

Police Service of Northern Ireland

Use of Force Statistics

1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021

Published 18th June 2021

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Data Quality

When police officers use force in the course of their duties they are required to self report this on a specially designed intranet database within PSNI. The PSNI's Statistics Branch then undertakes various completeness and accuracy checks of the submitted data before completing this statistical report. Whilst every effort is made to ensure that all incidents of use of force by the police are reported on this system, there is the possibility that some under-reporting exists and this should be borne in mind when using these statistics.

**Formerly referred to as TASER stun guns in this report. TASER is a trademark of Axon Enterprise Inc.*

Overview of Police Use of Force

Recommendation 21 of the Northern Ireland Policing Board’s Human Rights Annual Report (2008) requires the PSNI to, “provide the Policing Board with statistics on all categories of uses of force recorded on the PSNI electronic use of force monitoring system on a six monthly basis.” This report outlines the occasions of Police Use of Force for the period 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021. This report will be next be published in December 2021.

Summary Table: police use of force between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2021 compared to the same period last year.

Use of Force	1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020	1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021	% change ^(c)
AEP Pointed	49	75	53%
AEP Discharged	4	9	125%
AEP Total	53	84	58%
Baton Drawn Only	271	220	-19%
Baton Drawn & Used	117	109	-7%
Baton Total	388	329	-15%
Irritant Spray Drawn Only	186	191	3%
Irritant Spray Used	177	193	9%
Irritant Spray Total	363	384	6%
Firearm Drawn or Pointed	505	490	-3%
Firearm Discharged	0	0	-
Firearm Total	505	490	-3%
Police Dog Used	244	190	-22%
CED Drawn ^(a)	317	288	-9%
CED Fired ^(b)	26	24	-8%
CED Total	343	312	-9%
Handcuffs / Limb Restraints	4,348	4,657	7%
Unarmed Physical Tactics	7,189	7,743	8%
Spit and Bite Guard	N/A	112	-
Water Cannon Deployment	0	0	-
Water Cannon Used	0	0	-
Water Cannon Total	0	0	-

^(a) Includes drawn/aimed and red-dot. ^(b) Includes Stun Drive. ^(c) % change figures rounded to nearest integer.

- AEP rounds were discharged on 9 occasions during the reporting period, on each occasion as a less lethal option. There were an additional 75 occasions during the same period when the AEP was pointed only; again on each occasion as a less lethal option.
- There were 329 occasions where batons were either drawn or used. The baton was drawn only on 220 occasions and on the remaining 109 occasions it was drawn and used.
- There were 384 reported uses of irritant spray, 191 in which the irritant spray was drawn but not sprayed while on the remaining 193 occasions it was drawn and sprayed.
- Firearms were drawn or pointed on 490 occasions. There were no discharges during this reporting period.

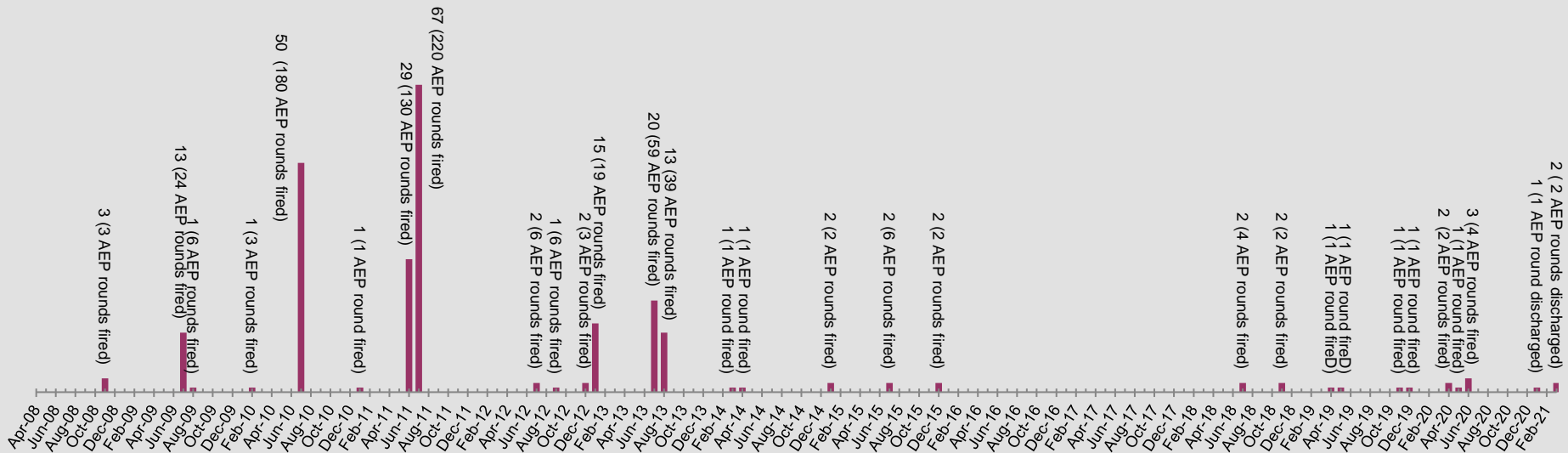
- Officers reported the use of a police dog on 190 occasions.
- Conductive Energy Devices (CEDs) were drawn^(a) on 288 occasions and were fired^(b) on a further 24 occasions.
- Restraints (handcuffs, flexi-cuffs and limb restraints) were used on 4,657 occasions and unarmed physical tactics (blocks/strikes, take downs, pressure points, physical restraints and other/improvised) were used on 7,743 occasions.
- Spit and bite guards, which were introduced by the PSNI as a temporary tactical option in response to COVID-19 in April 2020, were used 112 times during the reporting period.
- There were no reported deployments of water cannon during the reporting period.

Longer Term Trends

(i) Attenuating Energy Projectile (AEP): April 2008 – March 2021

The AEP has been designed for use as a less lethal option in situations where officers are faced with individual aggressors whether acting on their own or as part of a group. It discharges less-lethal kinetic energy projectiles (impact rounds) and has two purposes. It can be used by a limited number of specifically trained officers in serious public order situations to fire at selected individuals. Secondly, it can be used by a small number of specifically trained firearms officers as a less-lethal option at firearms incidents (e.g. suspect wielding a knife or sword).

Figure 1: Number of occasions AEP was discharged (number of rounds fired) trend information - April 2008 to March 2021

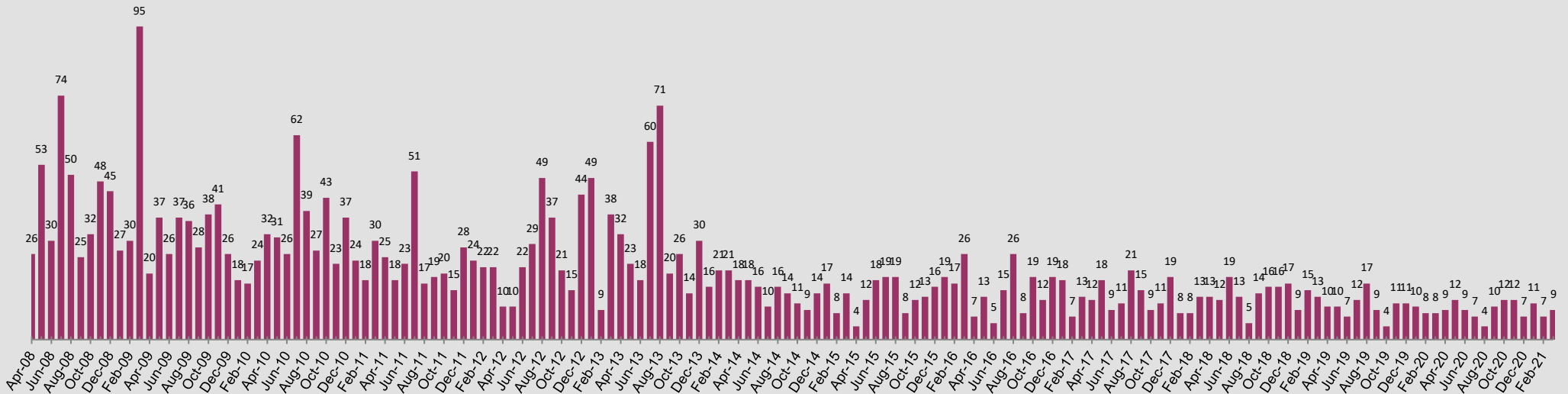


(ii) Use of Police Baton: April 2008 – March 2021

Officers will report any use of batons to their immediate supervisors as soon as practicable and submit an electronic use of force form, making their baton available for inspection. In addition, in circumstances where a baton has been drawn but not used, officers will submit a report (electronic use of force monitoring form) where it is reasonable to expect that a person (or persons) have anticipated a threat of force being used against them.

There may also be occasions where a supervisory officer gives a direction to other officers to draw their batons. This would most likely occur during serious public order situations. In such circumstances only the officer giving the direction is required to complete an electronic use of force monitoring form. However, if any officer has occasion to strike an individual(s) then they must submit an electronic use of force monitoring form to indicate 'baton used'.

Figure 2: Number of occasions a baton was drawn & used trend information - April 2008 to March 2021



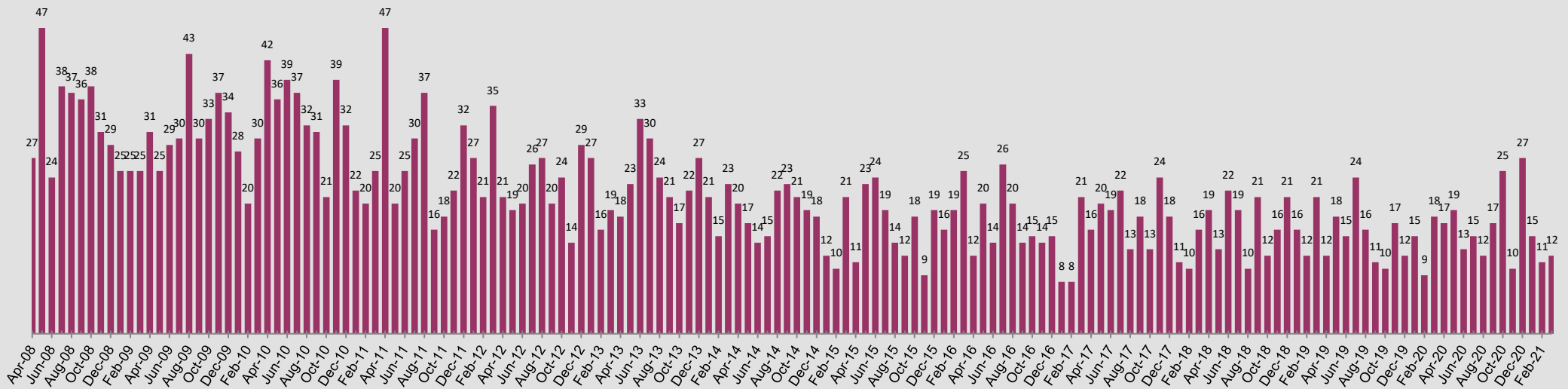
(iii) Use of Irritant Spray: April 2008 – March 2021

Irritant spray is issued to all PSNI officers who have been trained in the Personal Safety Programme and is worn as part of the normal patrol equipment. Service policy states that it is not to be used during serious public order situations as a crowd dispersal tactic.

Upon impact the solvent evaporates rapidly leaving irritant particles to gain compliance of the subject. Effects last on average for about 20 minutes. A person who has been sprayed with irritant spray will be classified as ‘injured’ and police officers will if possible administer aftercare advice. An officer drawing or discharging the device, or once drawn, subsequently points the device at any individual or group, must record this use and any warning given.

The PSNI have traditionally used CS irritant spray, while PAVA irritant spray was introduced to PSNI in a limited pilot in January 2016. During this trial PAVA irritant spray was issued to officers that carried Conductive Energy Devices and also some Portal officers. The PSNI approved a change to irritant spray in February 2020, which will see all officers transition from carrying CS irritant spray to carrying PAVA irritant spray. This transition is currently ongoing.

Figure 3: Number of occasions irritant spray (CS and PAVA) was sprayed trend information - April 2008 to March 2021



(iv) Use of Firearms: April 2008 – March 2021

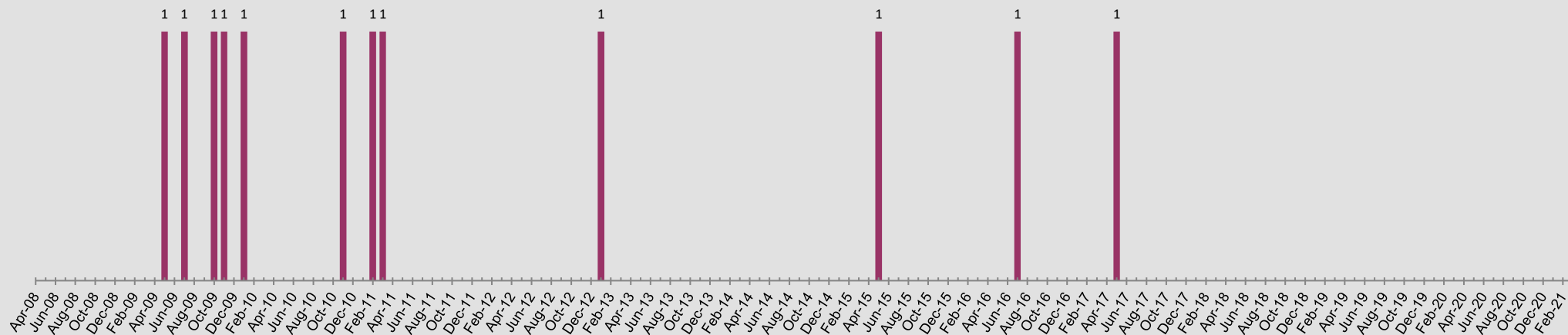
In recognition of the special circumstances prevailing in Northern Ireland, the Chief Constable has given standing authority for all officers, subject to successful training, to be issued with a personal issue handgun. This standing authority is kept under regular review. A police officer is deemed to have used a firearm when it is:

- (i) Pointed at another person;
- (ii) Fired at another person in self defence or in defence of another, whether or not injury or death results;
- (iii) Discharged in any other operational circumstances.

In addition officers are required to report any instance when they have occasion to draw their personal issue handgun.

District Commanders/Heads of Branch ensure that an appropriate number of officers are trained in order to meet locally identified needs, based upon an evaluation of the prevailing security situation and risk assessment. There are also a number of specifically trained firearms officers to deal with pre-planned and spontaneous firearms incidents. These officers deploy with H&K weapons and the Glock personal issue handgun but also have available other less lethal options including Taser and the Attenuating Energy Projectile (AEP) system.

Figure 4: Number of occasions a firearm was discharged trend information - April 2008 to March 2021

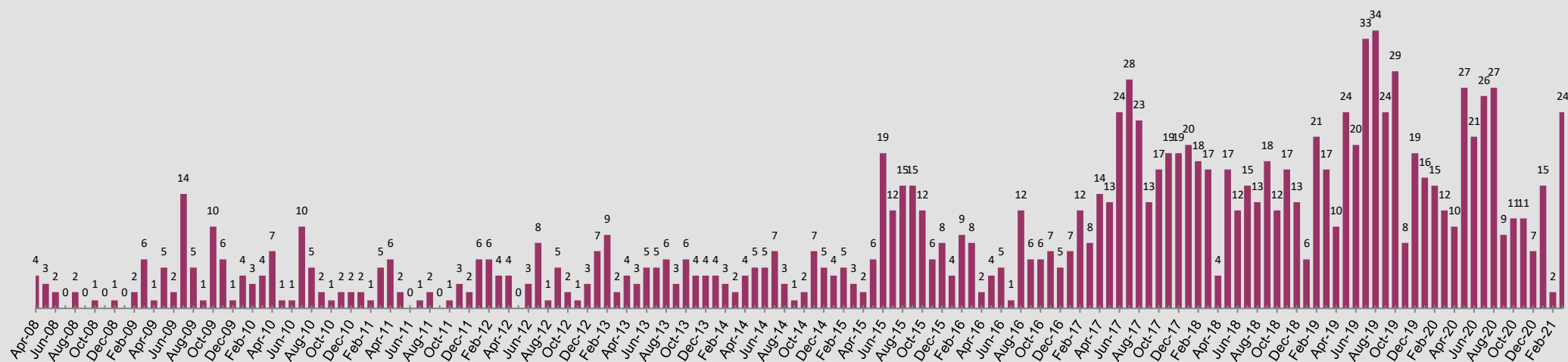


(v) Use of Force involving Police Dogs: April 2008 – March 2021

All Police dogs are under the control of Operational Support Department and can be used for a variety of purposes. Use of force only reflects a very small proportion of the overall work that police dogs carry out. The main types of force that are recorded for dog use include:

- when the dog is deployed to achieve control of an immediate threat to the handler, other officers, innocent persons or the dog itself whether or not the dog bites or causes injury
- when the dog is deployed to apprehend a fleeing offender/subject, whether or not it bites or causes injury
- when the dog bites at the direction of the handler and there is no injury
- when the dog bites not at the direction of the handler and there is no injury

Figure 5: Number of occasions a police dog was used trend information - April 2008 to March 2021



(a) The categories used to record the level of police dog deployment were refined in April 2015

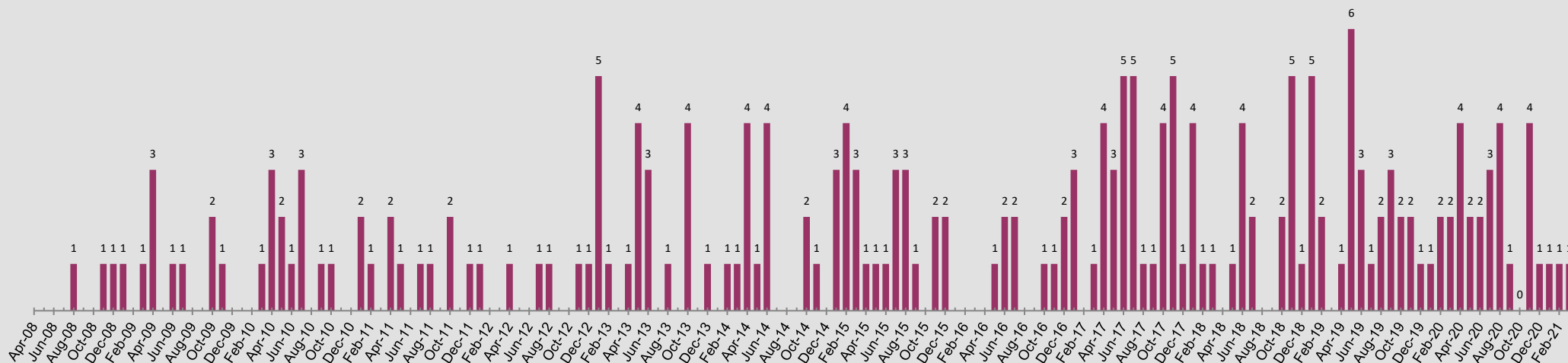
(vi) Use of Conductive Energy Device (CED): April 2008 – March 2021

The Conductive Energy Device (CED) is a single shot weapon designed to temporarily incapacitate a subject through the use of an electrical current, which temporarily interferes with the body’s neuromuscular system. Use of the CED is one of a number of tactical options available to an officer who is faced with violence or the threat of violence, which may escalate to the point where the use of lethal force would be justified. Its purpose is to temporarily incapacitate an individual in order to control and neutralise the threat that they pose.

Conductive Energy Devices were introduced to PSNI in a limited pilot on 25th January 2008. They were issued to specialist firearms officers and have also been made available to authorised firearms officers attached to Armed Response Vehicles (since 19th December 2008) who have completed NPCC approved accredited training in the use of the device.

In terms of use of force, the CED can be drawn/aimed, arced, red dotted (at which stage a red dot appears on the subject indicating where the CED would hit) or fired/discharged. The figure below shows the number of times that a CED was discharged.

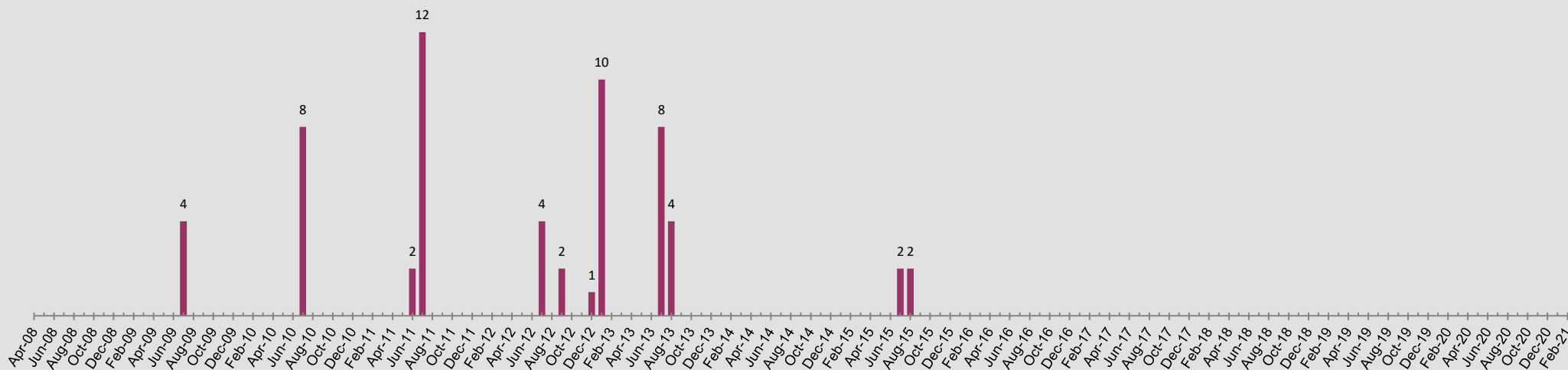
Figure 6: Number of occasions a CED was used trend information - April 2008 to March 2021



(vii) Use of Water Cannon: April 2008 – March 2021

The PSNI has 6 water cannons at its disposal which are kept at different police locations within Northern Ireland to ensure that they can respond quickly to any incident. Water cannon vehicles are deployed and used only when authorised by appropriate officers in accordance with the NPCC manual of guidance, public order, standards, tactics & training.

Figure 7: Number of occasions a water cannon was activated trend information - April 2008 to March 2021



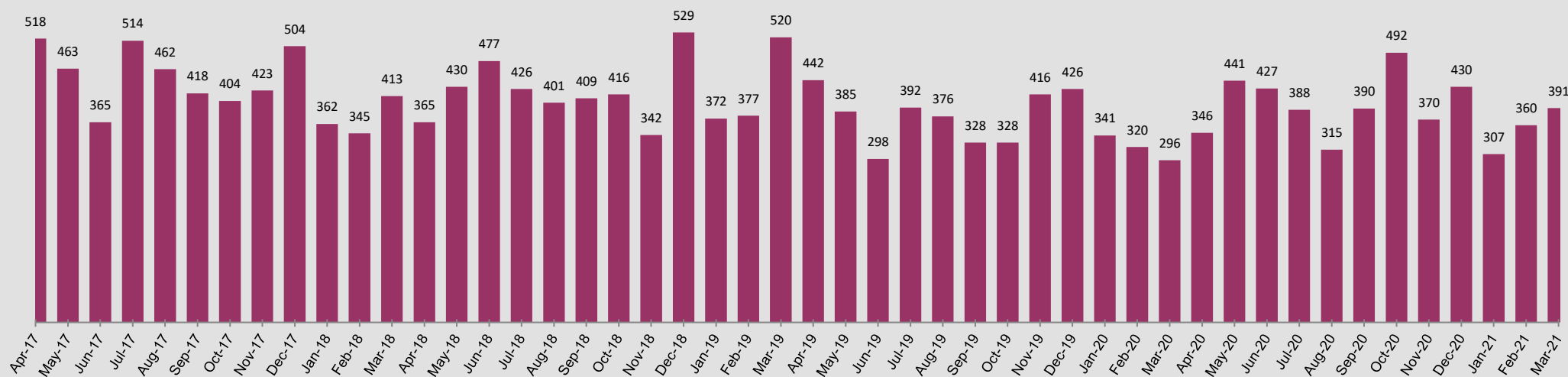
(a) Following a review of the Use of Water Cannon graph, the figures for the months between August 2008 and February 2011 were updated on 16th December 2016.

(viii) Use of handcuffs/limb restraints: April 2017 – March 2021

Police officers or civilian detention officers do not routinely use handcuffs with every Detained Person (DP), every circumstance is different and officers and staff are required to justify their use of this tactic in terms of proportionality and reasonableness. When officers and staff consider the use of handcuffs on a non-compliant DP, or a DP who it is assessed may offer violence during detention or transport, this can potentially reduce injuries to both police/staff and to the public. By effectively restraining a potentially violent individual officers and staff are also reducing the likelihood of having to resort to the use of other tactical options, escalating the use of force and therefore reducing the risk of injury to the DP.

Limb restraints are not designed to be a replacement for rigid handcuffs but rather are designed for use in conjunction with them. The purpose of restraints is to gain control of a violent subject as quickly as possible with the minimum risk of injury to all involved, and subsequently to assist the restrained person into a safe position.

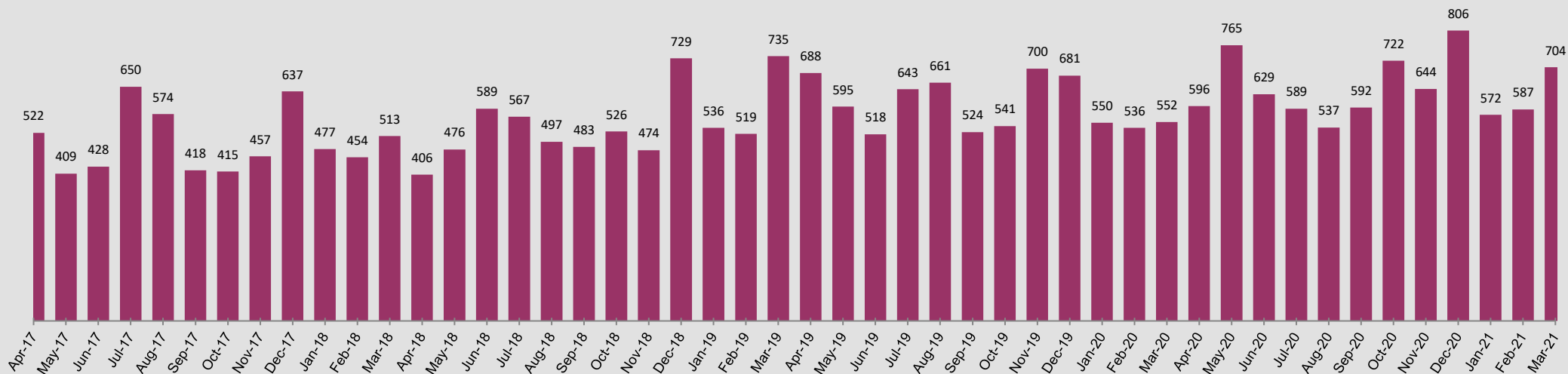
Figure 8: Number of occasions handcuffs/limb restraints were used trend information - April 2017 to March 2021



(ix) Use of unarmed physical tactics: April 2017 – March 2021

The PSNI follow national guidance regarding Personal Safety Manual training, officers and staff are trained to use the following tactics Blocks/Strikes, Take Downs, Pressure Points, Physical Restraints and Other/Improvised. These are stipulated tactics and as such officers are advised of the possible medical ramifications and considerations around vulnerabilities, as they are around all uses of force.

Figure 9: Number of occasions unarmed physical tactics were used trend information - April 2017 to March 2021



(x) Use of spit and bite guards: April 2020 – March 2021

Figure 10: Number of occasions a spit and bite guard was used trend information - April 2020 to March 2021

