

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')

Taser Statistics 2009 to 2011
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-use-of-taser-statistics-england-and-wales-2009-to-2011>

Name of Producer Organisation

Home Office (HO)

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 3, Practice 4: Ensure no action is taken within the producer body, or public statement made, that might undermine confidence of the statistics when released.

Date of occurrence

Monday 9 September 2013

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

On Monday 9 September, two national Newspapers (The Guardian and The Times) carried stories about the anticipated significant increase in the use of tasers expected to be published by the Office for National Statistics [ONS] the following day.

Reasons for breach

This was the first time these statistics had been published by the HO as 'official statistics'.

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) lead on armed policing was approached for interviews with The Times (on Friday) and The Guardian (on Saturday) in advance of the release of the official statistics. His interviews were based on figures held by ACPO. The media regularly contact the armed policing lead to ask questions about the use of Tasers usage and similarly ACPO are often approached for information under the Freedom of Information (FOI). ACPO also hold information on the number of officers trained in the use of Taser which are not included in the official statistics, but were quoted in The Times and The Guardian articles.

Since this was a new 'official statistics' output, the ACPO armed policing lead was unaware of how such actions could be considered a 'breach' of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. ACPO leads are more familiar with the constraints around the publication of the 'National Statistics' on crime, Police Workforce and Police Powers and Procedures

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

We are unaware of any public reaction, or concern, generated by the stories appearing in The Guardian and The Times ahead of publication on Tuesday 10 September. Staff in the UK Statistics Authority, the National Statistician's Office and the HO recognised that the story could be viewed as inappropriate before publication and investigated accordingly.

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

The HO Chief Statistician and the ACPO lead for statistics will be jointly writing to ACPO leads to remind them of the principles and protocols in the Code of Practice and how early release of national figures, rather than their regular use of timely local figures, can potentially undermine trust in all national crime and policing statistics. They will also investigate whether any more formal arrangements need to be put in place between the HO and ACPO such as a Memorandum of Understanding on the pre-publication use of crime and policing National Statistics and official statistics.