

For Wire Transmission 10:00 a.m. E.T. May 8, 2001

BW/01-03

**MONTHLY WHOLESALE TRADE: SALES AND INVENTORIES
MARCH 2001**

Special Notice: On June 7 with the release of the monthly wholesale estimates for April 2001, we will begin using the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) in place of the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) system. In addition, we will restate the unadjusted and adjusted data series on a NAICS basis beginning with January 1992 through March 2001. These data series will also be revised based on the results of the 1999 Annual Trade Survey, which was conducted on a NAICS basis, and will be released on June 1, 2001. For further information on NAICS, including publication stubs for the new release, see our web site at <http://www.census.gov/mrts/www/naics.html>.

Sales. March 2001 sales of merchant wholesalers, after adjustment for seasonal variations and trading-day differences but not for price changes, were \$248.5 billion, down 1.3 percent (+/-0.5%) from the revised February level, but were 0.7 percent (+/-1.0%) above the March 2000 level. The February preliminary estimate was revised downward \$1.1 billion or 0.5 percent. March sales of durable goods decreased 1.2 percent (+/-0.7%) from last month and were 2.4 percent (+/-1.3%) below a year ago. Compared to last month, sales of metals and minerals, except petroleum were down 2.6 percent and professional and commercial equipment and supplies decreased 2.5 percent. March sales of nondurable goods declined 1.3 percent (+/-0.6%) from February, but were 4.2 percent (+/- 1.4%) above March 2000. Sales of petroleum and petroleum products were down 6.4 percent from last month and beer, wine, and distilled alcoholic beverages fell 3.2 percent.

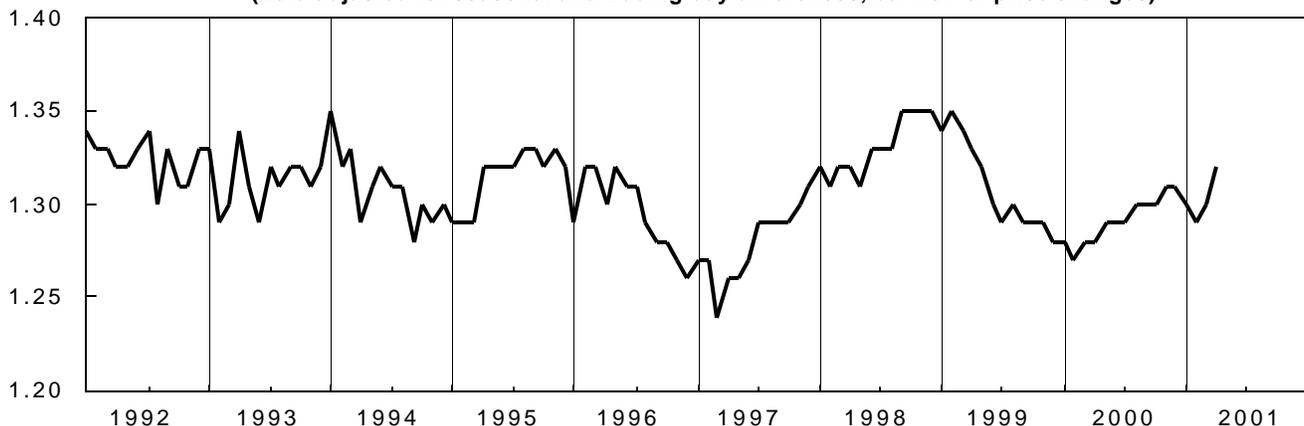
The February preliminary estimate was revised downward \$0.3 billion or 0.1 percent. End-of-month inventories of durable goods decreased 0.4 percent (+/-0.2%) from last month, but were up 1.8 percent (+/-1.0%) from March 2000. Compared to last month, inventories of professional and commercial equipment and supplies were down 1.7 percent. End-of-month inventories of nondurable goods increased 1.2 percent (+/-0.4%) from February 2001 and were up 7.3 percent (+/-1.3%) from last year. Compared to last month, inventories of drugs, drug proprietaries, and druggists' sundries increased 4.9 percent and chemicals and allied products grew 3.7 percent.

Inventories. Total inventories of merchant wholesalers, after adjustment for seasonal variations but not for price changes, were \$327.2 billion at the end of March, up 0.1 percent (+/-0.2%) from last month, and were 3.7 percent (+/-0.8%) above a year ago.

Inventories/Sales Ratio. The March inventories/sales ratio for merchant wholesalers, based on seasonally adjusted data, was 1.32. The March 2000 ratio was 1.28.

Data in this report are based on a sample and, therefore, are subject to sampling and nonsampling variability. A discussion of the reliability of the data and general survey methodology appears in BW/99-A Current Business Reports.

Monthly Inventories/Sales Ratios of Merchant Wholesalers: 1992 to 2001
(Data adjusted for seasonal and trading-day differences, but not for price changes)



Monthly Wholesale Trade for April is scheduled to be released June 7, 2001 at 10:00 a.m.

Address inquiries concerning this report to Service Sector Statistics Division, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC 20233, or call Scott Scheleur, (301) 457-2747 or (301) 457-2764. For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402.

This report is available on day of issue through the Department of Commerce's online Economic Bulletin Board (202-482-1986). The data are also available on the internet - <http://www.census.gov/svsd/www/mwts.html>.

Table 1. Estimated Monthly Sales, Inventories, and Inventories/Sales Ratios of Merchant Wholesalers: 2001 and 2000

[In millions of dollars]

SIC ¹ code	Kind of Business	Sales						Inventories						Inventories/Sales Ratios		
		Monthly			Percent change			Monthly			Percent change			Ratios		
		Mar. 2001 (p)	Feb. 2001 (r)	Mar. 2000 (r)	Mar./ Feb.	Feb./ Jan.	Mar. 01 Mar. 00	Mar. 2001 (p)	Feb. 2001 (r)	Mar. 2000 (r)	Mar./ Feb.	Feb./ Jan.	Mar. 01 Mar. 00	Mar. 2001 (p)	Feb. 2001 (r)	Mar. 2000 (r)
Adjusted²																
	U.S. Total	248,468	251,682	246,705	-1.3	-0.6	0.7	327,189	326,746	315,495	0.1	-0.2	3.7	1.32	1.30	1.28
50	Durable	127,922	129,541	131,018	-1.2	-0.5	-2.4	210,838	211,761	207,017	-0.4	-0.7	1.8	1.65	1.63	1.58
501	Automotive	19,112	19,031	18,900	0.4	-2.1	1.1	29,898	30,122	30,379	-0.7	-0.1	-1.6	1.56	1.58	1.61
502	Furniture	4,472	4,488	4,529	-0.4	-1.0	-1.3	7,115	7,149	6,706	-0.5	-0.6	6.1	1.59	1.59	1.48
503	Lumber	8,951	9,156	9,373	-2.2	1.4	-4.5	9,239	9,301	9,602	-0.7	-0.8	-3.8	1.03	1.02	1.02
504	Prof. equip.	22,714	23,285	24,518	-2.5	-0.2	-7.4	26,224	26,686	27,215	-1.7	-0.9	-3.6	1.15	1.15	1.11
505	Metals	7,744	7,950	8,622	-2.6	0.9	-10.2	12,880	13,038	13,972	-1.2	-1.3	-7.8	1.66	1.64	1.62
506	Electrical	21,828	21,837	21,810	0.0	-2.7	0.1	33,824	33,824	30,608	0.0	-1.1	10.5	1.55	1.55	1.40
507	Hardware	6,946	7,035	7,254	-1.3	0.3	-4.2	14,188	14,194	13,563	0.0	-0.9	4.6	2.04	2.02	1.87
508	Machinery	22,432	22,693	21,211	-1.2	2.2	5.8	53,286	53,383	52,504	-0.2	0.2	1.5	2.38	2.35	2.48
509	Other Durable	13,723	14,066	14,801	-2.4	-1.5	-7.3	24,184	24,064	22,468	0.5	-1.7	7.6	1.76	1.71	1.52
51	Nondurable	120,546	122,141	115,687	-1.3	-0.8	4.2	116,351	114,985	108,478	1.2	0.8	7.3	0.97	0.94	0.94
511	Paper	8,628	8,675	8,743	-0.5	0.3	-1.3	10,686	10,843	10,422	-1.4	2.1	2.5	1.24	1.25	1.19
512	Drugs	14,948	15,106	13,395	-1.0	0.1	11.6	21,998	20,969	18,612	4.9	-0.4	18.2	1.47	1.39	1.39
513	Apparel	8,039	8,257	8,664	-2.6	-2.0	-7.2	11,979	11,875	11,730	0.9	2.8	2.1	1.49	1.44	1.35
514	Groceries	33,811	33,589	31,619	0.7	0.4	6.9	19,832	19,699	19,365	0.7	-0.2	2.4	0.59	0.59	0.61
515	Farm-products	9,707	9,536	8,575	1.8	3.0	13.2	11,768	11,959	11,796	-1.6	0.5	-0.2	1.21	1.25	1.38
516	Chemicals	4,796	4,886	4,734	-1.8	2.2	1.3	4,857	4,682	4,931	3.7	-1.0	-1.5	1.01	0.96	1.04
517	Petroleum	15,105	16,137	15,365	-6.4	-6.9	-1.7	4,390	4,454	4,278	-1.4	1.0	2.6	0.29	0.28	0.28
518	Alcohol	6,040	6,242	5,869	-3.2	0.5	2.9	6,947	6,912	6,437	0.5	-1.3	7.9	1.15	1.11	1.10
519	Other Nondur.	19,472	19,713	18,723	-1.2	-1.2	4.0	23,894	23,592	20,907	1.3	2.1	14.3	1.23	1.20	1.12
Not Adjusted																
Sales to date																
	U.S. Total	258,827	229,520	263,410	12.8	-5.4	-1.7	328,144	329,862	316,733	-0.5	-0.6	3.6	731,006	715,514	
50	Durable	134,172	116,779	140,775	14.9	-3.7	-4.7	209,794	211,822	206,421	-1.0	0.0	1.6	372,179	378,732	
501	Automotive	20,794	17,166	20,828	21.1	-2.8	-0.2	30,436	31,206	30,956	-2.5	2.4	-1.7	55,613	55,722	
502	Furniture	4,579	3,999	4,742	14.5	-3.0	-3.4	6,859	6,949	6,478	-1.3	-1.4	5.9	12,700	12,797	
503	Lumber	8,987	7,728	9,682	16.3	-2.7	-7.2	9,452	9,227	9,813	2.4	1.0	-3.7	24,656	25,678	
504	Prof. equip.	24,031	20,887	26,798	15.1	-4.9	-10.3	25,909	26,846	26,970	-3.5	-1.1	-3.9	66,888	70,825	
505	Metals	8,193	7,584	9,467	8.0	-4.2	-13.5	12,841	12,999	13,972	-1.2	-1.7	-8.1	23,695	26,263	
506	Electrical	22,592	19,719	23,184	14.6	-6.6	-2.6	33,012	33,756	29,935	-2.2	-1.7	10.3	63,430	63,241	
507	Hardware	6,828	6,233	7,290	9.5	-4.2	-6.3	14,202	14,137	13,617	0.5	0.9	4.3	19,566	20,053	
508	Machinery	24,047	20,719	23,184	16.1	-1.7	3.7	53,552	52,903	52,819	1.2	1.7	1.4	65,835	62,257	
509	Other Durable	14,121	12,744	15,600	10.8	-1.4	-9.5	23,531	23,799	21,861	-1.1	-2.5	7.6	39,796	41,896	
51	Nondurable	124,655	112,741	122,635	10.6	-7.2	1.6	118,350	118,040	110,312	0.3	-1.7	7.3	358,827	336,782	
511	Paper	8,844	8,102	9,337	9.2	-10.0	-5.3	10,579	10,713	10,328	-1.3	0.6	2.4	25,947	26,207	
512	Drugs	15,382	14,018	14,292	9.7	-12.8	7.6	22,152	20,906	18,742	6.0	-7.1	18.2	45,477	39,325	
513	Apparel	9,004	8,414	10,016	7.0	5.4	-10.1	11,584	11,970	11,331	-3.2	-0.9	2.2	25,404	26,423	
514	Groceries	34,825	30,297	32,979	14.9	-6.3	5.6	19,594	19,285	19,152	1.6	-1.9	2.3	97,465	91,972	
515	Farm-products	10,018	9,097	9,055	10.1	-11.1	10.6	12,733	13,861	12,752	-8.1	-6.7	-0.1	29,350	25,845	
516	Chemicals	4,945	4,559	5,004	8.5	-4.1	-1.2	4,940	4,696	5,005	5.2	-0.8	-1.3	14,260	13,660	
517	Petroleum	14,878	15,282	15,611	-2.6	-13.3	-4.7	4,263	4,365	4,150	-2.3	0.3	2.7	47,790	44,041	
518	Alcohol	5,943	5,112	6,027	16.3	2.3	-1.4	6,891	6,670	6,398	3.3	1.6	7.7	16,051	15,243	
519	Other Nondur.	20,816	17,860	20,314	16.6	-3.0	2.5	25,614	25,574	22,454	0.2	3.6	14.1	57,083	54,066	

p Preliminary estimate. r Revised.

1 For a full description of the SIC codes shown above, see the "1987 Standard Industrial Classification Manual" or the Current Business Reports

"Annual Benchmark Report for Wholesale Trade" publication.

2 Data adjusted for seasonal variations and, in the case of sales, also for trading-day differences. See Table 3 for seasonal adjustment factors used.

Table 2. Coefficients of Variation and Standard Errors for Sales and Inventories Estimates

SIC code	Kind of Business	Coefficients of variation for level (x 100)				Standard error for trend				Coefficients of variation for level (x 100)		Standard error for trend
		Preliminary estimates		Final estimates		Ratio of two consecutive months		Year-to-year estimates		Cumulative sales estimates		Current year cumulative
		Sales	Inv.	Sales	Inv.	Sales	Inv.	Sales	Inv.	Current year	Previous year	to previous year cumulative
		Median	Median	Median	Median	Median	Median	Median	Median	year	year	
	U.S. Total	1.5	2.0	1.4	2.0	0.3	0.2	0.6	0.6	1.6	1.5	0.6
50	Durable	2.0	3.2	2.0	3.2	0.4	0.3	0.8	0.8	2.1	2.0	0.6
501	Automotive	4.4	5.4	4.4	5.4	0.7	0.6	1.4	1.9	4.7	4.8	1.2
502	Furniture	6.2	9.5	6.1	9.4	1.3	0.8	3.0	2.4	5.7	6.1	2.7
503	Lumber	5.7	6.8	5.8	6.8	0.9	0.7	1.6	2.2	5.7	5.5	2.8
504	Prof. equip.	6.9	6.9	7.0	6.9	0.9	0.6	1.5	1.7	6.3	6.2	1.1
505	Metals	5.7	10.3	5.7	10.3	1.2	1.0	3.2	2.2	6.2	5.1	3.6
506	Electrical	5.7	7.7	5.5	7.6	1.1	0.5	2.3	1.3	6.2	5.9	1.9
507	Hardware	6.5	6.8	6.5	6.8	0.9	0.4	1.6	1.2	6.9	6.7	1.1
508	Machinery	5.8	6.7	5.8	6.8	1.2	0.5	2.4	2.1	5.7	5.6	1.4
509	Other Durable	6.7	10.3	6.6	10.3	1.3	0.7	2.1	1.8	7.6	7.1	1.5
51	Nondurable	2.6	3.0	2.6	3.0	0.4	0.3	0.8	1.0	2.6	2.4	0.9
511	Paper	6.5	5.0	6.5	5.0	0.7	0.3	1.5	1.3	6.4	7.0	1.2
512	Drugs	6.3	5.2	6.2	5.2	0.5	0.3	1.5	1.3	6.5	6.0	1.4
513	Apparel	5.9	6.4	5.9	6.4	1.4	0.7	3.7	2.3	6.0	6.5	2.7
514	Groceries	3.5	4.4	3.5	4.4	0.6	0.5	1.6	1.5	3.1	3.7	1.6
515	Farm-products	7.8	9.0	7.7	8.9	1.8	1.2	2.5	2.6	7.9	7.5	2.6
516	Chemicals	5.8	5.4	5.8	5.5	0.9	0.6	1.8	1.6	5.8	5.4	1.8
517	Petroleum	5.6	14.0	5.6	13.9	0.6	0.7	1.2	2.0	5.8	5.4	0.9
518	Alcohol	6.1	6.1	6.2	6.1	1.0	0.9	1.3	2.7	6.5	6.7	1.2
519	Other Nondur.	8.4	12.7	8.5	12.8	1.2	0.8	2.1	3.8	8.8	8.7	2.2

Note: The median measures of variability are based on the most recent 12 months of data.

Reliability of Data

There are two types of errors possible in an estimate based on a sample survey: sampling and nonsampling.

Sampling errors occur because observations are made on a sample, not on the entire population, and different samples could have led to different estimates. Standard errors and coefficients of variation, as calculated for this report, are measures of sampling variation. The margin of sampling error, as used on page 1, gives a range about the estimate which is a 90% confidence interval. If, for example, the trend estimate is up 1.2% and the standard error is 0.9%, then the margin of sampling error is $\pm 1.65 \times 0.9\%$ or $\pm 1.5\%$, and the 90% confidence interval is -0.3% to $+2.7\%$. If the interval contains 0, it cannot be stated with certainty whether there was an increase or decrease. For monthly level, the coefficient of variation (CV) is given. The resulting confidence interval is the estimated value $\pm 1.65 \times CV \times$ (the estimated value).

Nonsampling errors are usually attributed to many possible sources: (1) coverage error - failure to accurately represent all population units in the sample, (2) inability to obtain information about all sample cases, (3) response

errors, possibly due to definitional difficulties or misreporting, (4) mistakes in recording or coding the data obtained, and (5) other errors of collection or processing, or in imputing for missing or inconsistent data. Coverage error has an effect on the accuracy of estimates for this survey to the extent that the administrative records system, which forms the basis of our survey universe frame, does not contain all legal businesses. A major source of nonsampling error in the published estimates is due to the need to impute data for nonrespondents and for late and inconsistent reports. For all kinds of businesses combined, imputed data amount to about 31 percent of the total monthly wholesale sales estimates and 32 percent of the total monthly wholesale inventories estimates.

Nonsampling errors also occur in complete censuses. Although no direct measures of these errors have been obtained, precautionary steps were taken in all phases of the collection, processing, and tabulation of the data to minimize their influence.

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Table 3. Seasonal Adjustment Factors for Sales and Inventories of Merchant Wholesalers

SIC code	Kind of Business	Sales						Inventories					
		2001				2000	2000	2001				2000	2000
		Apr.	Mar.r	Feb.r	Jan.	Dec.	Mar.r	Apr.	Mar.r	Feb.r	Jan.	Dec.	Mar.r
	U.S. Total¹	0.982	1.045	0.911	0.959	0.964	1.070	1.004	1.005	1.011	1.016	1.005	1.006
50	Durable	0.976	1.053	0.905	0.934	0.948	1.077	1.005	0.998	1.001	0.995	0.985	1.000
501	Automotive	1.011	1.088	0.902	0.908	0.978	1.102	1.021	1.018	1.036	1.010	0.978	1.019
502	Furniture	0.990	1.024	0.891	0.909	0.933	1.047	0.964	0.964	0.972	0.980	0.973	0.966
503	Lumber	0.988	1.004	0.844	0.879	0.832	1.033	1.032	1.023	0.992	0.974	0.949	1.022
504	Prof. equip.	0.936	1.058	0.897	0.942	1.020	1.093	0.995	0.988	1.006	1.008	1.000	0.991
505	Metals	0.994	1.058	0.954	1.005	0.903	1.098	1.005	0.997	0.997	1.001	1.007	1.000
506	Electrical	0.937	1.035	0.903	0.941	0.943	1.063	0.980	0.976	0.998	1.004	0.990	0.978
507	Hardware	0.981	0.983	0.886	0.927	0.869	1.005	1.020	1.001	0.996	0.978	0.981	1.004
508	Machinery	1.018	1.072	0.913	0.949	0.951	1.093	1.021	1.005	0.991	0.977	0.981	1.006
509	Other Durable	0.950	1.029	0.906	0.906	0.958	1.054	0.990	0.973	0.989	0.997	0.970	0.973
51	Nondurable	0.983	1.037	0.920	0.986	0.980	1.061	1.000	1.017	1.026	1.051	1.043	1.017
511	Paper	0.951	1.025	0.934	1.041	0.962	1.068	0.998	0.990	0.988	1.003	1.019	0.991
512	Drugs	0.975	1.029	0.928	1.065	0.994	1.067	1.009	1.007	0.997	1.069	1.025	1.007
513	Apparel	0.927	1.120	1.019	0.948	0.763	1.156	0.965	0.967	1.008	1.045	1.006	0.966
514	Groceries	0.974	1.030	0.902	0.967	0.990	1.043	0.990	0.988	0.979	0.996	1.014	0.989
515	Farm-products	0.939	1.032	0.954	1.105	1.067	1.056	0.981	1.082	1.159	1.249	1.240	1.081
516	Chemicals	0.973	1.031	0.933	0.995	0.902	1.057	1.009	1.017	1.003	1.001	1.004	1.015
517	Petroleum	0.975	0.985	0.947	1.017	0.999	1.016	0.980	0.971	0.980	0.986	1.031	0.970
518	Alcohol	0.935	0.984	0.819	0.804	1.076	1.027	1.008	0.992	0.965	0.938	0.921	0.994
519	Other Nondur.	1.118	1.069	0.906	0.923	0.962	1.085	1.033	1.072	1.084	1.068	1.065	1.074

r Revised



1 Adjusted sales and inventories data shown in Table 1 are obtained by dividing the unadjusted data by the adjustment factors shown above for the corresponding group. Adjusted data for the totals are obtained by adding the durable and nondurable goods. Seasonal factors shown for the totals will provide an approximation of the adjusted estimates, but may show small differences from the published data.

Note: The seasonal factors shown have been computed based on monthly estimates through the current month preliminary estimates.