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Nancy Piesto/ Howard Krakower
Service Sector Statistics Division
(301) 763-2747

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MONTHLY WHOLESALE TRADE: SALES AND INVENTORIES April 2005

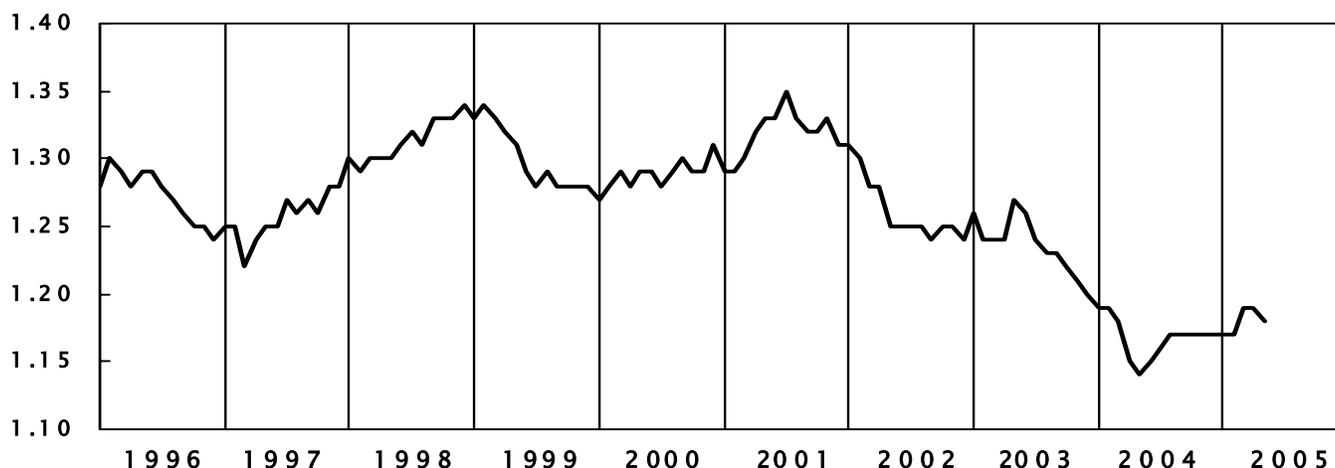
Sales. The U.S. Census Bureau announced today that April 2005 sales of merchant wholesalers, except manufacturers' sales branches and offices, after adjustment for seasonal variations and trading-day differences but not for price changes, were \$296.0 billion, up 1.5 percent (+/-0.7%) from the revised March level and were up 8.1 percent (+/-1.3%) from the April 2004 level. The March preliminary estimate was revised upward \$0.1 billion. April sales of durable goods increased 1.5 percent (+/-1.0%) from last month and were up 7.1 percent (+/-2.1%) from a year ago. Compared to last month, sales of machinery, equipment, and supplies increased 5.6 percent and sales of electrical and electronic goods increased 2.3 percent. April sales of nondurable goods were up 1.5 percent (+/-0.8%) from last month and were up 9.1 percent (+/-1.7%) from last year. Sales of chemicals and allied products increased 4.4 percent from last month and sales of drugs and druggists' sundries increased 4.1 percent.

Inventories. Total inventories of merchant wholesalers, except manufacturers' sales branches and offices, after adjustment for seasonal variations but not for price changes, were \$350.0 billion at the end of April, up 0.8 percent (+/-0.3%) from last month and were up 11.8 percent (+/-5.1%) from a year ago. The March preliminary estimate was revised upward \$0.6 billion or 0.2 percent. End-of-month inventories of durable goods increased 0.4 percent (+/-0.5%)* from March and were up 13.6 percent (+/-7.1%) from last April. Inventories of motor vehicle and motor vehicle parts and supplies increased 1.5 percent from last month, while inventories of lumber and other construction materials decreased 2.0 percent. End-of-month inventories of nondurable goods increased 1.4 percent (+/-0.5%) from March and were up 8.9 percent (+/-1.5%) compared to last April. Inventories of apparel, piece goods, and notions increased 1.8 percent from last month and inventories of paper and paper products increased 1.7 percent.

Inventories/Sales Ratio. The April inventories/sales ratio for merchant wholesalers, except manufacturers' sales branches and offices, based on seasonally adjusted data, was 1.18. The April 2004 ratio was 1.14.

Data in this report are based on a sample and, therefore, are subject to sampling and nonsampling error. A discussion of the reliability of the estimates and general survey methodology appears in BW/04-A Current Business Reports.

Monthly Inventories/Sales Ratios of Merchant Wholesalers, Except Manufacturers'
Sales Branches and Offices: 1996 to 2005
(Estimates adjusted for seasonal and trading-day differences, but not for price changes)



Monthly Wholesale Trade for May is scheduled to be released July 8, 2005 at 10:00 a.m. EDT.

For information, visit the Census Bureau's Web site at <<http://www.census.gov/whl>>. This report is also available the day of issue through the Department of Commerce's STAT-USA (202-482-1986).

* The 90 percent confidence interval includes zero. The Census Bureau does not have sufficient statistical evidence to conclude that the actual change is different from zero.

Table 1. Estimates of Monthly Sales, Inventories, and Inventories/Sales Ratios of Merchant Wholesalers, Except Manufacturers' Sales Branches and Offices

[Total sales and inventory estimates are shown in millions of dollars. Estimates are based on data from the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey.]

NAICS ¹ code	Kind of Business	Sales						Inventories						Inventories/Sales Ratios		
		Monthly total			Percent change			Monthly total			Percent change			Ratios		
		Apr. 2005 (p)	Mar. 2005 (r)	Apr. 2004 (r)	Apr./ Mar.	Mar./ Feb.	Apr. 05/ Apr. 04	Apr. 2005 (p)	Mar. 2005 (r)	Apr. 2004 (r)	Apr./ Mar.	Mar./ Feb.	Apr. 05/ Apr. 04	Apr. 2005 (p)	Mar. 2005 (r)	Apr. 2004 (r)
Adjusted²																
42	U.S. Total	295,993	291,624	273,761	1.5	0.2	8.1	349,956	347,275	312,981	0.8	0.6	11.8	1.18	1.19	1.14
423	Durable	148,536	146,407	138,651	1.5	-0.3	7.1	219,863	218,945	193,540	0.4	0.2	13.6	1.48	1.50	1.40
4231	Automotive	22,902	23,496	23,120	-2.5	-1.2	-0.9	32,374	31,900	31,487	1.5	-2.2	2.8	1.41	1.36	1.36
4232	Furniture	5,321	5,209	4,973	2.2	-0.3	7.0	7,649	7,584	7,232	0.9	0.3	5.8	1.44	1.46	1.45
4233	Lumber	12,078	12,062	11,777	0.1	-4.0	2.6	14,195	14,479	11,582	-2.0	0.0	22.6	1.18	1.20	0.98
4234	Prof. equip.	24,494	24,325	23,765	0.7	-0.3	3.1	28,815	28,431	26,247	1.4	-0.1	9.8	1.18	1.17	1.10
42343	Comp. equip.	13,529	13,513	13,260	0.1	-1.2	2.0	10,819	10,808	9,539	0.1	-0.1	13.4	0.80	0.80	0.72
4235	Metals	11,241	10,960	9,987	2.6	-0.5	12.6	20,969	20,826	14,648	0.7	1.3	43.2	1.87	1.90	1.47
4236	Electrical	22,693	22,177	21,154	2.3	3.0	7.3	26,857	27,047	25,389	-0.7	0.0	5.8	1.18	1.22	1.20
4237	Hardware	6,732	6,715	6,390	0.3	-1.2	5.4	12,663	12,617	11,033	0.4	0.1	14.8	1.88	1.88	1.73
4238	Machinery	26,374	24,985	22,547	5.6	-0.3	17.0	53,708	53,235	46,166	0.9	1.5	16.3	2.04	2.13	2.05
4239	Misc. Durable	16,701	16,478	14,938	1.4	-0.3	11.8	22,633	22,826	19,756	-0.8	0.7	14.6	1.36	1.39	1.32
424	Nondurable	147,457	145,217	135,110	1.5	0.8	9.1	130,093	128,330	119,441	1.4	1.2	8.9	0.88	0.88	0.88
4241	Paper	6,907	6,799	6,504	1.6	-2.9	6.2	7,012	6,897	5,938	1.7	-0.3	18.1	1.02	1.01	0.91
4242	Drugs	27,363	26,273	24,373	4.1	-2.3	12.3	28,446	28,567	29,832	-0.4	-0.1	-4.6	1.04	1.09	1.22
4243	Apparel	9,633	9,277	8,860	3.8	1.1	8.7	15,883	15,600	14,080	1.8	0.9	12.8	1.65	1.68	1.59
4244	Groceries	35,512	35,415	34,053	0.3	-0.4	4.3	23,302	23,040	22,097	1.1	-0.1	5.5	0.66	0.65	0.65
4245	Farm products	9,702	9,460	11,802	2.6	-0.4	-17.8	11,666	11,279	12,477	3.4	6.4	-6.5	1.20	1.19	1.06
4246	Chemicals	6,948	6,655	5,913	4.4	-1.4	17.5	7,525	7,424	6,399	1.4	1.0	17.6	1.08	1.12	1.08
4247	Petroleum	27,486	27,519	21,647	-0.1	8.2	27.0	7,848	7,770	4,591	1.0	8.9	70.9	0.29	0.28	0.21
4248	Alcohol	7,669	7,609	6,903	0.8	0.8	11.1	8,641	8,534	7,677	1.3	0.1	12.6	1.13	1.12	1.11
4249	Misc. Nondur.	16,237	16,210	15,055	0.2	0.1	7.9	19,770	19,219	16,350	2.9	0.3	20.9	1.22	1.19	1.09
													Sales to date			
													2005		2004	
42	U.S. Total	294,523	314,646	278,992	-6.4	18.0	5.6	350,784	349,262	313,777	0.4	0.4	11.8	1,142,716	1,059,862	
423	Durable	147,468	159,366	141,614	-7.5	20.0	4.1	221,695	219,490	195,326	1.0	0.0	13.5	570,606	525,755	
4231	Automotive	23,589	26,174	24,392	-9.9	21.9	-3.3	32,860	32,538	31,991	1.0	-3.8	2.7	91,443	88,963	
4232	Furniture	5,161	5,496	5,013	-6.1	17.9	3.0	7,481	7,417	7,073	0.9	-0.6	5.8	19,936	19,006	
4233	Lumber	12,320	12,834	12,448	-4.0	18.2	-1.0	14,706	15,029	11,987	-2.1	2.5	22.7	46,679	42,330	
4234	Prof. equip.	22,779	27,025	22,814	-15.7	24.1	-0.2	28,700	27,777	26,221	3.3	-2.1	9.5	93,209	92,550	
42343	Comp. equip.	12,393	14,891	12,385	-16.8	23.8	0.1	10,906	10,538	9,653	3.5	-0.2	13.0	51,795	50,141	
4235	Metals	11,432	11,815	10,496	-3.2	13.4	8.9	20,948	20,909	14,633	0.2	1.8	43.2	44,119	36,459	
4236	Electrical	22,080	23,641	21,027	-6.6	21.2	5.0	26,857	26,641	25,389	0.8	-0.4	5.8	85,459	79,398	
4237	Hardware	6,786	7,138	6,639	-4.9	16.3	2.2	12,790	12,768	11,154	0.2	0.7	14.7	26,142	24,490	
4238	Machinery	26,954	27,134	23,877	-0.7	20.1	12.9	54,675	53,927	47,043	1.4	3.0	16.2	98,811	86,378	
4239	Misc. Durable	16,367	18,109	14,908	-9.6	18.0	9.8	22,678	22,484	19,835	0.9	-1.2	14.3	64,808	56,181	
424	Nondurable	147,055	155,280	137,378	-5.3	16.0	7.0	129,089	129,772	118,451	-0.5	1.0	9.0	572,110	534,107	
4241	Paper	6,665	7,255	6,413	-8.1	12.4	3.9	6,998	6,773	5,926	3.3	-1.9	18.1	26,927	25,023	
4242	Drugs	26,706	28,375	24,568	-5.9	14.3	8.7	27,991	28,853	29,414	-3.0	3.1	-4.8	106,254	95,699	
4243	Apparel	8,997	10,798	8,373	-16.7	16.2	7.5	15,152	14,929	13,418	1.5	-2.4	12.9	37,233	36,150	
4244	Groceries	35,015	37,080	34,121	-5.6	15.3	2.6	22,999	22,925	21,788	0.3	0.7	5.6	137,059	133,017	
4245	Farm products	9,372	9,999	11,613	-6.3	8.0	-19.3	12,623	13,241	13,138	-4.7	4.9	-3.9	38,877	47,049	
4246	Chemicals	6,997	7,227	6,096	-3.2	13.6	14.8	7,548	7,446	6,405	1.4	0.6	17.8	27,077	23,852	
4247	Petroleum	28,366	28,950	22,708	-2.0	21.6	24.9	7,463	7,910	4,375	-5.7	8.8	70.6	105,929	88,415	
4248	Alcohol	7,385	7,830	6,910	-5.7	24.2	6.9	8,762	8,380	7,784	4.6	1.7	12.6	27,117	25,003	
4249	Misc. Nondur.	17,552	17,766	16,576	-1.2	15.2	5.9	19,553	19,315	16,203	1.2	-3.4	20.7	65,637	59,899	

^p Preliminary estimate. ^r Revised estimate.

¹ For a full description of the NAICS codes used in this table, see the 2002 NAICS manual or <http://www.census.gov/epcd/www/naics.html>.

² Estimates are adjusted for seasonal variation and, in the case of sales, also for trading-day differences. See Table 3 for the seasonal adjustment factors used. Cumulative seasonally adjusted sales estimates are not tabulated.

Note: Estimates have not been adjusted for price changes. Table 2 provides estimated measures of sampling variability. Additional information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, sample design, and definitions may be found at <http://www.census.gov/svsd/www/jmwsreliability.html>.

Table 2. Estimated Measures of Sampling Variability of Monthly Wholesale Sales and Inventory Estimates

[Estimates are shown as percents and are based on data from the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey.]

NAICS code	Kind of Business	Median coefficient of variation for monthly total				Median standard error for percent change				Coefficient of variation for total		Standard error for percent change
		Preliminary estimates		Final estimates		Ratio of two consecutive months		Current month to current month last year		Sales to date		Current year sales to date
		Sales	Inv.	Sales	Inv.	Sales	Inv.	Sales	Inv.	Current year	Previous year	to previous year sales to date
42	U.S. Total	1.3	1.5	1.3	1.5	0.4	0.2	0.8	3.1	1.2	1.0	0.7
423	Durable	1.3	1.7	1.2	1.7	0.6	0.3	1.3	4.3	1.3	1.2	1.0
4231	Automotive	3.3	4.0	3.3	4.0	1.2	0.8	1.3	1.7	3.2	3.4	1.3
4232	Furniture	7.5	9.8	7.5	9.8	1.7	0.9	2.9	3.7	7.3	8.0	2.4
4233	Lumber	6.9	8.0	6.5	7.4	1.5	1.1	4.2	21.1	5.6	5.2	2.1
4234	Prof. equip.	4.8	6.3	4.8	6.3	1.3	0.9	3.8	2.6	4.4	5.4	3.0
42343	Comp. equip.	9.8	13.3	9.8	13.2	2.5	1.8	4.9	3.1	9.7	8.3	2.7
4235	Metals	6.2	10.6	6.4	10.6	1.7	0.8	4.7	3.7	5.7	6.8	2.6
4236	Electrical	4.1	5.9	4.0	5.7	1.2	0.6	2.0	1.6	4.0	3.9	1.3
4237	Hardware	7.4	9.2	7.3	9.2	1.4	0.6	1.4	1.9	7.1	7.4	1.2
4238	Machinery	4.4	4.1	4.4	4.0	1.6	0.5	2.3	1.0	4.2	3.9	1.7
4239	Misc. Durable	4.1	7.9	4.1	7.9	1.4	0.8	2.6	2.6	4.0	4.1	2.1
424	Nondurable	2.2	2.3	2.2	2.3	0.5	0.3	1.0	0.9	2.1	1.7	1.0
4241	Paper	5.8	5.1	5.8	5.1	1.2	0.7	1.8	2.7	5.8	4.8	1.5
4242	Drugs	5.0	5.4	5.0	5.4	0.9	0.4	1.3	1.4	5.1	5.0	1.1
4243	Apparel	5.6	5.0	5.6	5.1	2.1	0.9	2.2	3.4	5.6	4.7	2.4
4244	Groceries	3.6	7.3	3.6	7.3	0.8	0.8	1.3	1.3	3.7	3.2	1.1
4245	Farm products	7.5	10.1	7.7	9.6	2.1	2.2	2.9	3.3	6.9	7.7	1.5
4246	Chemicals	5.0	6.8	5.0	6.9	1.1	0.9	1.6	2.2	5.1	5.0	1.2
4247	Petroleum	9.5	9.6	9.4	9.6	1.1	1.6	3.1	3.0	9.6	8.2	2.5
4248	Alcohol	4.6	5.3	4.7	5.3	1.1	0.7	1.3	1.3	4.7	4.4	1.3
4249	Misc. Nondur.	8.3	9.0	8.2	9.1	1.9	0.9	3.8	3.6	8.3	7.5	2.5

Note: Estimated measures of sampling variability are based on estimates unadjusted for seasonal variation or trading-day differences.

Medians are based on estimates for the most recent 12 months. Additional information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, sample design, and definitions may be found at <http://www.census.gov/svsd/www/mwtsreliability.html>.

Reliability of the Estimates

Because the estimates presented in this report are based on a sample survey, they may contain sampling error and nonsampling error.

Sampling error is the difference between the estimate and the result that would be obtained from a complete enumeration of the sampling frame conducted under the same survey conditions. This error occurs because only a subset of the entire sampling frame is measured in a sample survey. Standard errors and coefficients of variation (CV), as given in Table 2 of this report, are estimated measures of sampling variation.

The margin of sampling error, as used on page 1, gives a range about the estimate which is a 90-percent confidence interval. If, for example, the percent change estimate is +1.2 percent and its estimated standard error is 0.9 percent, then the margin of sampling error is $\pm 1.645 \times 0.9$ percent or ± 1.5 percent, and the 90 percent confidence interval is -0.3 percent to +2.7 percent. If the interval contains 0, then one does not have sufficient statistical evidence to conclude at the 90 percent confidence level that the change is different from zero and therefore the change is not statistically significant. Estimated changes shown in the text are statistically significant unless otherwise noted. For a monthly total, the median estimated coefficient of variation (CV) is given. The resulting confidence interval is the estimated value $\pm 1.645 \times CV \times$ (the estimated value). The Census Bureau recommends that individuals using estimates in this report incorporate this information into their analyses, as sampling error could affect the conclusions drawn from the estimates.

Nonsampling error encompasses all other factors that contribute to the total error of a sample survey estimate. This type of error can occur because of nonresponse, insufficient coverage of the universe of wholesale businesses, mistakes in the recording and coding of data, model error, and other errors of collection, response, coverage, or processing. Although nonsampling error is not measured directly, the Census Bureau employs quality control procedures throughout the process to minimize this type of error.

Table 3. Seasonal Adjustment Factors for Monthly Wholesale Sales and Inventory Estimates

[Seasonal adjustment factors are computed using the Census Bureau's X-12 ARIMA program and are based on data from the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey.]

NAICS code	Kind of Business	Sales						Inventories					
		2005					2004	2005					2004
		May	Apr.r	Mar.r	Feb.	Jan.	Apr.r	May	Apr.r	Mar.r	Feb.	Jan.	Apr.r
42	U.S. Total ¹	1.014	0.991	1.075	0.916	0.914	1.017	0.989	1.002	1.006	1.007	1.012	1.002
423	Durable	1.006	0.987	1.084	0.908	0.885	1.018	1.004	1.009	1.002	1.004	0.994	1.010
4231	Automotive	1.016	1.030	1.114	0.903	0.867	1.055	0.997	1.015	1.020	1.037	1.007	1.016
4232	Furniture	1.003	0.970	1.055	0.892	0.878	1.008	0.998	0.978	0.978	0.987	0.984	0.978
4233	Lumber	1.063	1.020	1.064	0.864	0.833	1.057	1.040	1.036	1.038	1.013	0.983	1.035
4234	Prof. equip.	0.959	0.930	1.111	0.892	0.887	0.960	0.981	0.996	0.977	0.997	1.004	0.999
42343	Comp. equip.	0.936	0.916	1.102	0.879	0.900	0.934	0.983	1.008	0.975	0.978	0.996	1.012
4235	Metals	1.024	1.017	1.078	0.946	0.930	1.051	0.998	0.999	1.004	0.999	1.007	0.999
4236	Electrical	0.996	0.973	1.066	0.906	0.893	0.994	1.006	1.000	0.985	0.989	0.989	1.000
4237	Hardware	1.045	1.008	1.063	0.903	0.885	1.039	1.013	1.010	1.012	1.006	0.986	1.011
4238	Machinery	1.049	1.022	1.086	0.902	0.880	1.059	1.017	1.018	1.013	0.998	0.980	1.019
4239	Misc. Durable	0.957	0.980	1.099	0.929	0.896	0.998	0.988	1.002	0.985	1.004	1.011	1.004
424	Nondurable	1.017	0.995	1.070	0.929	0.945	1.016	0.964	0.990	1.011	1.013	1.042	0.989
4241	Paper	0.983	0.965	1.067	0.921	0.940	0.986	0.999	0.998	0.982	0.998	0.999	0.998
4242	Drugs	0.989	0.976	1.080	0.923	0.966	1.008	0.955	0.984	1.010	0.979	1.041	0.986
4243	Apparel	0.916	0.934	1.164	1.013	0.878	0.945	0.973	0.954	0.957	0.989	1.028	0.953
4244	Groceries	1.034	0.986	1.047	0.904	0.931	1.002	0.984	0.987	0.995	0.987	1.004	0.986
4245	Farm products	0.949	0.966	1.057	0.975	1.061	0.984	0.927	1.082	1.174	1.191	1.198	1.053
4246	Chemicals	1.012	1.007	1.086	0.943	0.959	1.031	1.007	1.003	1.003	1.007	0.999	1.001
4247	Petroleum	1.044	1.032	1.052	0.936	0.979	1.049	0.938	0.951	1.018	1.019	1.076	0.953
4248	Alcohol	1.045	0.963	1.029	0.835	0.748	1.001	1.003	1.014	0.982	0.967	0.967	1.014
4249	Misc. Nondur.	1.060	1.081	1.096	0.952	0.929	1.101	0.953	0.989	1.005	1.043	1.059	0.991

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¹Adjusted sales and inventory estimates for detailed kind-of-business levels in Table 1 are computed by dividing each unadjusted estimate by the seasonal adjustment factor for the corresponding kind of business and month. Adjusted estimates for broad kind-of-business levels are obtained by summing adjusted estimates at the appropriate detailed levels. Seasonal factors shown for broad kind-of-business levels may be used to approximate adjusted estimates at these levels, but the resulting estimates may differ slightly from the published estimates.

Note: The seasonal adjustment factors shown are estimates derived from a model that uses sample survey data as input. Therefore, these estimates may contain sampling error and nonsampling error. Additional information on the general form of the model and the X-12 ARIMA program may be found at <http://www.census.gov/srd/www/x12a/>.

Description of the Survey

The U.S. Census Bureau conducts the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey (MWTS) to provide national estimates of monthly sales, end-of-month inventories, and inventory-to-sales ratios by kind of business for wholesale firms located in the United States. Specifically, the MWTS covers wholesale merchants who sell goods on their own account and include such businesses as wholesale merchants or jobbers, industrial distributors, exporters, and importers. Sales offices and branches maintained by manufacturing, refining, or mining firms for the purpose of marketing their products are not covered in this report. Also excluded is NAICS Industry Group 4251: Wholesale Electronic Markets and Agents and Brokers.

The MWTS sample was selected using a stratified, one-stage design with strata defined by kind of business (e.g., Automotive, Furniture, Lumber, etc.) and annual sales size. The sample includes firms of all sizes and is updated on a quarterly basis to account for new wholesale firms, deaths, and other changes to the wholesale universe. Each month, questionnaires are mailed to a probability sample of approximately 4,000 employer firms. Data for nonresponding firms are imputed based on data for similar-sized firms classified in the same kind of business. Approximately 31% of the total sales estimate and 33% of the total end-of-month inventory estimate is based on imputed data. Monthly sales and inventory estimates are obtained by summing weighted data (either reported or imputed). The monthly estimates are benchmarked to annual survey estimates and are adjusted for seasonal variation and trading-day differences. Individuals who use estimates in this report to create new estimates should cite the Census Bureau as the source of only the original estimates. Additional information on the MWTS can be found on the Census Bureau website at:

<http://www.census.gov/econ/www/retmenu.html#WHOL>.