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MONTHLY WHOLESALE TRADE: SALES AND INVENTORIES November 2008

Intention to Revise Wholesale Data: Monthly wholesale sales, inventories, and inventories/sales ratios will be revised based on the results of the 2007 Annual Wholesale Trade Survey. Revised unadjusted and corresponding adjusted data are tentatively scheduled for release on our website on March 31, 2009.

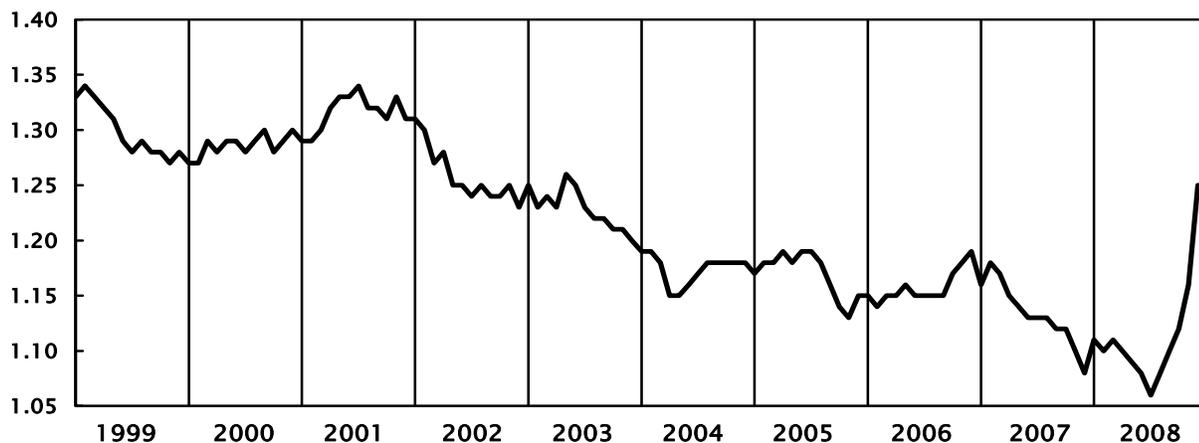
Sales. The U.S. Census Bureau announced today that November 2008 sales of merchant wholesalers, except manufacturers' sales branches and offices, after adjustment for seasonal variations and trading-day differences but not for price changes, were \$349.2 billion, down 7.1 percent (+/-0.4%) from the revised October level and were down 7.6 percent (+/-1.2%) from the November 2007 level. The October preliminary estimate was revised downward \$1.3 billion or 0.4 percent. November sales of durable goods were down 6.1 percent (+/-0.7%) from last month and were down 9.4 percent (+/-2.1%) from a year ago. Compared to last month, sales of motor vehicle and motor vehicle parts and supplies were down 10.6 percent and sales of electrical and electronic goods were down 8.8 percent. Sales of nondurable goods were down 7.9 percent (+/-0.9%) from last month and were down 6.1 percent (+/-1.8%) from last year. Sales of petroleum and petroleum products were down 25.1 percent from last month and sales of chemicals and allied products were down 5.0 percent.

Inventories. Total inventories of merchant wholesalers, except manufacturers' sales branches and offices, after adjustment for seasonal variations but not for price changes, were \$435.0 billion at the end of November, down 0.6 percent (+/-0.4%) from the revised October level, but were up 6.3 percent (+/-1.4%) from a year ago. The October preliminary estimate was revised downward \$0.5 billion or 0.1 percent. End-of-month inventories of durable goods were down 0.1 percent (+/-0.4%)* from last month, but were up 9.2 percent (+/-1.8%) from last November. Inventories of lumber and other construction materials were down 2.3 percent from last month, while inventories of motor vehicle and motor vehicle parts and supplies were up 1.2 percent. End-of-month inventories of nondurable goods decreased 1.5 percent (+/-0.4%) from October, but increased 1.6 percent (+/-3.7%)* compared to last November. Inventories of petroleum and petroleum products were down 6.2 percent from last month and inventories of chemicals and allied products were down 4.4 percent.

Inventories/Sales Ratio. The November inventories/sales ratio for merchant wholesalers, except manufacturers' sales branches and offices, based on seasonally adjusted data, was 1.25. The November 2007 ratio was 1.08.

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 can be found at: <<http://www.census.gov/wholesale/www/methodology/011340.html>>.

Monthly Inventories/Sales Ratios of Merchant Wholesalers, Except Manufacturers' Sales Branches and Offices: 1999 to 2008
(Estimates adjusted for seasonal and trading-day differences, but not for price changes)



Monthly Wholesale Trade for December is scheduled to be released February 10, 2009 at 10:00 a.m. EST.

For information, visit the Census Bureau's Web site at <<http://www.census.gov/wholesale>>. 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			Percent change			Monthly			Percent change			Ratios		
		Nov. 2008 (p)	Oct. 2008 (r)	Nov. 2007 (r)	Nov./ Oct.	Oct./ Sep.	Nov. 08/ Nov. 07	Nov. 2008 (p)	Oct. 2008 (r)	Nov. 2007 (r)	Nov./ Oct.	Oct./ Sep.	Nov. 08/ Nov. 07	Nov. 2008 (p)	Oct. 2008 (r)	Nov. 2007 (r)
Adjusted²																
42	U.S. Total	349,245	376,064	378,025	-7.1	-4.5	-7.6	435,006	437,724	409,334	-0.6	-1.2	6.3	1.25	1.16	1.08
423	.Durable	159,059	169,471	175,476	-6.1	-4.4	-9.4	276,075	276,424	252,828	-0.1	-0.3	9.2	1.74	1.63	1.44
4231	..Automotive	20,768	23,227	27,390	-10.6	-3.9	-24.2	43,101	42,581	38,610	1.2	-0.1	11.6	2.08	1.83	1.41
4232	..Furniture	5,205	5,289	5,733	-1.6	-4.6	-9.2	8,121	8,111	7,984	0.1	1.2	1.7	1.56	1.53	1.39
4233	..Lumber	8,657	9,302	10,213	-6.9	-3.0	-15.2	14,125	14,460	14,488	-2.3	-1.6	-2.5	1.63	1.55	1.42
4234	..Prof. equip.	30,166	30,501	30,650	-1.1	-1.1	-1.6	32,822	32,913	30,726	-0.3	-0.4	6.8	1.09	1.08	1.00
42343	...Comp. equip.	15,003	15,226	16,208	-1.5	-2.9	-7.4	11,720	11,912	10,817	-1.6	0.2	8.3	0.78	0.78	0.67
4235	..Metals	13,802	14,895	13,529	-7.3	-4.8	2.0	28,850	28,894	22,541	-0.2	0.8	28.0	2.09	1.94	1.67
4236	..Electrical	25,986	28,501	29,139	-8.8	-2.2	-10.8	36,074	36,488	33,006	-1.1	0.7	9.3	1.39	1.28	1.13
4237	..Hardware	7,044	7,311	8,088	-3.7	-2.9	-12.9	15,048	15,172	15,520	-0.8	-0.6	-3.0	2.14	2.08	1.92
4238	..Machinery	30,947	31,926	29,499	-3.1	1.3	4.9	72,877	72,543	66,181	0.5	0.0	10.1	2.35	2.27	2.24
4239	..Misc. Durable	16,484	18,519	21,235	-11.0	-20.6	-22.4	25,057	25,262	23,772	-0.8	-3.3	5.4	1.52	1.36	1.12
424	.Nondurable	190,186	206,593	202,549	-7.9	-4.6	-6.1	158,931	161,300	156,506	-1.5	-2.6	1.5	0.84	0.78	0.77
4241	..Paper ³	7,908	8,177	7,948	-3.3	0.1	-0.5	7,246	7,312	6,938	-0.9	1.4	4.4	0.92	0.89	0.87
4242	..Drugs	31,407	32,523	31,145	-3.4	0.4	0.8	31,260	31,366	30,212	-0.3	1.6	3.5	1.00	0.96	0.97
4243	..Apparel	10,683	10,872	11,349	-1.7	-4.3	-5.9	16,784	16,773	16,486	0.1	0.2	1.8	1.57	1.54	1.45
4244	..Groceries	44,150	44,433	43,774	-0.6	-0.6	0.9	27,615	27,978	26,057	-1.3	0.6	6.0	0.63	0.63	0.60
4245	..Farm products	19,415	19,746	18,171	-1.7	-5.9	6.8	19,436	20,133	23,650	-3.5	-8.6	-17.8	1.00	1.02	1.30
4246	..Chemicals ³	8,805	9,265	8,776	-5.0	-1.7	0.3	9,584	10,026	8,989	-4.4	-2.1	6.6	1.09	1.08	1.02
4247	..Petroleum	39,702	52,975	52,210	-25.1	-11.3	-24.0	12,560	13,383	13,399	-6.1	-18.2	-6.3	0.32	0.25	0.26
4248	..Alcohol	9,055	9,200	8,888	-1.6	-2.4	1.9	11,059	10,859	10,210	1.8	0.9	8.3	1.22	1.18	1.15
4249	..Misc. Nondur.	19,061	19,402	20,288	-1.8	-4.4	-6.0	23,387	23,470	20,565	-0.4	-0.6	13.7	1.23	1.21	1.01
													Sales to date			
													2008		2007	
42	U.S. Total	322,771	398,674	371,890	-19.0	-0.8	-13.2	435,444	438,946	410,620	-0.8	-0.4	6.0	4,288,226	3,887,776	
423	.Durable	146,435	182,600	173,262	-19.8	-1.0	-15.5	274,972	277,402	251,970	-0.9	-0.3	9.1	1,939,494	1,867,235	
4231	..Automotive	19,937	24,504	27,664	-18.6	3.1	-27.9	44,006	42,581	39,421	3.3	2.0	11.6	275,066	298,017	
4232	..Furniture	4,986	5,855	5,894	-14.8	-0.8	-15.4	8,007	8,152	7,880	-1.8	0.1	1.6	60,867	64,092	
4233	..Lumber	7,384	10,242	9,437	-27.9	1.9	-21.8	13,419	14,012	13,778	-4.2	-4.7	-2.6	107,234	119,419	
4234	..Prof. equip.	27,934	32,850	30,221	-15.0	-3.6	-7.6	33,150	33,769	31,095	-1.8	1.3	6.6	330,826	317,555	
42343	...Comp. equip.	13,743	16,155	15,657	-14.9	-11.0	-12.2	12,036	12,496	11,131	-3.7	3.7	8.1	165,478	162,039	
4235	..Metals	11,925	16,146	12,704	-26.1	2.7	-6.1	28,273	28,865	22,158	-2.1	-1.4	27.6	167,053	153,625	
4236	..Electrical	25,414	31,180	30,071	-18.5	-0.1	-15.5	36,074	37,072	33,006	-2.7	0.6	9.3	317,276	297,155	
4237	..Hardware	6,241	8,071	7,708	-22.7	2.3	-19.0	14,792	15,051	15,256	-1.7	-1.9	-3.0	85,148	88,180	
4238	..Machinery	26,707	33,714	27,670	-20.8	2.9	-3.5	72,294	72,108	65,652	0.3	0.3	10.1	342,412	309,535	
4239	..Misc. Durable	15,907	20,038	21,893	-20.6	-12.8	-27.3	24,957	25,792	23,724	-3.2	-4.1	5.2	253,612	219,657	
424	.Nondurable	176,336	216,074	198,628	-18.4	-0.8	-11.2	160,472	161,544	158,650	-0.7	-0.7	1.1	2,348,732	2,020,541	
4241	..Paper	7,370	9,027	7,932	-18.4	6.6	-7.1	7,246	7,312	6,938	-0.9	1.4	4.4	89,707	86,010	
4242	..Drugs	29,177	35,353	31,425	-17.5	6.9	-7.2	31,354	31,335	30,333	0.1	0.2	3.4	347,819	331,840	
4243	..Apparel	9,999	12,481	11,224	-19.9	0.7	-10.9	16,213	17,075	15,942	-5.0	-3.2	1.7	123,820	119,568	
4244	..Groceries	41,987	45,544	43,380	-7.8	2.3	-3.2	28,443	28,594	26,891	-0.5	2.7	5.8	491,110	466,719	
4245	..Farm products	19,182	21,997	19,679	-12.8	11.2	-2.5	20,563	19,811	25,140	3.8	9.1	-18.2	235,470	164,231	
4246	..Chemicals	7,995	9,876	8,548	-19.0	2.2	-6.5	9,584	10,026	8,989	-4.4	-2.1	6.6	102,150	92,209	
4247	..Petroleum	34,938	52,763	48,399	-33.8	-12.8	-27.8	12,535	12,915	13,439	-2.9	-20.5	-6.7	640,139	461,043	
4248	..Alcohol	8,838	10,019	9,457	-11.8	7.8	-6.5	11,568	11,358	10,680	1.8	3.0	8.3	98,469	93,975	
4249	..Misc. Nondur.	16,850	19,014	18,584	-11.4	-5.1	-9.3	22,966	23,118	20,298	-0.7	0.2	13.1	220,048	204,946	

Footnotes:

^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/naics02/naicod02.htm#N42>.

² Except where indicated, sales and inventories estimates are adjusted for seasonal variation. Estimates of sales are also adjusted for trading-day differences and moving holidays. See Table 3 for the combined adjustment factors. Adjusted sales-to-date estimates are not tabulated.

³ No discernible seasonal pattern for this NAICS code was detected in the latest annual review of the seasonal adjustment for inventories. Consequently, the "Adjusted" inventories estimates are equal to the "Not Adjusted" estimates.

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/wholesale/www/methodology/011340.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	Coefficient of variation for monthly total				Standard error for monthly total				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 to previous year sales to date
		Sales	Inv.	Sales	Inv.	Sales	Inv.	Sales	Inv.	Current year	Previous year	
42	U.S. Total	1.2	1.5	1.2	1.5	0.2	0.2	0.7	0.8	0.9	0.7	0.7
423	..Durable	1.8	1.9	1.7	2.0	0.4	0.2	1.2	1.0	1.6	1.3	1.1
4231	..Automotive	3.0	4.9	3.0	4.9	0.8	0.5	1.2	1.8	2.7	2.8	0.6
4232	..Furniture	6.5	4.6	6.5	5.2	2.6	0.9	4.3	2.9	4.2	3.2	2.0
4233	..Lumber	5.3	9.3	5.2	9.1	0.6	0.6	1.8	3.1	4.9	4.5	1.8
4234	..Prof. equip.	4.3	4.0	4.6	4.2	1.1	0.5	1.6	1.9	4.3	4.1	1.3
42343	...Comp. equip.	7.0	6.3	6.6	6.8	2.0	0.9	2.0	3.1	6.6	6.3	1.3
4235	..Metals	6.4	6.4	5.3	6.3	1.8	0.8	3.2	2.6	5.1	4.7	1.6
4236	..Electrical	8.4	4.7	8.7	4.6	0.7	0.4	4.7	3.8	8.5	3.1	6.0
4237	..Hardware	4.5	4.8	4.5	4.6	1.0	0.5	2.5	2.4	4.8	5.2	2.0
4238	..Machinery	3.9	4.0	4.2	4.1	1.5	0.5	2.7	2.4	3.7	2.9	1.7
4239	..Misc. Durable	4.1	4.6	4.6	4.5	1.8	0.4	3.0	3.5	5.4	6.4	2.2
424	..Nondurable	1.5	1.8	1.5	1.8	0.5	0.2	1.0	2.1	1.3	1.1	1.0
4241	..Paper	7.5	7.1	7.7	6.9	1.4	0.8	3.8	5.9	7.0	8.2	3.9
4242	..Drugs	3.6	4.6	3.5	4.6	1.2	0.3	2.7	4.7	3.5	4.0	2.1
4243	..Apparel	4.8	6.3	4.6	5.9	1.9	1.2	2.8	4.2	3.7	4.0	1.9
4244	..Groceries	4.5	7.5	4.7	7.6	0.8	0.6	2.2	3.4	4.2	3.8	1.2
4245	..Farm products	4.3	6.7	4.7	6.6	1.7	1.0	3.4	4.4	3.4	3.7	4.2
4246	..Chemicals	7.8	8.3	8.0	9.4	1.0	1.2	3.2	3.5	7.4	6.7	2.0
4247	..Petroleum	4.1	4.6	4.4	5.5	0.7	0.8	1.7	1.8	3.9	3.3	2.9
4248	..Alcohol	6.5	3.8	6.6	3.9	0.7	1.0	2.0	2.2	7.1	7.2	1.1
4249	..Misc. Nondur.	5.9	6.3	4.6	6.5	1.6	0.6	1.9	3.2	4.6	4.8	1.1

Note:

Estimated measures of sampling variability are based on estimates not adjusted for seasonal variation, trading-day differences, or moving holidays. Additional information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, sample design, and definitions may be found at http://www.census.gov/wholesale/www/how_surveys_are_collected/011340.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 $\pm 1.753 \times 0.9$ percent or ± 1.6 percent, and the 90 percent confidence interval is -0.4 percent to +2.8 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 $\pm 1.753 \times CV \times$ (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. Combined¹ Adjustment Factors for Monthly Wholesale Sales and Inventory Estimates

Combined 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					
		2008					2007	2008					2007
		Dec.	Nov.r	Oct.r	Sep.	Aug.	Nov.r	Dec.	Nov.r	Oct.r	Sep.	Aug.	Nov.r
42	U.S. Total²	1.012	0.936	1.060	1.021	0.999	0.991	1.004	1.002	1.004	0.994	0.991	1.003
423	.Durable	1.012	0.934	1.076	1.033	0.995	0.994	0.984	0.996	1.003	1.002	1.000	0.997
4231	..Automotive	1.041	0.960	1.055	0.984	0.983	1.010	0.998	1.021	1.000	0.979	0.951	1.021
4232	..Furniture	0.972	0.958	1.107	1.065	1.002	1.028	0.982	0.986	1.005	1.016	1.035	0.987
4233	..Lumber	0.828	0.853	1.101	1.048	1.062	0.924	0.953	0.950	0.969	1.000	1.014	0.951
4234	..Prof. equip.	1.136	0.926	1.077	1.105	0.957	0.986	0.981	1.010	1.026	1.009	1.013	1.012
42343	...Comp. equip.	1.212	0.916	1.061	1.157	0.931	0.966	0.992	1.027	1.049	1.014	1.005	1.029
4235	..Metals	0.852	0.864	1.084	1.005	1.025	0.939	1.002	0.980	0.999	1.021	1.017	0.983
4236	..Electrical	0.990	0.978	1.094	1.071	1.004	1.032	0.983	1.000	1.016	1.017	1.017	1.000
4237	..Hardware	0.914	0.886	1.104	1.048	1.030	0.953	0.990	0.983	0.992	1.005	1.011	0.983
4238	..Machinery	1.040	0.863	1.056	1.040	1.001	0.938	0.981	0.992	0.994	0.991	1.000	0.992
4239	..Misc. Durable	0.939	0.965	1.082	0.986	0.994	1.031	0.977	0.996	1.021	1.030	1.010	0.998
424	.Nondurable	1.015	0.941	1.049	1.004	0.995	0.988	1.031	1.008	0.997	0.983	0.974	1.012
4241	..Paper ³	1.011	0.932	1.104	1.037	1.017	0.998	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
4242	..Drugs	1.073	0.929	1.087	1.021	0.959	1.009	1.051	1.003	0.999	1.013	1.002	1.004
4243	..Apparel	0.866	0.936	1.148	1.091	1.081	0.989	0.976	0.966	1.018	1.054	1.059	0.967
4244	..Groceries	1.021	0.951	1.025	0.996	0.989	0.991	1.025	1.030	1.022	1.001	1.001	1.032
4245	..Farm products	1.110	0.988	1.114	0.942	0.880	1.083	1.143	1.058	0.984	0.824	0.791	1.063
4246	..Chemicals ³	0.955	0.908	1.066	1.026	1.019	0.974	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
4247	..Petroleum	0.954	0.880	0.996	1.013	1.049	0.927	1.092	0.998	0.965	0.993	1.007	1.003
4248	..Alcohol	1.214	0.976	1.089	0.986	1.029	1.064	0.929	1.046	1.046	1.025	0.988	1.046
4249	..Misc. Nondur.	0.949	0.884	0.980	0.987	0.986	0.916	1.007	0.982	0.985	0.977	0.949	0.987

Footnotes:

¹ Revised factors.

¹ Combined factors for sales include the effects of seasonal variation, trading day differences, and moving holidays. Combined factors for inventories include only the effects of seasonal variation.

² Adjusted sales and inventories estimates for detailed kind-of-business levels in Table 1 are computed by dividing each "Not Adjusted" estimate by the combined 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. Combined 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.

³ No discernible seasonal pattern for this NAICS code was detected in the latest annual review of the seasonal adjustment for inventories. Therefore, the combined adjustment factors for inventories are set to one for this NAICS code.

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 Census Bureau conducts the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey (MWTS) to provide national estimates of monthly sales, end-of-month inventories, and inventories-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 employer firms selected in a probability sample of approximately 4,500. Approximately 75% of those mailed provided data for this reporting period. Data for nonresponding firms are imputed based on data for similar-sized firms classified in the same kind of business. Approximately 29% of the total sales estimate and 27% of the total end-of-month inventories estimate is based on imputed data.

Monthly sales and inventories 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/wholesale>.