

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
Effects of the Hurricanes on the August 2017 Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey

How much do the areas that had the biggest impact from Hurricane Harvey typically represent of the nation's wholesale estimates?

The monthly wholesale trade program is not designed to measure wholesale activity at specific geographic levels, so current estimates of sales and inventories in those areas are unavailable.

For data from other Census Bureau sources on the areas impacted by Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, please see the Census Bureau's Emergency Preparedness page at <https://www.census.gov/topics/preparedness.html>.

Does the Census Bureau produce monthly wholesale estimates for the affected sample areas?

No. We cannot isolate the effect of Hurricane Harvey on the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey (MWTS) estimates since the sample is designed to measure wholesale activity at the national level and not at specific geographic areas.

Even though we cannot isolate the effect, we did receive indications from companies that the hurricane had both positive and negative effects on the wholesale data. Some firms reported a drop in sales or increased inventories due to power outages and closures. Other firms reported decreased inventories due to damages suffered from the storm. In addition, many firms reported that they were not affected by Hurricane Harvey. For companies impacted by Hurricane Harvey, we review their contribution to the estimates to ensure accurate representation to the overall industry estimates.

Does this report include wholesale establishments in Puerto Rico? Will Hurricane Maria impact future estimates?

No. This report covers wholesale establishments operating only in the 50 states and District of Columbia. U.S. Territories, such as Puerto Rico, generally present their economic statistics separately from those of the United States. Sales and/or inventories of in scope companies that obtain goods from suppliers or sell to customers in Puerto Rico could be impacted by Hurricane Maria, but we cannot isolate those effects on the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey (MWTS) estimates.

How was the collection of wholesale data affected by the Hurricanes Harvey and Irma?

Overall response was within the range of the past 12 months. For surveyed companies, approximately 57.0% provided data for the August Advance report, compared to a range of 51.4% to 59.7% in the preceding 12 months. This resulted in a total quantity response rate of 59.4% for the August Advance report, compared to a range of 48.8% to 60.3% in the preceding 12 months. Approximately 63.7% provided data for the August full Monthly Wholesale Trade Report, compared to a range of 61.8% to 65.4% in the preceding 12 months. This resulted in a total quantity response rate of 66.0% for sales, compared to a range of 62.5% to 66.1% in the preceding 12 months and a total quantity response rate of 66.4% for inventories, compared to a range of 62.6% to 66.0% in the preceding 12 months.

Did the Census Bureau change its data collection procedures this month?

Yes. Our electronic instrument requested responding companies describe how their business was impacted by Hurricane Harvey and our data collection staff inquired about the impacts of Hurricane Harvey as part of their normal follow-up operations.

Were there any estimates withheld or delayed because of data collection problems?

No. All estimates were released as scheduled.

As a result of Hurricane Harvey, did the Census Bureau modify its usual weighting or estimation methods used to produce monthly wholesale estimates for August 2017?

No. Because the sample is designed to measure wholesale data at the national level and not at specific geographic areas, there is not sufficient evidence to support a change.

Has the reliability of the monthly wholesale estimates changed because of Hurricane Harvey?

No, the reliability of the monthly wholesale estimates as measured by the coefficient of variation for monthly totals and the standard error for month-to-month change has not changed substantially. For the published industries, reported data for August 2017 exhibited variation similar to that for prior months.

Did the Census Bureau alter the procedures for developing seasonally adjusted estimates for monthly wholesale data?

No, the monthly review process of the seasonal adjustment output and diagnostics did not indicate that adjustments to the parameters were necessary for this month.

What activities are the Census Bureau planning to ensure the affected areas will continue to be accurately represented?

As part of our data collection, we will continue to ask questions that will help us monitor impacts from the affected areas. We will monitor data responses and make adjustments if necessary.

Source: U. S. Census Bureau
Economic Indicators Division

Last Revised: October 6, 2017