

From: **Information Access**
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Our Ref: **F0002030**

Date: 31st July 2009

Dear

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000

I refer to your email of 20th June. We have dealt with it under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

You asked about the “mystery shopper exercise”. Mystery Shopper checks are when a vehicle is presented to a Testing Station (VTS) without disclosing that the presenter is an employee of VOSA.

The checks may take the form of

- Observed*
- Unobserved with Induced Defects
- Observed with Induced Defects

(* This can also include observed tests on vehicles which have not been presented by VOSA observed whilst the VE is covertly on the premises.)

This process includes the selection of VTS(s) and vehicle, preparing the vehicle and records prior to test, undertaking the Mystery Shopper checks and processing the results, and finally releasing the vehicle back into service. The operation may be anything between a single test on a single day, to a series spanning several weeks.

A Mystery Shopper test is carried out as an exercise to monitor the procedures and/or standards applied by a tester at a targeted VTS. The type of Mystery Shopper activity used will depend on the perceived problems at the selected site and also previous enforcement activities used. The Mystery Shopper with Induced Defects is not intended to be used as a routine activity and should only be used where all other avenues have been considered or that this best meets the need due to site constraints.

The table below gives the statistics held by VOSA in relation to Mystery Shopper checks carried out in the 2008 calendar year.

	Outcome	Number of Tests	%
Mystery Shopper	Minor Discrepancies	74	29.6%
	Satisfactory	75	30.0%
	Unsatisfactory	101	40.4%
	Total	250	

Since the end of 2007, mystery shopper activity has been extracted from the live MOT computerisation repository on a daily basis and placed in another table to allow for reporting on these events. Prior to this, mystery shopper details were not part of VOSA's standard reporting and data was only held in the live repository.

Interrogation of the live repository is not possible as this may affect operation of the system. I am therefore unable to provide you with data for any other complete calendar year from the MOT computerised system.

I can confirm that the only other records of mystery shopper activity are the paper records held on the garage files. In order to produce any statistics from these, it would be necessary to examine each garage file individually. At the last count, there were 19,260 private MOT garages in the UK. Based on 5 minutes per file for retrieval (the files would need to be retrieved from storage by the relevant area office and sent to VOSA's headquarters for review) and 10 minutes per file to extract the relevant information, it would cost £120,405 to provide the information you have requested. Please see the attached spreadsheet, which was used to produce this estimate.

It is considered that Section 12 of the Act applies in this instance:

Section 12 (1) Section 1(1) does not oblige a public authority to comply with a request for information if the authority estimates that the cost of complying with the request would exceed the appropriate limit.

The Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004 set the appropriate limit at £600 for a central government Department or Agency.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact us, quoting reference **F0002030**.

If you are unhappy with the response provided, you may ask for an internal review. To request an internal review, please write to:

VOSA Corporate Office,
Berkeley House,
Croydon Street,
Bristol,

BS5 0DA

or email vosa.corporateoffice@vosa.gsi.gov.uk giving the reasons for your dissatisfaction. It will help us if you quote the reference number for your case.

If you do not agree with the outcome of the internal review, you may lodge an appeal with the Information Commissioner (www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk). The Information Commissioner is an independent official appointed by the Crown to oversee the Data Protection Act 1998, the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

The Information Commissioner can consider complaints about any aspect of the way in which requests for information have been handled. Please note: the Information Commissioner would be unlikely to consider your complaint if you have not first requested an internal review.

You can write to the Information Commissioner at:

The Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House,
Water Lane,
Wilmslow,
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Yours sincerely

VOSA Information Access Team