

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)

UK Business: Activity, Size and Location – 2001

Name of Producer Organisation

Office for National Statistics (ONS)

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

Principle 5, Confidentiality
Practice 1- Ensure that official statistics do not reveal the identity of an individual or organisation, or any private information relating to them, taking into account other relevant sources of information.
Principle 5, Confidentiality
Practice 4, Ensure that arrangements for confidentiality protection are sufficient to protect the privacy of individual information, but not so restrictive as to limit unduly the practical utility of official statistics. Publish details of such arrangements.

Date of occurrence

24 July 2012

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

UK Business: Activity, Size and Location – 2001, which was published in April 2012 contained disclosive data relating to counts of numbers of businesses. The published unrounded information could potentially be used to identify a specific business or its activity.

Reasons for breach

As part of the ONS Web recovery programme, on 25 March 2012, a member of the ONS Business Registers Output and Strategy Team (BRSO) had to resubmit files to the ONS Web Team that had been previously been published on the ONS website. Inadvertently, a non-disclosure tested file for UK Business: Activity, Size and Location – 2001, was submitted for the ONS web team to upload to the ONS website for publication.

This error was discovered on Tuesday 24 July at 11:33 by a member of the BRSO team when carrying out checks to ensure that data values generated by a newly installed software package matched previously published data values.

3 Reactions and Impact

There has been no adverse reaction or complaints to the BRSO team from the public or businesses that might have identified themselves from the published data. The number of hits to the webpage since disclosive UK Business: Activity, Size and Location – 2001 data was published in April and its withdrawal on 24 July 2012 was 16.

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

Upon discovery of this error, BRSO asked the ONS web team to immediately remove the non-disclosure tested file from the ONS website while investigations into how the breach occurred took place. The ONS Web team were provided with a replacement disclosure tested file which was published on 25 July 2012.

BRSO staff have been reminded of their obligations to the Code of Practice, verbally at a team meeting and via an email which requested they re-familiarise themselves with the Code on the UK Statistics Authority Website (website link included in email). They were also asked to visit the Civil Service Learning website package on Information Security.

A review of existing practices and checks carried out within BRSO before submission of data for publication will take place in early August when all team members return to official duty after leave. Any practices or procedures not deemed to be robust or those that potentially jeopardise compliance with the Code of Practice will be revised.