

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

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Telephone 08459 33 55 77

Website www.defra.gov.uk

Simon Birkett
Clean Air in London

Our ref: RFI4781
8 June 2012

By email: simon@emailbirkett.com

Dear Mr Birkett,

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PRESS RELEASES AND INFORMATION BULLETINS

Thank you for your request for information about We have handled your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

Specifically you requested:

For example, what was involved when Defra published a Press release about air pollution on 21 April 2011 <http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2011/04/21/summer-smog/> compared to issuing an Information Bulletin on Air Pollution on 3 April 2012 <http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2012/04/03/air-pollution/>. For example, who and how and many people were sent each? How were they distributed? How many 'hits' did each receive etc? What approval process was involved? What policies or guidance does Defra have for the issuing of one or other form of communication?

I will respond to each of your questions in turn.

1. What was involved when Defra published a Press release about air pollution on 21 April 2011 (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2011/04/21/summer-smog/>) compared to issuing an Information Bulletin on Air Pollution on 3 April 2012 (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2012/04/03/air-pollution/>)?

Both these were Information Bulletins. Nonetheless, they are not directly comparable pieces of information as one was designed to communicate a specific ozone event and the other was to highlight that the time of year when ozone episodes can be experienced was due to commence. We have not yet had an analogous ozone event this year.

2. Who and how and many people were sent each? How were they distributed?
Information Bulletins are placed on the Defra website. Journalists and other interested parties can subscribe to the RSS feed from the site which will alert them to changes to the website. The information bulletin from April 2011, which related to a specific smog event, was also emailed to journalists who had previously written stories on air pollution.

3. How many 'hits' did each receive etc?
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2011/04/21/summer-smog/> received 9100 page views in 1st 30 days
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2012/04/03/air-pollution/> received 523 page views in 1st 30 days

4. What approval process was involved?

Any communication from the Press Office is approved by a Chief Press Officer and checked for factual accuracy with policy colleagues.

5. What policies or guidance does Defra have for the issuing of one or other form of communication?

Current Press Office guidance on the differences between a News Release and Information bulletin is as follows:

News Release

Most significant Ministerial announcements will warrant a news release – however a news release isn't always the best way to make an announcement, so don't rely on it as your default option.

Take the time to make sure any news release you write is a proper news story that is crafted with your target media in mind. It needs a short, snappy headline and a clear opening paragraph that will encourage a journalist to read further. Your ministerial quotes should be written in a way that makes them quotable.

Information Bulletins

Defra issues information bulletins regularly, but they should be used only where necessary, for example where there is a statutory or public interest reason to communicate the information.

An information bulletin is concise and factual. It is a tool for communicating certain types of information to journalists. Like a news release, an information bulletin shouldn't be issued for the sake of it.

These are not news releases, and should not include quotations or notes to editors. Anything that requires a quotation requires a news release.

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the FOIA, all information is assumed to be releasable to the public unless exempt. Therefore, the information released to you may now be published on our website together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context.

I attach Annex A, which explains the copyright that applies to the information being released to you.

I also attach Annex B giving contact details should you be unhappy with the service you have received.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Amanda Waller

Direct Line 020 7238 5498

Email amanda.waller@defra.gsi.gov.uk

Annex A - Copyright

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Annex B - Complaints

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request you may make a complaint or appeal against our decision within 40 working days of the date of this letter. Please write to Brendan Walsh, Head of Defra's Information Rights Team at Area1B, Ergon House, Horseferry Road, London, SW1P 2AL, (email: informationrights@defra.gsi.gov.uk) and he will arrange for an internal review of your case. Details of Defra's complaints procedure are on our [website](#).

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Please note that generally the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have first exhausted Defra's own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF