

BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

This document reports a breach of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, or the relevant Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Orders, to which the Code applies as if it included these orders.

1. Background information

Name of Statistical Output (including weblink to the relevant output or 'landing page')

- NHS Safety Thermometer Annual Publication – April 2012 to March 2014
(<http://www.hscic.gov.uk/catalogue/PUB14502>)

Name of Producer Organisation

- Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC)

Name and contact details of the statistical Head of Profession (Lead Official in an Arm's Length Body) 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 7
Subject to compliance with the rules and principles on pre-release access set out in legislation, limit access before public release to those people essential for production and publication, and for quality assurance and operational purposes. Publish records of those who have access prior to release.
 - Practice 8
Ensure that no indication of the substance of a statistical report is made public, or given to the media or any other party not recorded as eligible for access before publication. Report to the National Statistician immediately any accidental or wrongful release, and investigate the circumstances.

Date of occurrence

- 11 July 2014

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

- At 16:55 Friday 11 July 2014, a copy of the draft press release accompanying this publication was sent in error to an external party. As soon as this was discovered on Monday 14 July 2014 the individual in question was contacted and asked to delete the email. At the same time, the recipient confirmed that the material had not been read.

Reasons for breach

- The team uses Microsoft Outlook for email, which can include a feature that suggests email addresses as the user begins to type a name; these stored addresses are held in the autocomplete cache. In this instance, Outlook suggested an email address which was accepted in error and thus the email was sent to the incorrect recipient.

3. Reactions and impact (both within the producer body and outside)

- The recipient said that having noted that the material was not due to be published until Tuesday 15 July 2014, the email and its attachment were left to be reviewed after the weekend.
- The recipient confirmed that the email and attachment were deleted unread.

4. Corrective actions taken to prevent reoccurrence of such a breach (include short-term actions, and long-term changes made to procedures)

- Guidance has been provided to enable staff to clear all previous auto-completed email addresses from their mailboxes which means that all historical email addresses will no longer be available for selection.
- The team has disabled the autocomplete functionality so that email addresses have to be typed in full for future emails which will ensure that an incorrect recipient cannot be selected from a list.
- Staff to undertake an additional confirmation check of recipients' email addresses before sending email.
- All staff involved in the publication of Official and National Statistics are aware of the regulations associated with pre-release access and their obligations under the Pre-release access to Official Statistics Order 2008.

5. Links to published statements about this breach

- <http://www.hscic.gov.uk/catalogue/PUB14502>