

Minister Vernon Coaker apologises for misleading MPs over police injuries

Home Office minister says sorry to parliament after Guardian reveals most police injuries from climate protest were from insects or heat

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Mon 15 Dec 2008 18.16 GMT

A minister has apologised to parliament for telling MPs that 70 police officers were hurt during a climate change protest after [the Guardian revealed that most of the injuries were inflicted by insects or the heat](#).

Vernon Coaker, the Home Office minister, told MPs at Commons question time today: "I was informed that 70 police officers were hurt and naturally assumed that they had been hurt in direct contact as a result of the protest. That clearly wasn't the case and I apologise if that caused anybody to be misled."

The apology followed a Freedom of Information request from the Liberal Democrats, which showed that no officers in the £5.9m police operation at [Kingsnorth](#) power station in Kent during August had been injured by protesters. Instead, police records showed that their medical unit had dealt mostly with toothache, diarrhoea, cut fingers and "possible bee stings".

David Howarth, the Lib Dems' justice spokesman, asked Coaker to "revise his conclusion" that the policing was "proportionate and appropriate".

"Large numbers of protesters were injured at the hands of the police, especially by baton injuries," he said.

Coaker said that he would be meeting with representatives of the Association of Chief [Police](#) Officers to discuss the "lessons to be learned" from Kingsnorth and that the National Police Improvement Agency was carrying out an inquiry into the handling of the demonstration.

Labour's David Taylor said: "When people expressed concerns about the vigour and resources devoted by the police to the Kingsnorth climate camp we were told that it was justified because there were dozens of injuries that occurred. Unless the protesters are to be held responsible for wasps and the weather, aren't we to conclude that the justification used at that time was wholly bogus and vacuous?"

Jacqui Smith, the home secretary, also apologised to MPs today, for last week's premature release of data on knife crime, which provoked fierce criticism from Sir Michael Scholar, chairman of the UK Statistics Agency.

Smith told MPs: "I am sorry that I think we were too quick off the mark with the publication of one number in relation to the progress that had been made with tackling knife crime."

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