

BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

A breach of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics occurs where one or more provisions of the Code were not followed in situations where an exemption or exception had not been approved by the UK Statistics Authority's Head of Assessment, as required in paragraph (xii) of the Code's preamble. Rules on pre-release access to statistics are covered in the relevant Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics Orders; the Code applies as if it includes these orders.

1 Background Information

Name of Statistical Output (including web link if relevant)

Key Scottish Environment Statistics 2010

Name of Producer Organisation

Scottish Government

Name and contact details of person submitting this report, and date of report

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2 Circumstances of Breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2: Release practices - Practice 8

Date of occurrence

07/07/2010

Nature of breach (including links with previous breaches, if any)

An internal policy colleague, undertaking quality assurance of a draft version of a page from Key Scottish Environment Statistics 2010 publication, forwarded the draft page on to an external contact, outside of the quality assurance distribution list, for comment. This was despite the page being marked as 'restricted' and the recipient's responsibilities being clearly outlined. Although the data contained in the page is already publicly available, the commentary was not.

Reasons for breach

This breaches protocol 2.8 as the page was passed to a contact not recorded as eligible for access before publication, so they had access prior to the publication date of 7th September 2010.

3 Reactions and Impact

Once we became aware of this issue we directly contacted the external recipient of the page to confirm the page had not been circulated or shared more widely. The recipient confirmed that they had not passed this page to anyone. As the data is already publicly available, no new data were released so the impact was minimal.

4 Corrective Actions Taken (include short-term actions, and long-term changes made to procedures)

As soon as we became aware of this issue, we contacted all colleagues involved in the quality assurance process to remind them that, as the publication is National Statistics and therefore subject to the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, they should not be sharing the pages with any other colleagues.

The internal policy colleague, who sent the page to the external contact, have had their responsibilities when dealing with statistics not in their final form, clearly reiterated to them.

The Office of the Chief Statistician is revising their current guidance on pre-release access for Quality Assurance which includes the recommended usage of a non-disclosure declaration to be signed by QA recipients before they receive statistics. It is envisaged that this will reinforce the rules and help recipients understand their responsibilities.

Finally, we are reviewing the QA recipient list for this publication.

5 Any other relevant supporting material (including link to published statements about this breach)

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/About/nsbreaches>