

U.S. Census Bureau News

U.S. Department of Commerce • Washington, D.C. 20233

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2015 AT 10:00 A.M. EST

CB15-17

William Abriatis/ Nicole Davis
Economic Indicators Division
(301) 763-6856

MONTHLY WHOLESALE TRADE: SALES AND INVENTORIES December 2014

Intention to Revise: Monthly Wholesale sales, inventories, and inventories/sales ratios will be revised based on the results of the 2013 Annual Wholesale Trade Survey and the preliminary results of the 2012 Economic Census. Revised not adjusted and corresponding adjusted estimates are scheduled to be released on our website on March 31, 2015 at 10:00 a.m. EDT.

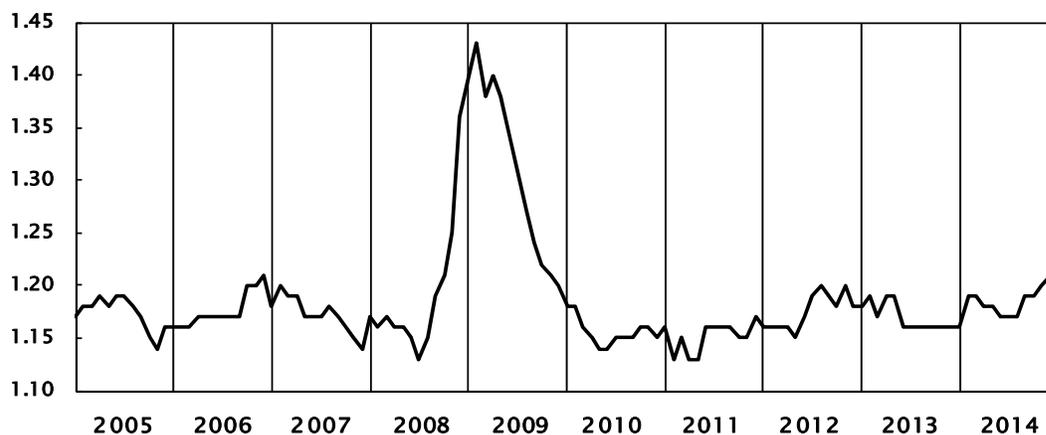
Sales. The U.S. Census Bureau announced today that December 2014 sales of merchant wholesalers, except manufacturers' sales branches and offices, after adjustment for seasonal variations and trading-day differences but not for price changes, were \$449.8 billion, down 0.4 percent (+/-0.9%)* from the revised November level, but were up 1.4 percent (+/-0.9%) from the December 2013 level. The November preliminary estimate was revised downward \$0.6 billion or 0.1 percent. December sales of durable goods were up 1.1 percent (+/-1.4%)* from last month and were up 7.3 percent (+/-1.8%) from a year ago. Sales of lumber and other construction materials were up 5.4 percent from last month. Sales of nondurable goods were down 1.7 percent (+/-1.1%) from November and were down 3.5 percent (+/-1.9%) from last December. Sales of petroleum and petroleum products were down 13.7 percent from last month.

Inventories. Total inventories of merchant wholesalers, except manufacturers' sales branches and offices, after adjustment for seasonal variations but not for price changes, were \$547.6 billion at the end of December, up 0.1 percent (+/-0.4%)* from the revised November level and were up 6.7 percent (+/-0.9%) from the December 2013 level. The November preliminary estimate was revised upward \$0.1 billion. December inventories of durable goods were up 0.2 percent (+/-0.5%)* from last month and were up 7.8 percent (+/-1.4%) from a year ago. Inventories of computer and computer peripheral equipment and software were up 2.6 percent from last month. Inventories of nondurable goods were down 0.1 percent (+/-0.4%)* from November, but were up 4.9 percent (+/-1.2%) from last December. Inventories of petroleum and petroleum products were down 6.2 percent from last month, while inventories of chemicals and allied products were up 3.4 percent.

Inventories/Sales Ratio. The December inventories/sales ratio for merchant wholesalers, except manufacturers' sales branches and offices, based on seasonally adjusted data, was 1.22. The December 2013 ratio was 1.16.

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/how_surveys_are_collected/monthly_methodology.html.

Monthly Inventories/Sales Ratios of Merchant Wholesalers, Except Manufacturers'
Sales Branches and Offices: 2005 to 2014
(Estimates adjusted for seasonal and trading-day differences, but not for price changes)



Monthly Wholesale Trade for January is scheduled to be released March 10, 2015 at 10:00 a.m. EDT.

For customized wholesale time series estimates by industry, visit the Census Bureau's web site at <http://www.census.gov/timeseries>.

To receive the latest updates on the nation's key economic indicators, download the America's Economy app for Apple and Android smartphones and tablets.

The U.S. Census Bureau updated its Application Programming Interface (API) with monthly and quarterly economic indicators. The API allows developers to combine Census Bureau statistics with other data sets to create tools for research on a variety of topics. For more information, visit <http://www.census.gov/developers>.

For additional survey information, visit <http://www.census.gov/wholesale>.

* 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		
		Dec. 2014 (p)	Nov. 2014 (r)	Dec. 2013 (r)	Dec./ Nov.	Nov./ Oct.	Dec. 14/ Dec. 13	Dec. 2014 (p)	Nov. 2014 (r)	Dec. 2013 (r)	Dec./ Nov.	Nov./ Oct.	Dec. 14/ Dec. 13	Dec. 2014 (p)	Nov. 2014 (r)	Dec. 2013 (r)
Adjusted²																
42	U.S. Total	449,792	451,660	443,430	-0.4	-0.4	1.4	547,648	547,215	513,311	0.1	0.8	6.7	1.22	1.21	1.16
423	..Durable	216,134	213,878	201,372	1.1	0.3	7.3	339,320	338,765	314,743	0.2	0.9	7.8	1.57	1.58	1.56
4231	..Automotive	35,435	35,310	33,409	0.4	1.0	6.1	55,401	55,240	50,677	0.3	0.5	9.3	1.56	1.56	1.52
4232	..Furniture	5,841	5,805	5,270	0.6	2.3	10.8	8,971	8,863	8,509	1.2	-0.3	5.4	1.54	1.53	1.61
4233	..Lumber	11,107	10,539	9,984	5.4	-0.4	11.2	15,560	15,585	14,600	-0.2	-0.1	6.6	1.40	1.48	1.46
4234	..Prof. equip.	39,898	40,298	38,521	-1.0	0.1	3.6	43,486	43,145	39,706	0.8	1.5	9.5	1.09	1.07	1.03
42343	...Comp. equip.	22,148	22,634	21,857	-2.1	-0.2	1.3	19,507	19,007	17,320	2.6	2.9	12.6	0.88	0.84	0.79
4235	..Metals	14,844	14,957	12,982	-0.8	-1.7	14.3	30,300	30,190	26,807	0.4	1.4	13.0	2.04	2.02	2.06
4236	..Electrical	40,147	38,831	35,416	3.4	4.0	13.4	37,716	38,356	36,000	-1.7	1.1	4.8	0.94	0.99	1.02
4237	..Hardware	10,435	10,580	9,821	-1.4	-1.4	6.3	20,903	20,824	18,537	0.4	1.3	12.8	2.00	1.97	1.89
4238	..Machinery	40,215	39,608	37,369	1.5	-1.2	7.6	99,405	99,088	92,066	0.3	1.0	8.0	2.47	2.50	2.46
4239	..Misc. Durable	18,212	17,950	18,600	1.5	-2.0	-2.1	27,578	27,474	27,841	0.4	0.1	-0.9	1.51	1.53	1.50
424	..Nondurable	233,658	237,782	242,058	-1.7	-1.1	-3.5	208,328	208,450	198,568	-0.1	0.6	4.9	0.89	0.88	0.82
4241	..Paper ³	8,029	7,924	7,860	1.3	-0.3	2.2	7,409	7,325	7,365	1.1	-2.0	0.6	0.92	0.92	0.94
4242	..Drugs	44,675	42,633	37,923	4.8	1.4	17.8	47,361	47,656	39,513	-0.6	2.6	19.9	1.06	1.12	1.04
4243	..Apparel	13,308	13,504	12,392	-1.5	-0.4	7.4	25,266	25,418	23,949	-0.6	-1.1	5.5	1.90	1.88	1.93
4244	..Groceries	53,779	53,636	49,922	0.3	-1.2	7.7	35,110	34,735	33,168	1.1	-0.1	5.9	0.65	0.65	0.66
4245	..Farm products	19,978	19,694	21,207	1.4	-0.8	-5.8	21,695	21,527	22,002	0.8	5.9	-1.4	1.09	1.09	1.04
4246	..Chemicals ³	11,017	10,770	10,608	2.3	-2.9	3.9	12,861	12,435	12,722	3.4	0.3	1.1	1.17	1.15	1.20
4247	..Petroleum	49,895	57,783	70,697	-13.7	-3.1	-29.4	16,912	18,030	20,895	-6.2	-5.5	-19.1	0.34	0.31	0.30
4248	..Alcohol	11,006	10,827	10,669	1.7	-1.9	3.2	15,266	15,025	14,253	1.6	0.5	7.1	1.39	1.39	1.34
4249	..Misc. Nondur.	21,971	21,011	20,780	4.6	0.3	5.7	26,448	26,299	24,701	0.6	1.2	7.1	1.20	1.25	1.19
													Sales to date			
													2014	2013		
42	U.S. Total	460,623	425,525	441,537	8.2	-11.6	4.3	548,132	551,767	513,952	-0.7	0.7	6.7	5,396,528	5,135,322	
423	..Durable	223,510	199,526	202,832	12.0	-13.3	10.2	333,747	338,985	309,623	-1.5	0.3	7.8	2,504,119	2,366,981	
4231	..Automotive	37,349	33,615	34,545	11.1	-9.5	8.1	54,847	57,284	50,373	-4.3	2.7	8.9	413,929	394,492	
4232	..Furniture	5,701	5,695	5,001	0.1	-11.2	14.0	8,890	8,863	8,432	0.3	-2.5	5.4	65,075	61,481	
4233	..Lumber	9,430	9,085	8,127	3.8	-23.4	16.0	14,455	14,494	13,563	-0.3	-2.0	6.6	124,267	116,910	
4234	..Prof. equip.	45,204	37,840	42,257	19.5	-12.6	7.0	42,877	43,533	39,110	-1.5	0.4	9.6	473,132	451,972	
42343	...Comp. equip.	25,581	21,480	24,545	19.1	-13.7	4.2	19,234	19,159	16,974	0.4	0.8	13.3	267,706	257,949	
4235	..Metals	13,493	13,222	11,515	2.0	-18.4	17.2	30,421	29,677	26,887	2.5	1.0	13.1	170,979	153,310	
4236	..Electrical	40,789	39,763	34,920	2.6	-3.8	16.8	37,339	38,509	35,640	-3.0	-1.3	4.8	440,934	419,090	
4237	..Hardware	9,506	9,480	8,741	0.3	-17.8	8.8	20,569	20,470	18,240	0.5	0.8	12.8	122,176	116,233	
4238	..Machinery	43,553	33,271	39,424	30.9	-20.8	10.5	97,516	98,791	90,317	-1.3	0.8	8.0	470,720	425,342	
4239	..Misc. Durable	18,485	17,555	18,302	5.3	-13.5	1.0	26,833	27,364	27,061	-1.9	-3.5	-0.8	222,907	228,151	
424	..Nondurable	237,113	225,999	238,705	4.9	-10.1	-0.7	214,385	212,782	204,329	0.8	1.4	4.9	2,892,409	2,768,341	
4241	..Paper	8,198	7,274	7,719	12.7	-16.2	6.2	7,409	7,325	7,365	1.1	-2.0	0.6	95,819	90,427	
4242	..Drugs	47,624	39,393	38,719	20.9	-12.3	23.0	49,776	48,085	41,726	3.5	2.7	19.3	492,864	437,286	
4243	..Apparel	11,671	13,463	10,496	-13.3	-15.4	11.2	24,483	24,300	23,207	0.8	-6.1	5.5	155,069	141,576	
4244	..Groceries	54,048	50,793	49,023	6.4	-9.6	10.3	35,742	35,881	33,699	-0.4	-0.4	6.1	630,161	589,222	
4245	..Farm products	22,715	21,151	23,306	7.4	-6.2	-2.5	26,945	26,801	27,019	0.5	16.7	-0.3	244,724	252,246	
4246	..Chemicals	10,180	9,456	9,452	7.7	-17.9	7.7	12,861	12,435	12,722	3.4	0.3	1.1	131,455	124,254	
4247	..Petroleum	49,246	55,414	69,142	-11.1	-6.3	-28.8	16,675	17,074	20,811	-2.3	-6.6	-19.9	762,081	752,337	
4248	..Alcohol	13,306	10,481	12,333	27.0	-11.3	7.9	14,152	15,371	13,227	-7.9	-0.2	7.0	129,869	126,637	
4249	..Misc. Nondur.	20,125	18,574	18,515	8.4	-10.8	8.7	26,342	25,510	24,553	3.3	3.4	7.3	250,367	254,356	

Footnotes:

^p Preliminary estimate.

^r Revised estimate.

¹ For a full description of the NAICS codes used in this table, see the 2007 NAICS manual or <http://www.census.gov/eos/www/naics>.

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/how_surveys_are_collected/monthly_methodology.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	0.9	1.8	1.0	1.7	0.5	0.2	0.5	0.5	1.0	0.9	0.8
423	..Durable	1.2	1.9	1.1	1.9	0.8	0.3	1.0	0.8	1.1	1.1	0.5
4231	..Automotive	2.2	4.1	2.2	3.9	1.0	0.8	1.5	1.7	2.3	2.1	1.0
4232	..Furniture	5.6	6.4	6.9	6.2	2.6	0.9	4.9	4.0	5.3	4.4	2.6
4233	..Lumber	4.5	5.4	4.2	5.3	2.0	0.5	1.9	1.0	4.3	3.8	1.2
4234	..Prof. equip.	4.5	4.9	3.9	4.7	1.2	0.6	1.5	2.6	3.6	2.5	1.6
42343	...Comp. equip.	5.2	6.6	4.0	6.6	1.6	0.8	2.4	3.0	3.6	2.1	2.1
4235	..Metals	6.4	8.6	6.7	8.2	1.2	0.5	2.7	2.6	5.8	4.6	2.0
4236	..Electrical	2.3	3.3	2.6	3.2	2.2	1.2	1.6	1.5	1.6	2.3	1.8
4237	..Hardware	2.7	4.7	2.8	4.7	1.1	0.3	2.1	1.0	2.2	2.2	1.4
4238	..Machinery	3.6	3.2	3.7	3.5	2.5	0.5	2.6	1.2	3.0	3.1	1.8
4239	..Misc. Durable	3.8	5.8	3.0	5.8	2.1	0.9	2.6	2.3	3.8	3.9	1.3
424	..Nondurable	1.8	2.1	2.0	2.0	0.6	0.2	1.1	0.7	2.0	1.6	1.4
4241	..Paper	3.8	6.1	4.2	6.2	0.9	0.5	2.0	2.5	4.1	3.4	1.7
4242	..Drugs	2.7	4.5	2.7	4.5	0.2	0.3	0.7	1.0	2.9	2.8	0.8
4243	..Apparel	7.5	5.6	8.1	5.7	1.7	0.5	4.3	3.5	5.9	5.4	3.1
4244	..Groceries	3.9	7.7	3.6	7.7	1.1	0.8	1.6	2.7	3.8	3.5	1.6
4245	..Farm products	2.9	4.2	3.2	3.7	3.7	1.0	3.2	1.5	2.0	2.0	1.4
4246	..Chemicals	5.1	4.9	4.4	5.4	1.9	1.4	2.6	2.4	4.3	4.4	1.7
4247	..Petroleum	5.5	4.1	5.6	3.9	0.4	0.8	3.3	2.1	5.8	3.4	5.1
4248	..Alcohol	4.5	4.5	4.4	4.4	1.0	0.7	2.2	1.3	3.9	3.6	1.4
4249	..Misc. Nondur.	3.3	6.0	4.1	5.5	1.9	0.9	3.0	1.7	4.1	4.1	1.2

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/monthly_methodology.html.

Reliability of the Estimates

Because the estimates presented in this report are based on a sample survey, they 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 can be used to construct a 90-percent confidence interval. If, for example, the percent change estimate is +1.2 percent and its estimated standard error is 0.8 percent, then the margin of sampling error is $\pm 1.753 \times 0.8$ percent or ± 1.4 percent, and the 90 percent confidence interval is 1.2 \pm 1.4 or -0.2 percent to 2.6 percent. If the interval contains 0, then one does not have sufficient statistical evidence to conclude at the 90 percent confidence level that the actual change is different from zero. Estimated changes shown in the text are statistically significant unless otherwise noted. For a monthly total, the estimated coefficient of variation is given. The resulting confidence interval is the estimated monthly total $\pm 1.753 \times CV \times$ (the estimated monthly total). 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-13 ARIMA-SEATS program and are based on data from the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey.]

NAICS code	Kind of Business	Sales						Inventories					
		2015	2014				2013	2015	2014				2013
		Jan.	Dec.r	Nov.r	Oct.	Sep.	Dec.r	Jan.	Dec.r	Nov.r	Oct.	Sep.	Dec.r
42	U.S. Total²	0.933	1.020	0.944	1.061	1.013	0.993	1.011	1.003	1.010	1.010	0.991	1.003
423	.Durable	0.922	1.034	0.935	1.080	1.046	1.007	0.994	0.984	1.001	1.008	1.006	0.984
4231	..Automotive	0.906	1.054	0.952	1.062	0.985	1.034	1.004	0.990	1.037	1.015	0.979	0.994
4232	..Furniture	0.935	0.976	0.981	1.130	1.063	0.949	0.994	0.991	1.000	1.023	1.035	0.991
4233	..Lumber	0.838	0.849	0.862	1.120	1.065	0.814	0.973	0.929	0.930	0.948	0.975	0.929
4234	..Prof. equip.	0.911	1.133	0.939	1.076	1.079	1.097	1.003	0.986	1.009	1.020	1.014	0.985
42343	...Comp. equip.	0.902	1.155	0.949	1.097	1.077	1.123	0.990	0.986	1.008	1.029	1.028	0.980
4235	..Metals	0.982	0.909	0.884	1.065	1.025	0.887	1.000	1.004	0.983	0.987	1.003	1.003
4236	..Electrical	0.934	1.016	1.024	1.107	1.067	0.986	0.981	0.990	1.004	1.028	1.031	0.990
4237	..Hardware	0.911	0.911	0.896	1.075	1.039	0.890	0.982	0.984	0.983	0.988	0.999	0.984
4238	..Machinery	0.910	1.083	0.840	1.048	1.032	1.055	0.991	0.981	0.997	0.999	1.001	0.981
4239	..Misc. Durable	0.974	1.015	0.978	1.108	1.069	0.984	1.007	0.973	0.996	1.033	1.024	0.972
424	.Nondurable	0.951	1.004	0.953	1.043	0.983	0.979	1.037	1.032	1.025	1.014	0.966	1.033
4241	..Paper ³	0.953	1.021	0.918	1.092	1.049	0.982	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
4242	..Drugs	0.999	1.066	0.924	1.068	1.020	1.021	0.992	1.051	1.009	1.008	1.002	1.056
4243	..Apparel	0.897	0.877	0.997	1.174	1.099	0.847	1.011	0.969	0.956	1.007	1.063	0.969
4244	..Groceries	0.957	1.005	0.947	1.035	1.000	0.982	1.002	1.018	1.033	1.036	1.008	1.016
4245	..Farm products	1.056	1.137	1.074	1.135	0.888	1.099	1.271	1.242	1.245	1.130	0.720	1.228
4246	..Chemicals ³	1.016	0.924	0.878	1.039	1.009	0.891	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
4247	..Petroleum	0.943	0.987	0.959	0.991	0.978	0.978	0.982	0.986	0.947	0.958	0.976	0.996
4248	..Alcohol	0.767	1.209	0.968	1.071	0.987	1.156	0.973	0.927	1.023	1.031	1.004	0.928
4249	..Misc. Nondur.	0.868	0.916	0.884	0.994	0.914	0.891	1.072	0.996	0.970	0.949	0.922	0.994

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-13 ARIMA-SEATS program may be found at <http://www.census.gov/srd/www/x13as/>.

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 4,200. Approximately 66% 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 32% of the total sales estimate and 34% 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>.