

## 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)

Suicide rates in the United Kingdom (released 27 January 2011)  
[www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=13618](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=13618)

Name of Producer Organisation

Office for National Statistics

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

Pre-release access – Protocol 2, practice 8

Date of occurrence

26 January 2011

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

On 26 January, pre-release access to the Statistical Bulletin, UK dataset, and England and Wales dataset (available at the link above) was given to everyone named in the 'Suicide' form, which is attached to a document titled 'Department of Health (DoH) – Revised pre-release access from 1 September 2010' on the Director General (DG) Office database (Pre-release\Minimisation 2010\Response letters). ONS checked that they had all signed and returned pre-release declarations in advance.

After the e-mail was sent at 9:30am, ONS was informed by DoH colleagues that two of the people named on the list had since moved posts and been replaced. ONS was then contacted by DoH and asked if the two new members of the DoH team could have access. ONS checked that they had returned and signed declarations and forwarded the pre-release email to them.

Reasons for breach

It was assumed that the pre-release access list provided by the Department of Health in September 2010 was up-to-date so unfortunately people were not contacted in advance to check that they still required access.

### **3 Reactions and Impact**

Although the suicide documents were sent to two people at DoH who should not have had pre-release access, there was no risk of wrongful use because everyone who received them has signed a pre-release access declaration, which includes a condition not to disclose the statistics.

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

The ONS business area contacted ONS DG's Office to find out how to update pre-release access lists on the website and to inform them about the e-mail received from DoH. DG's Office helpfully provided links to the ONS pre-release database, and a flow chart ([http://intranet/Images/ONS%20PRA%20process\\_tcm67-98024.pdf](http://intranet/Images/ONS%20PRA%20process_tcm67-98024.pdf)) which outlines pre-release procedures, and additional information on the intranet.

DG's Office and ONS senior managers circulated an e-mail to ONS staff to make sure people responsible for outputs are aware of the current pre-release guidance. This included links to the flow chart and additional information.

For future releases, ONS will ensure that people named on pre-release lists will be contacted in advance to check whether they still require access and to make sure that the list is fully up-to-date. If no response is received from a named individual, or if the person in the named post cannot be established, pre-release access will not be given.

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

None