

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
Hurricane Sandy's Effect on the October and November 2012 Monthly Wholesale Trade Reports

Can the Census Bureau estimate the effect of Hurricane Sandy on the estimates published in the October and November 2012 Monthly Wholesale Trade Reports?

No. We cannot isolate the effect of Hurricane Sandy 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 Sandy.

Please see <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/emergencies/sandy.html> for data from the 2007 Economic Census and other Census Bureau sources on the areas impacted by Hurricane Sandy.

Can the Census Bureau produce monthly wholesale trade estimates for the affected areas?

No. We cannot separately estimate monthly wholesale sales or inventories data for the affected areas since the MWTS sample is designed to estimate data for the national level only.

Was the Census Bureau able to collect information from firms operating within the affected areas?

Yes, but we received fewer responses than we usually receive from companies in the affected areas. However, many large, regional, and other multi-location firms with reporting offices outside the affected areas responded at a normal rate. For the entire survey, we received 2,510 responses in October and 2,464 responses in November, compared to the previous 12-month range of 2,486 to 2,543 responses.

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

Yes. Our data collection staff asked additional questions with regard to the impact of Hurricane Sandy on October and November 2012 data as part of our regular follow-up.

As a result of Hurricane Sandy, did the Census Bureau modify its usual weighting or estimation methods used to produce monthly wholesale estimates for October and/or November 2012?

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 Sandy?

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 October and November 2012 exhibited variation similar to that for prior months.

Did the Census Bureau alter the parameters input to the seasonal adjustment program to produce monthly wholesale estimates for October and/or November 2012?

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

Did the Census Bureau change its analytical procedures for the October and November 2012 Monthly Wholesale Trade Reports?

Yes. In addition to the usual analysis done every month, we reviewed independent data sources and discussed the effect of the hurricane with companies on the survey.

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
Service Sector Statistics Division

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