

## Appendix C.

# Historical Comparisons and Changes

### HISTORICAL COMPARISONS

- In 1992, the American Housing Survey's weighting has been changed to reflect the results of the 1990 Census of Housing. The estimates in chapters 1 through 5 of this book are not comparable to similar data published in earlier AHS books. The estimates in chapter 6 (Units Removed) use weighting, which reflects the results of the 1980 census and are comparable to data published earlier. The effects of the weighting change in 1992 are, however, proportionately distributed among all types of housing units. Therefore, the comparison of percents and medians in this book with similar previously published data is valid. For most metropolitan areas, the counts of housing units from the 1990 Census of Housing suggest that the numbers shown in the 1988 metropolitan reports are too high. A 1988 count of housing units for each metropolitan area that is consistent with the 1990 Census of Housing is shown below.
- This appendix provides a description of historical changes that have occurred in the American Housing Survey since its beginning in 1973.

Metropolitan area	1988 total housing units consistent with 1990 census	Published 1988 total housing units
Birmingham, AL MSA	375,300	384,400
Cleveland, OH PMSA	761,900	774,600
Indianapolis, IN MSA	511,100	517,700
Memphis, TN-AR-MS MSA	378,500	392,300
Norfolk-Virginia Beach-Newport News, VA MSA	526,200	531,000
Oklahoma City, OK MSA	426,900	437,100
Salt Lake City, UT MSA	370,300	379,900
Providence-Pawtucket-Warwick, RI-MA PMSA's	408,000	418,200

### HISTORICAL CHANGES

**Comparison with the 1988 American Housing Survey Metropolitan Sample.** The concepts, definitions, data collection, and processing procedures are essentially the same for both the 1988 and 1992 American Housing Survey Metropolitan Samples.

In 1992, the monthly housing costs questionnaire items for renters were revised to improve the reporting of actual rental costs. In 1988, the questionnaire reflected the total

amount reportedly paid for monthly rental costs. These amounts may have included the partially subsidized amount provided by the public housing authority, the Federal government, or State and local governments. The current questionnaire identifies those rental units that are subsidized and allows households to report only the costs they actually paid. The new procedures in 1992 produce lower and more accurate estimates.

In 1992, two new procedures were introduced that attempt to correct the overreporting of electricity and gas costs in the AHS. Previously, respondents were only asked to provide an estimate of average monthly costs. The new procedures produce lower and more accurate estimates. For a detailed definition of "Monthly costs of electricity and gas," see appendix A.

**Changes in two items relating to income.** A new item has replaced a similar item that was published in 1988. It is "Monthly housing costs as a percent of current income." For income, this new item uses "current income"; in 1988, the item "Monthly housing costs as a percent of income" used the "Income of families and primary individuals in the last 12 months." See appendix A for a complete definition of "Current income." We recommend caution when comparing prior years' data with 1992 because of differences in the definitions. For further discussion of "Monthly housing costs as a percent of current income," see the section "Historical Changes" in appendix C of the *American Housing Survey for the United States in 1991*, series H150/91 report.

**Severe and moderate problems.** The data concerning units with severe and moderate problems in 1992 are not entirely comparable with similar data published in 1988. See the paragraphs on "Plumbing facilities" under the section "Comparison with the 1974 through 1983 American Housing Survey" in appendix C of any of the American Housing Survey metropolitan area reports in 1992, series H170.

**Heating equipment.** In 1992, the heating equipment questions were revised to improve the reporting of electric heat pumps as a heating source. Previously, the questionnaire item dealing with the type of heating equipment underreported electric heat pumps. The respondents often answered yes to the first option of "a central warm-air furnace with air vents or ducts to the individual rooms" and did not proceed to the option of "electric heat pump." The questionnaire

item was revised to determine if the central air system is actually a heat pump or another type of warm-air furnace.

**Comparison with the 1974 through 1983 Annual Housing Surveys.** Most of the subjects in the 1992 American Housing Survey Metropolitan Sample (AHS-MS) are the same as those in pre-redesign (1974 through 1983) Annual Housing Survey metropolitan samples. Beginning with 1984, the AHS-MS was redesigned, including the introduction of a new questionnaire, and new weighting procedures were developed. Most of the changes made in redesign were made to improve the quality of the data. As a result of these changes, however, several items in the redesigned AHS-MS are not comparable to similar data in 1974 through 1983. All comparisons made between 1992 and 1974 through 1983 should be made with caution. Listed below are major differences noted as a result of redesign. The list may not be all inclusive. Differences noted as of the time of this publication include the following:

*Units in structure.* In the 1974 through 1983 AHS-MS, data on units in structure were based on the respondent's answer to one question, "How many living quarters, both occupied and vacant, are there in this house (building)?" In the redesigned AHS-MS, data on units in structure were based on the respondent's answer to a series of questions (see items 20 through 23 on page 3 of the questionnaire in appendix A). The method of collecting units-in-structure data in the redesigned AHS-MS was revised as previous AHS experience has shown the concept to be difficult for the respondents. Respondents particularly had difficulty distinguishing between single-family attached and units in multi-unit structures. As a result of this change, the estimated number of one-unit attached structures declined in some MSA's between the first year of redesign and the date of previous interview. It is estimated that the preredesign (1974 through 1983) AHS-MS, on average, overestimated the numbers of one-unit attached structures by approximately 25 percent. The level of overestimation may vary significantly between metropolitan areas. Units incorrectly classified as one-unit attached in previous survey years are, in redesign, correctly classified as being in multi-unit structures.

*Rooms in units.* In the 1974 through 1983 AHS-MS, respondents answered a single question asking for a total count of rooms in a unit. The potential to miss specific rooms is high in a question of this type. In the redesigned AHS, respondents were asked for a count of each specific type of room. The answers to these questions are then added together in the tabulations to provide a total count of rooms. Far fewer rooms were missed in this series of

questions. Based on research done for the redesign American Housing Survey National Sample (AHS-N), it is assumed that the 1974 through 1983 AHS-MS estimates of one- and two-room units are too high, resulting in low estimates for median number of rooms in many metropolitan areas.

*Housing unit definition.* There are one major and two minor differences in the housing unit definition. The major difference is that the redesigned American Housing Survey includes vacant mobile homes as housing units. The 1974 through 1983 Annual Housing Surveys excluded these units. There are two minor changes to the housing unit definition. One minor difference in the definition is the 1974 through 1983 AHS requirement that a housing unit must have either direct access from the outside or through a common hallway or complete kitchen facilities for the exclusive use of the occupants. In the redesigned American Housing Survey, the complete kitchen facilities alternative was dropped with direct access required of all units. A second minor difference is in the definition of group quarters. In the 1974 through 1983 Annual Housing Survey, a household containing five or more persons unrelated to the householder was considered to be group quarters. In the redesigned AHS, the cutoff was changed to nine or more persons unrelated to the householder.

**Other changes.** Beginning in 1980, the concept head of household was dropped and replaced by householder. The head of household was the person regarded as the head by the respondent. However, if a married woman living with her husband was reported as the head, her husband was considered the head for the purpose of simplifying the tabulations. The householder is the first household member who is 18 years old or over and is the owner or renter of the sample unit.

There are also some minor differences in the definition or presentation of several subjects. The 1974 through 1983 AHS reports presented data on gross rent for renter-occupied units, contract rent for vacant-for-rent units, and selected monthly housing costs for owner-occupied housing units. The same basic data are presented for all three groups in the redesigned AHS except that the subject is titled "monthly housing costs" for all three universes on all tables to ease presentation of the data on tables where more than one of the universes occur. For a detailed definition of "monthly housing costs," see appendix A.

The characteristics of new construction units are based on units constructed during the last 4 years in the AHS redesign. Prior to the AHS-MS redesign, characteristics of new construction were based on units built since the last survey, which varied from being a 3- to 4-year period.