**, which may be influenced by changes in the policing environment, such as an increase in severity of some types of violent offences or other risk factors.
 - **More thorough reporting of firearm displays.** [BC Provincial Policing Standards](#) on use-of-force reporting took effect in February 2020. The introduction of these standards may have improved compliance with the use-of-force reporting threshold, which includes firearm displays. In addition, because firearm displays were introduced starting with PSB's 2019 data request, changes in 2020 data may in part reflect increased familiarization with the reporting methodology and improvements in data quality between 2019 and 2020.
 - A combination of these and other factors.
- Caution must be used when interpreting a one-year change in numbers. As more longitudinal data on displays is collected, it will better support analyses of trends.
- From 2007 to 2020, the number of police firearm discharge incidents reported to PSB per year ranged from 5 to 26, averaging 12.4 incidents per year ([Table 2](#)). In this period, there was an average of fewer than four deaths per year (range of 0 to 8) and an average of fewer than four persons injured per year (range of 1 to 9) by police firearm discharges ([Figure 1](#)).
- In 2020, there were eight police firearm discharge incidents in BC reported to PSB, seven fewer than in 2019. Also, in 2020, three people died and three people were injured as a result of police gunshot wounds, compared to four deaths and four persons injured in 2019.
- Overall, there is no clear trend in police firearm discharges in the past 14 years when considered in isolation or when compared to trends in other data available to PSB. The number of discharges, deaths, and injuries have fluctuated annually, and because the number of incidents each year is relatively small, the fluctuations are even more pronounced when expressed as percentage changes.

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TOTAL FIREARM USE

Table 1: Total Firearm Use in Relation to General Occurrence (GO) Reports, 2020

	2020
GO Reports	1,524,168
Total firearm use	2,290
Firearm discharges	8
Firearm displays	2,282
Rate of firearm use per 1,000 GO reports	1.50
Rate of firearm discharges	0.005
Rate of firearm displays	1.50

Note 1: Rates are rounded to the nearest 0.01, except for numbers smaller than 0.01, which are rounded to the first non-zero digit. Rounding may affect calculations.

FIREARM DISCHARGES

Table 2: Police Firearm Discharge Incidents in an Operational Setting by Agency, 2007–2020

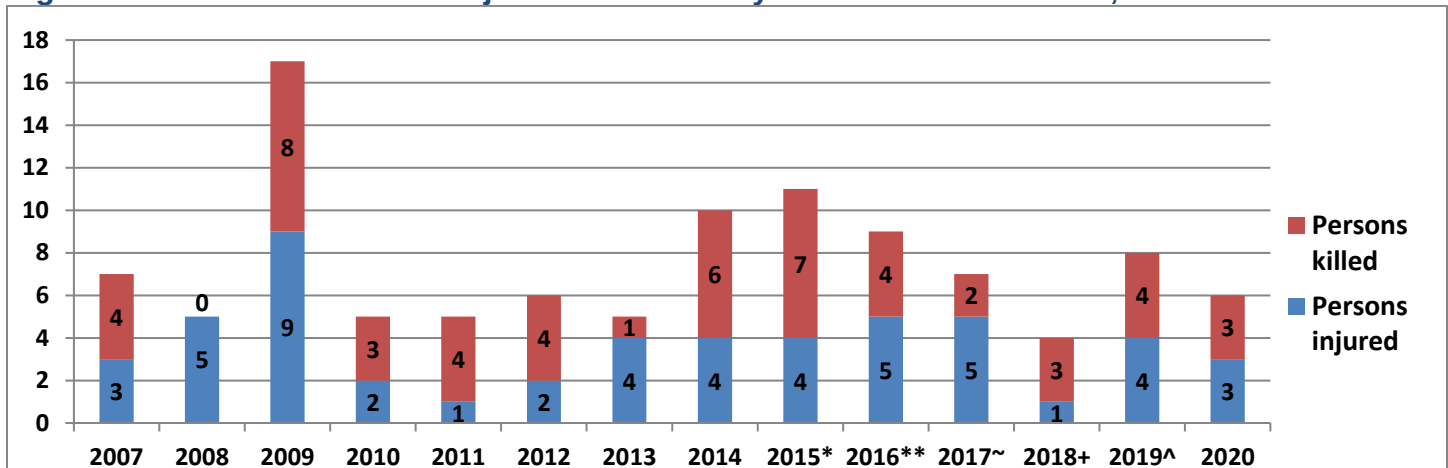
POLICE AGENCY*															
	AB	CS	DE	NE	NW	OB	PM	SA	STP	TP	VA	VI	WV	RCMP	BC Total
2007	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	12	16
2008	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	13
2009	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	1	0	20	26
2010	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	8	9
2011	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	6	9
2012	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	8	10
2013	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	9	10
2014	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	1	0	10	17
2015	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	11	12
2016	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	5	9
2017	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	12	14
2018	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5
2019	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	13	15
2020	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	8

*As follows: Abbotsford (AB), Central Saanich (CS), Delta (DE), Nelson (NE), New Westminster (NW), Oak Bay (OB), Port Moody (PM), Saanich (SA), St'at'imx Tribal Police Service (STP), Transit Police (TP), Vancouver (VA), Victoria (VI), and West Vancouver (WV) Police Departments.

Note: Counts are based on what agency was in command of the officer(s) who discharged the firearm(s), regardless of what agency the member may have been seconded from.

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Figure 1: Number of Persons Injured and Killed by Police Firearms in BC, 2007–2020



Note: Figure 1 only includes injuries and deaths caused by a police firearm.

2015*: Persons-killed figure includes two people who died after being shot by police, who had also sustained other life-threatening injuries.

2016**: Persons-injured figure includes one incident counted as an injury where a person was shot by police but died from another injury.

2017~: Persons-killed figure includes an incident where a person died after being shot by police but had also sustained other life-threatening injuries.

2018+: Persons-killed figure includes an incident where a person fatally shot himself at the same time as being fatally shot by police.

2019^: Persons-killed figure includes two people from an incident involving a hostage situation where the subject was shot and killed by officers, and in the course of this action, the hostage was accidentally struck by police bullets and subsequently died of the injuries.

FIREARM DISPLAYS

Table 3: Police Firearm Displays Against a Person, by EDP Status, 2019–2020

POLICE AGENCY*																
2019		AB	CS	DE	NE	NW	OB	PM	SA	STP	TP	VA	VI	WV	RCMP	BC Total
	Total	88	7	41	4	42	3	17	12	2	26	533	119	33	900	1,827
	EDP	10	1	6	0	5	1	2	4	0	3	107	26	6	141	312

2020		AB	CS	DE	NE	NW	OB	PM	SA	STP	TP	VA	VI	WV	RCMP	BC Total
	Total	181	5	71	2	88	0	23	35	6	47	794	148	54	828	2,282
	EDP	36	3	13	1	30	0	1	5	5	7	139	19	13	121	393

*As follows: Abbotsford (AB), Central Saanich (CS), Delta (DE), Nelson (NE), New Westminster (NW), Oak Bay (OB), Port Moody (PM), Saanich (SA), Stl'atl'imx Tribal Police Service (STP), Transit Police (TP), Vancouver (VA), Victoria (VI), and West Vancouver (WV) Police Departments.

Note: 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."