

REPORT OF A BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR STATISTICS



1. Core Information [\[guidance\]](#)

Title and link to statistical output	Renewable Fuel Statistics 2018: April to December - Final report (link)
Name of producer organisation	Department for Transport (DfT)
Name and contact details of person dealing with report	Jack Marks – jack.marks@dft.gov.uk
Link to published statement about the breach (if relevant)	
Date of breach report	25 November 2019

2. Circumstances of breach [\[guidance\]](#)

Relevant principle(s) and practice(s)	Trustworthiness: T3.6 Statistics should be released to all users at 9.30am on a weekday (release was delayed by 4hrs 30mins)
Date of occurrence of breach	7 November 2019

This statistical series provides statistics on the supply of renewable fuel to the UK. In the final report for each reporting period some company-level data is published in addition to the usual sector-level headline findings. This includes the proportion of renewable fuel meeting sustainability criteria, average greenhouse gas savings of fuel from each supplier, and source of renewable fuel for each supplier by country and by feedstock.

Pre-release processes are handled by the DfT Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation (RTFO) Unit, the policy and operational team for this release from whom the responsible statistician receives data. During the pre-release period for the final report in each reporting period, companies supplying renewable fuel are given the data which will be published about them (e.g. table RF_0110). They are not provided with anything beyond this, to comply with pre-release access rules. In this instance, suppliers were given their data at 4:05pm. Staff shortages in the RTFO Unit saw pre-release responsibilities fall to a member of the team who was also running a stakeholder workshop, contributing to the delay in companies receiving their data. One company supplying renewable fuel (incidentally, the smallest supplier), upon receiving their data realised that their information was going to be misreported and contacted the RTFO team at 4:55pm. When filing their renewable fuel supply with the RTFO Unit, they had incorrectly reported their supply. The company had reported a supply of 437,000kg of biomethane, with only 3,000kg (0.7%) being verified by the RTFO Unit. In fact, they had supplied 437,000kg of *methane*, 3,000kg of which was *biomethane*, of which 100% had been verified. As a result, we had a higher value for unverified renewable fuel than the true value, and had an incorrect proportion verified for the company in question. If we had published figures showing only 0.7% verified, it would cause embarrassment to the company as it would imply that they were not meeting their obligation for renewable fuel.

This error was not spotted as part of the main quality assurance checks for the publication. The company is the smallest supplier in the data, and the incorrectly reported total, whilst important to that supplier, represents less than 1% of total fuel volume. Therefore, the error would only be visible at a company level.

Company level data is checked by the RTFO database manager. Each company's declared renewable fuel amount is checked against HMRC returns to query anomalies and identify potential errors prior to such data being passed to the responsible statistician. However, as HMRC duty codes for methane and biomethane are the same, the error was not identified in this instance.

3. Impact of the breach [\[guidance\]](#)

The error was reported to the RTFO Unit at 4:55pm the day before publication, and brought to the attention of the responsible statistician (who sits in a different organisational unit) at 8:50am on the morning of the release. Though the initial error was small in relation to total renewable fuel volumes, it was quickly established that there was potential for knock-on effects throughout the report and accompanying tables (e.g. proportional changes, overall total changes etc.). There was also uncertainty amongst the statistical team about the cause(s) and/or full-scale of the error, and if other similar errors could also be in the report.

A decision was made to delay the report to allow the statistical team and the RTFO Unit to assess the error, assure that other similar errors had not been made, and to correct the report and accompanying tables where necessary. Once satisfied that the source of the error was understood and not replicated across any other suppliers, and that all necessary changes and corrections were made to the report and accompanying tables, the DfT Head of Profession for Statistics authorised the publication of the statistics at 14:00 that day so as to minimise the delay for users of these statistics.

We are not aware of any adverse effects to users of these statistics as neither the RTFO Unit nor the responsible statistical team were contacted about the delay.

4. Corrective actions (taken or planned) to prevent re-occurrence [\[guidance\]](#)

Starting with the next "final" Renewable Fuel Statistics release, fuel suppliers will be given a report showing their own reported data one week in advance of publication so that similar submission errors can be spotted and addressed sooner. Companies will just be given their own data, not data for all companies, so as not to breach pre-release access rules.

In future, company specific data will be searched for similar anomalies to that which was in the original data before corrections. This will help identify similar errors sooner.

Despite the lateness of the identification of this error, it is possible that the delay could have been avoided if the responsible statistical team were made aware of it immediately. We will ensure that we improve communications between the teams in the future so that error reporting is not delayed. This will be achieved by agreeing with the RTFO Unit the schedule for contacting companies, adding this step to our project plan which we produce for each publication. Though we already have regular meetings with the RTFO Unit prior to publications, we will add another meeting to this project plan for the day prior to pre-release for future publications, giving more time to respond to similar issues should they arise.