BRIEFLY…

BLS Reduced Risk of Improper Disclosure of Essential Economic Information Yet Additional Improvements Are Needed

Why We Did the Audit

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) is responsible for publishing some of the foremost statistics on U.S. employment and inflation, such as the Employment Situation and the Consumer Price Index (CPI) news releases. BLS' statistics are used for an array of public and private sector decision-making such as setting wages and adjusting Social Security benefits.

When BLS issues reports and statistics, it follows the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) statistical policy to establish the exact release time. On multiple occasions in 2024, BLS released undisclosed essential economic information early or prior to release on its public-facing website. Early or unauthorized releases could have given some traders an economic advantage in trading decisions compared to other traders and the public. BLS' improper releases incited complaints from the public and gained congressional interest. Based on these concerns, we performed an audit to answer the following question:

> To what extent has BLS implemented controls to mitigate the risk of improper disclosure of essential economic information?

Read the Full Report

For more information, go to: https://www.oig.dol.gov/public/reports/oa/2026/17-26-001-11-001.pdf.

What We Found

We found, in response to three incidents in 2024 where undisclosed essential economic information was released early or prior to posting on BLS' public-facing website, BLS implemented or made improvements to controls to mitigate the risk of improper disclosure of essential economic information. However, we identified additional opportunities for improvement.

In May 2024, an incident occurred when the CPI and Real Earnings data was released 31 minutes earlier than scheduled, allowing 72 Internet Service Providers to access the data early. Second, in August 2024, Current Employment Statistics preliminary benchmark data was provided to users who telephoned or emailed BLS during a 34-minute delay in publishing. Third, on three separate days in 2024, internal or inaccurate CPI methodology was shared with a limited group of users prior to being publicly announced. BLS leadership learned of all three incidents up to an hour after they occurred—sometimes through social media or another agency. As a result, BLS lacked the necessary information to timely assess and respond to the incidents.

These incidents occurred due to deficiencies in BLS' information technology (IT) safeguards, performance standards, management oversight, and training. Further, we identified BLS' policy and procedures: (1) lacked clarity and cohesiveness on the data release process and (2) inadequately demonstrated the importance of adhering to OMB and BLS guidance regarding equitable access to information and safeguarding restricted information.

In response to these incidents, BLS closed gaps in IT safeguards, revised performance standards, strengthened management oversight, updated policies and procedures, and provided training. However, we identified additional improvements BLS could make to reduce the risk of improper disclosure of essential economic information.

BLS still needs to update its testing procedures, clarify its recently updated policies and procedures, and ensure staff's compliance by improving buy-in, understanding of expectations, and accountability. Lastly, BLS should finalize its Crisis Communication Plan and perform related exercises to ensure staff are prepared in the event of another crisis.

BLS' deviation from OMB and BLS policy during these incidents negatively affected its reputation and credibility. It is critical for BLS to further mitigate the risk of future improper disclosures of essential economic information.

What We Recommended

We made two recommendations to BLS to further improve its policies, procedures, and training. BLS generally agreed with our recommendations.