

Statement

22 January 2009

Code of Practice breach – pre-release access *UK emissions of Air Pollutants 2007 (Defra)*

The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has reported to the UK Statistics Authority a breach of the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008 (and therefore the Code of Practice for Official Statistics). Data from Defra's statistical release *UK emissions of Air Pollutants* for 2007 appear to have been available ahead of the 24 hour limit imposed by the Order.

The Authority is content that Defra properly sought to publish the statistics as soon as practicable after the breach, and notes the arrangements that Defra has put in place to prevent a recurrence.

The Authority notes that Defra has reviewed and tightened its pre-release access list, and has published a reference to the breach on its website. We endorse this approach, and think it is appropriate for any official body responsible for a breach of the Code of Practice to issue a public statement explaining the breach on both its own website and the National Statistics Publication Hub, as soon as it is aware of the facts, and no later than the time of the publication of the relevant statistics.

The Authority's breach report is provided overleaf.

**Monitoring and Assessment Team
UK Statistics Authority**

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.

1 Background Information

Name of Statistical Output (including web link if relevant)

UK Emissions of Air Pollutants, 2007
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/statistics/airqual/download/pdf/ns0409.pdf>

Name of Producer Organisation

Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

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

Peter Helm, Statistical Head of Profession, 8 January 2009

2 Circumstances of Breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2, Practice 8 – pre-release access

Date of occurrence

Discovered 18 December 2008

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

It was discovered on 18 December 2008 through the European Environment Agency (EEA) restricted website that UK air emissions figures had been sent to the EU, as part of our legal duty under the National Emission Ceilings Directive (NECD), following submission to Ministers by non statistical staff.

Reasons for breach

A breakdown in procedures which ensure non-statistical staff are aware of the pre-release practices for National Statistics.

3 Reactions and Impact

No reaction so far, as the public did not have access to the restricted EEA data.

These data have now been removed from the site and will not be reinstated until after publication of the National Statistic.

A reference to the breach will be put on the Defra website.

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

The National Statistician was informed of the breach and corrective action was agreed.

The release date was moved forward to 8 January 2009 from 22 January 2009 so the public had access to the data as early as possible after the breach. This was the earliest practical given the Christmas holiday period, ensuring that key staff were available and that sufficient notice was provided to users.

A reference to the breach will be placed on the Defra website, indicating that the data has been transferred to the EEA earlier and that some officials have seen the figures as part of the process.

Policy colleagues have been informed of the situation, and appreciate that the figures are not for circulation or use prior to official publication. The EEA were asked to remove the data from the website, and have done so. It will not be reinstated until after publication of the National Statistic.

New procedures will be put in place to ensure no further breaches occur.

The release will be brought further forward in the future to December each year to co-ordinate with submission to the EU

The EU will be asked to put an embargo on the figures until the UK publication.

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

Link to the published statement within the pre access arrangements for air pollutant emissions : <https://statistics.defra.gov.uk/esg/natstats/statregfin.htm>)