



# Police Firearm Discharges (2007–2021) and Displays (2019–2021)

## 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 2007-2021 and a three-year summary of police firearm display data for 2019-2021. This report also presents 2021 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. 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. Examples of this may be 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 danger<sup>1</sup>.
- Firearm use by police officers in BC is rare. In 2021, BC police agencies reported 2,238 firearm displays and 17 firearm discharge incidents. The rate of firearm discharges was 0.012 per 1,000 GO reports, which corresponds to 0.0012% of all GO reports. Firearm displays had a GO report rate of 1.63 per 1,000, higher than for discharges but still rare, corresponding to 0.16% of all GO reports ([Table 1](#)).
- The subject was listed as perceived to be emotionally disturbed<sup>2</sup> (EDP) in 18% of firearm displays in 2021 ([Table 3](#)), almost the same proportion as in 2020 and 2019.

<sup>1</sup>Specifically, 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."

<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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- Consistent with 2019 and 2020 data, in 2021, more than 99% of police firearm use in BC was display only, with 2,238 firearm displays and 17 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 BC's municipal police departments in both 2021 and 2020, there were approximately 1.4 displays per incident with a firearm display. 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.
- From 2019 to 2020, the number of firearm displays increased by 455. In 2021, 44 fewer firearm displays were reported than in 2020 ([Table 3](#)).
- From 2007 to 2021, the number of police firearm discharge incidents reported to PSB per year ranged from 5 to 26, averaging 12.7 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 four persons injured per year (range of 1 to 9) by police firearm discharges ([Figure 1](#)).
- In 2021, there were 17 police firearm discharge incidents in BC reported to PSB, nine more than in 2020. The 17 discharge incidents in 2021 were higher than the average number of discharge incidents between 2007 and 2021 at 12. Also, in 2021, five people died and eight people were injured because of police gunshot wounds, compared to three deaths and three persons injured in 2020.
- 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, 2021

	2021
GO Reports	1,375,212
Total firearm use	2,255
Firearm discharges	17
Firearm displays	2,238
Rate of firearm use per 1,000 GO reports	1.64
Rate of firearm discharges	0.012
Rate of firearm displays	1.63

**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, 2007–2021

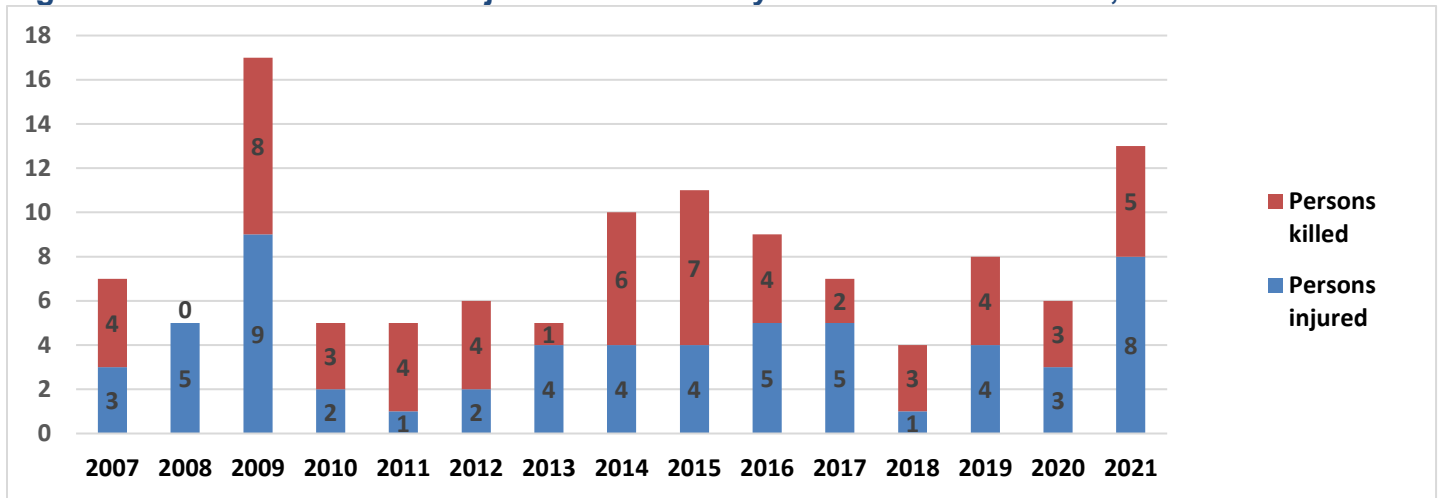
	POLICE AGENCY*														BC Total
	AB	CS	DE	NE	NW	OB	PM	SA	STP	TP	VA	VI	WV	RCMP	
2007	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	12	16
2008	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	13
2009	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	1	0	20	26
2010	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	8	9
2011	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	6	9
2012	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	8	10
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
2021	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	12	17

\*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:** 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, 2007–2021**



**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, 2019–2021**

POLICE AGENCY*																
		AB	CS	DE	NE	NW	OB	PM	SA	STP	TP	VA	VI	WV	RCMP	BC Total
2019	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	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
2021	Total	186	4	87	10	73	2	9	36	16	69	804	186	8	748	2,238
	EDP	35	0	21	6	16	0	1	3	12	0	145	28	4	141	412

\*As follows: Abbotsford (AB), Central Saanich (CS), Delta (DE), Nelson (NE), New Westminster (NW), Oak Bay (OB), Port Moody (PM), Saanich (SA), Stl'at'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."