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MONTHLY WHOLESALE TRADE: SALES AND INVENTORIES December 2012

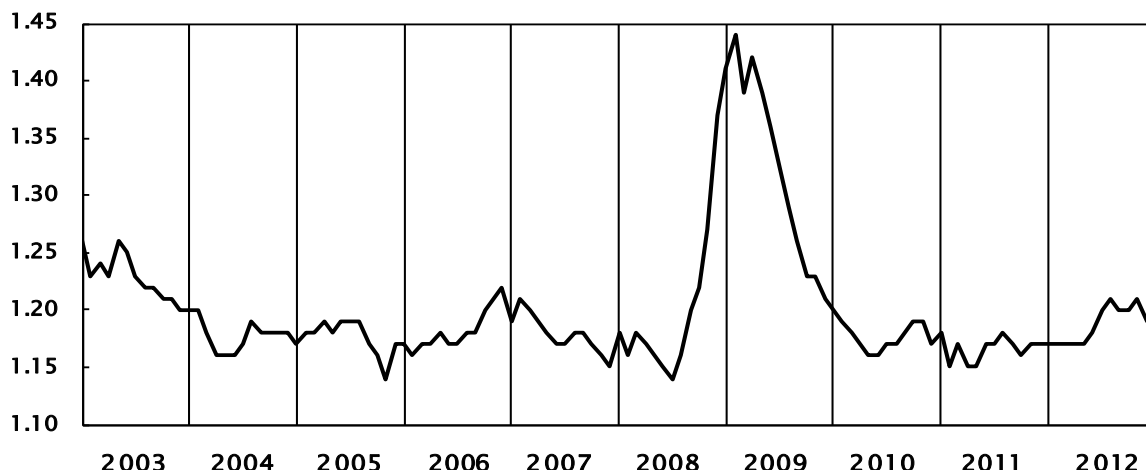
Sales. The U.S. Census Bureau announced today that December 2012 sales of merchant wholesalers, except manufacturers' sales branches and offices, after adjustment for seasonal variations and trading-day differences but not for price changes, were \$418.9 billion, virtually unchanged (+/-0.5%)* from the revised November level, but were up 3.7 percent (+/-1.1%) from the December 2011 level. The November preliminary estimate was revised downward \$0.6 billion or 0.1 percent. December sales of durable goods were down 0.9 percent (+/-1.1%)* from last month, but were up 0.9 percent (+/-1.4%)* from a year ago. Sales of professional and commercial equipment and supplies were down 2.3 percent from last month. Sales of nondurable goods were up 0.8 percent (+/-0.5%) from November and were up 6.1 percent (+/-1.6%) from last December. Sales of drugs and druggists' sundries were up 4.8 percent from last month and sales of beer, wine, and distilled alcoholic beverages were up 1.8 percent.

Inventories. Total inventories of merchant wholesalers, except manufacturers' sales branches and offices, after adjustment for seasonal variations but not for price changes, were \$497.7 billion at the end of December, down 0.1 percent (+/-0.4%)* from the revised November level, but were up 5.5 percent (+/-1.2%) from the December 2011 level. The November preliminary estimate was revised downward \$0.7 billion or 0.1 percent. December inventories of durable goods were up 0.2 percent (+/-0.5%)* from last month and were up 7.7 percent (+/-1.6%) from a year ago. Inventories of electrical and electronic goods were up 2.6 percent from last month, while inventories of motor vehicle and motor vehicle parts and supplies were down 3.8 percent. Inventories of nondurable goods were down 0.6 percent (+/-0.5%) from November, but were up 2.4 percent (+/-1.9%) from last December. Inventories of farm product raw materials were down 6.0 percent from last month and inventories of drugs and druggists' sundries were down 4.3 percent.

Inventories/Sales Ratio. The December inventories/sales ratio for merchant wholesalers, except manufacturers' sales branches and offices, based on seasonally adjusted data, was 1.19. The December 2011 ratio was 1.17.

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: 2003 to 2012
(Estimates adjusted for seasonal and trading-day differences, but not for price changes)



Monthly Wholesale Trade for January is scheduled to be released March 8, 2013 at 10:00 a.m. EST.

For customized wholesale time series estimates by industry visit the Census Bureau's website 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.

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 inventories 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		
		Monthly			Percent change			Monthly			Percent change			Ratios		
		Dec. 2012 (p)	Nov. 2012 (r)	Dec. 2011 (r)	Dec./ Nov.	Nov./ Oct.	Dec. 12/ Dec. 11	Dec. 2012 (p)	Nov. 2012 (r)	Dec. 2011 (r)	Dec./ Nov.	Nov./ Oct.	Dec. 12/ Dec. 11	Dec. 2012 (p)	Nov. 2012 (r)	Dec. 2011 (r)
Adjusted²																
42	U.S. Total	418,855	418,755	403,969	0.0	2.2	3.7	497,651	498,252	471,884	-0.1	0.4	5.5	1.19	1.19	1.17
423	.Durable	186,289	188,023	184,713	-0.9	2.5	0.9	295,448	294,872	274,357	0.2	0.4	7.7	1.59	1.57	1.49
4231	..Automotive	33,546	33,782	31,712	-0.7	1.3	5.8	43,795	45,543	44,570	-3.8	-0.6	-1.7	1.31	1.35	1.41
4232	..Furniture	4,270	4,377	4,377	-2.4	0.9	-2.4	7,149	7,334	7,123	-2.5	1.4	0.4	1.67	1.68	1.63
4233	..Lumber	10,086	9,731	8,855	3.6	3.0	13.9	13,848	13,565	11,972	2.1	0.8	15.7	1.37	1.39	1.35
4234	..Prof. equip.	31,656	32,394	31,514	-2.3	2.7	0.5	33,446	33,101	31,448	1.0	0.8	6.4	1.06	1.02	1.00
42343	...Comp. equip.	15,750	16,198	16,084	-2.8	2.1	-2.1	12,754	12,641	11,736	0.9	-0.1	8.7	0.81	0.78	0.73
4235	..Metals	12,963	12,778	13,596	1.4	2.0	-4.7	27,510	27,267	25,638	0.9	-0.2	7.3	2.12	2.13	1.89
4236	..Electrical	32,635	32,628	31,641	0.0	1.7	3.1	43,141	42,068	40,782	2.6	1.3	5.8	1.32	1.29	1.29
4237	..Hardware	9,064	9,094	8,863	-0.3	0.7	2.3	18,964	18,635	17,793	1.8	0.1	6.6	2.09	2.05	2.01
4238	..Machinery	32,178	32,203	32,799	-0.1	2.2	-1.9	82,718	82,525	70,518	0.2	0.6	17.3	2.57	2.56	2.15
4239	..Misc. Durable	19,891	21,036	21,356	-5.4	7.8	-6.9	24,877	24,834	24,513	0.2	-0.7	1.5	1.25	1.18	1.15
424	.Nondurable	232,566	230,732	219,256	0.8	1.9	6.1	202,203	203,380	197,527	-0.6	0.6	2.4	0.87	0.88	0.90
4241	..Paper ³	7,141	7,159	7,127	-0.3	1.3	0.2	7,759	7,523	7,522	3.1	-0.9	3.2	1.09	1.05	1.06
4242	..Drugs	37,241	35,543	36,096	4.8	3.4	3.2	34,151	35,692	34,217	-4.3	4.5	-0.2	0.92	1.00	0.95
4243	..Apparel	12,207	12,227	11,734	-0.2	5.0	4.0	21,773	21,059	22,169	3.4	0.2	-1.8	1.78	1.72	1.89
4244	..Groceries	48,759	48,956	48,002	-0.4	1.2	1.6	35,770	35,770	33,853	0.0	1.5	5.7	0.73	0.73	0.71
4245	..Farm products	20,209	21,513	17,098	-6.1	6.4	18.2	22,523	23,966	20,489	-6.0	-5.0	9.9	1.11	1.11	1.20
4246	..Chemicals ³	10,297	10,177	9,673	1.2	0.4	6.5	12,367	11,916	11,680	3.8	-0.9	5.9	1.20	1.17	1.21
4247	..Petroleum	65,402	64,406	60,459	1.5	-0.1	8.2	27,062	27,109	27,002	-0.2	0.6	0.2	0.41	0.42	0.45
4248	..Alcohol	10,550	10,360	9,976	1.8	2.0	5.8	13,887	13,693	12,654	1.4	-0.2	9.7	1.32	1.32	1.27
4249	..Misc. Nondur.	20,760	20,391	19,091	1.8	1.9	8.7	26,911	26,652	27,941	1.0	1.1	-3.7	1.30	1.31	1.46
Not Adjusted														Sales to date		
														2012	2011	
42	U.S. Total	401,266	415,963	398,506	-3.5	-3.8	0.7	499,477	501,830	473,737	-0.5	0.3	5.4	4,915,959	4,677,337	
423	.Durable	180,246	187,123	184,866	-3.7	-4.5	-2.5	290,820	295,836	270,277	-1.7	-0.4	7.6	2,208,871	2,093,773	
4231	..Automotive	33,479	33,816	32,441	-1.0	-4.8	3.2	44,364	47,684	45,194	-7.0	3.1	-1.8	400,683	333,013	
4232	..Furniture	3,911	4,465	4,145	-12.4	-7.9	-5.6	7,078	7,297	7,052	-3.0	-0.5	0.4	52,751	51,920	
4233	..Lumber	7,817	9,196	7,084	-15.0	-11.9	10.3	12,879	12,697	11,110	1.4	-1.7	15.9	111,200	97,132	
4234	..Prof. equip.	33,872	32,524	35,075	4.1	-1.2	-3.4	32,844	33,531	30,913	-2.0	-1.1	6.2	381,808	375,760	
42343	...Comp. equip.	17,656	16,522	18,657	6.9	0.6	-5.4	12,473	12,995	11,490	-4.0	-4.3	8.6	193,410	195,558	
4235	..Metals	10,811	11,807	11,788	-8.4	-8.5	-8.3	27,538	26,803	25,638	2.7	-0.9	7.4	152,532	146,761	
4236	..Electrical	30,775	34,912	30,660	-11.8	-1.2	0.4	42,623	42,110	40,293	1.2	-1.8	5.8	378,669	372,061	
4237	..Hardware	7,831	8,621	7,906	-9.2	-10.9	-0.9	18,680	18,355	17,526	1.8	-0.9	6.6	108,416	101,531	
4238	..Machinery	32,854	29,820	34,603	10.2	-9.5	-5.1	80,733	82,525	68,896	-2.2	0.2	17.2	383,004	353,252	
4239	..Misc. Durable	18,896	21,962	21,164	-14.0	2.7	-10.7	24,081	24,834	23,655	-3.0	-3.9	1.8	239,808	262,343	
424	.Nondurable	221,020	228,840	213,640	-3.4	-3.2	3.5	208,657	205,994	203,460	1.3	1.4	2.6	2,707,088	2,583,564	
4241	..Paper	6,727	7,130	6,920	-5.7	-8.5	-2.8	7,759	7,523	7,522	3.1	-0.9	3.2	85,169	84,653	
4242	..Drugs	36,124	36,041	36,132	0.2	-4.0	0.0	36,781	35,656	36,852	3.2	5.6	-0.2	426,614	426,205	
4243	..Apparel	9,851	12,423	9,798	-20.7	-9.3	0.5	21,120	20,364	21,482	3.7	-4.5	-1.7	143,404	135,496	
4244	..Groceries	47,491	47,928	47,666	-0.9	-2.3	-0.4	36,378	36,843	34,428	-1.3	2.3	5.7	576,827	544,132	
4245	..Farm products	20,573	24,267	18,056	-15.2	5.7	13.9	26,510	28,424	24,177	-6.7	0.7	9.6	225,408	220,628	
4246	..Chemicals	9,000	9,638	8,822	-6.6	-7.8	2.0	12,367	11,916	11,680	3.8	-0.9	5.9	120,375	115,046	
4247	..Petroleum	61,543	61,765	57,859	-0.4	-4.1	6.4	27,901	25,537	27,785	9.3	2.3	0.4	769,152	718,720	
4248	..Alcohol	11,774	10,888	11,682	8.1	1.4	0.8	12,984	14,172	11,844	-8.4	-0.1	9.6	122,810	116,810	
4249	..Misc. Nondur.	17,937	18,760	16,705	-4.4	-4.7	7.4	26,857	25,559	27,690	5.1	2.3	-3.0	237,329	221,874	

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/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	1.3	1.5	1.3	1.5	0.3	0.2	0.6	0.7	1.2	1.1	0.4
423	..Durable	1.7	1.8	1.5	1.7	0.6	0.3	0.8	0.9	1.4	1.4	0.4
4231	..Automotive	3.9	4.5	3.9	4.5	0.6	0.5	2.2	2.5	4.1	4.2	0.9
4232	..Furniture	6.8	7.6	7.0	7.8	1.9	0.7	2.1	3.1	6.6	5.0	2.8
4233	..Lumber	5.4	8.5	5.4	8.5	0.5	0.4	2.2	1.7	5.6	5.5	2.1
4234	..Prof. equip.	4.2	4.7	4.1	4.7	1.0	0.4	1.4	1.7	4.0	4.6	1.2
42343	...Comp. equip.	7.0	6.7	7.2	7.1	1.5	0.7	1.5	2.5	7.0	8.0	1.6
4235	..Metals	7.1	5.3	6.0	5.2	1.6	0.6	1.2	1.2	6.0	6.0	1.5
4236	..Electrical	3.0	4.4	3.1	4.4	0.9	0.4	2.2	1.0	3.5	3.7	1.0
4237	..Hardware	5.5	5.3	5.2	5.4	0.8	0.5	2.5	1.3	5.2	4.9	1.7
4238	..Machinery	4.0	4.8	3.5	4.8	3.0	0.9	2.7	2.2	3.3	3.2	1.5
4239	..Misc. Durable	7.6	6.8	7.1	6.9	1.1	0.9	3.3	3.4	6.9	6.6	2.0
424	..Nondurable	1.8	2.1	1.8	2.2	0.3	0.3	0.9	1.1	1.6	1.5	0.5
4241	..Paper	7.9	8.4	8.2	7.6	1.8	0.9	1.8	1.4	7.9	7.6	1.5
4242	..Drugs	5.1	5.0	5.6	5.1	0.8	0.5	2.4	1.0	4.8	4.9	1.7
4243	..Apparel	4.8	6.9	4.6	7.1	2.4	0.4	4.1	2.7	4.5	4.7	3.1
4244	..Groceries	5.5	9.0	5.6	8.7	1.0	1.2	1.7	1.9	5.5	5.6	1.3
4245	..Farm products	6.4	8.2	6.8	8.1	1.2	1.2	3.6	3.1	6.9	6.1	3.2
4246	..Chemicals	5.3	6.1	5.1	6.5	1.2	1.7	3.2	3.3	5.1	5.5	2.3
4247	..Petroleum	4.1	4.3	4.2	4.5	0.5	0.5	2.0	1.2	4.2	4.1	0.9
4248	..Alcohol	4.3	4.8	4.2	4.5	0.8	1.2	2.1	2.2	4.3	4.5	1.3
4249	..Misc. Nondur.	6.3	7.5	6.2	7.4	0.6	0.5	2.1	2.3	5.6	5.5	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/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 ± 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					
		2013	2012					2013	2012				2011
		Jan.	Dec.r	Nov.r	Oct.	Sep.	Dec.r	Jan.	Dec.r	Nov.r	Oct.	Sep.	Dec.r
42	U.S. Total²	0.964	0.960	0.998	1.057	0.957	0.988	1.009	1.006	1.007	1.009	0.992	1.006
423	.Durable	0.955	0.966	1.000	1.068	0.980	0.999	0.994	0.986	1.004	1.012	1.004	0.986
4231	..Automotive	0.939	0.998	1.001	1.065	0.929	1.023	1.011	1.013	1.047	1.010	0.980	1.014
4232	..Furniture	0.980	0.916	1.020	1.118	0.995	0.947	0.992	0.990	0.995	1.014	1.028	0.990
4233	..Lumber	0.864	0.775	0.945	1.105	1.003	0.800	0.971	0.930	0.936	0.960	0.987	0.928
4234	..Prof. equip.	0.944	1.070	1.004	1.044	1.028	1.113	0.999	0.982	1.013	1.033	1.008	0.983
42343	...Comp. equip.	0.920	1.121	1.020	1.035	1.055	1.160	0.987	0.978	1.028	1.073	1.019	0.979
4235	..Metals	1.039	0.834	0.924	1.030	0.943	0.867	0.993	1.001	0.983	0.990	0.998	1.000
4236	..Electrical	0.951	0.943	1.070	1.101	1.001	0.969	0.991	0.988	1.001	1.032	1.027	0.988
4237	..Hardware	0.947	0.864	0.948	1.072	0.962	0.892	0.986	0.985	0.985	0.995	1.003	0.985
4238	..Machinery	0.936	1.021	0.926	1.046	0.958	1.055	0.977	0.976	1.000	1.004	1.000	0.977
4239	..Misc. Durable	0.990	0.950	1.044	1.096	0.998	0.991	0.996	0.968	1.000	1.033	1.019	0.965
424	.Nondurable	0.992	0.952	0.991	1.040	0.943	0.976	1.031	1.036	1.012	0.998	0.973	1.036
4241	..Paper ³	0.988	0.942	0.996	1.103	0.990	0.971	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
4242	..Drugs	1.042	0.970	1.014	1.092	0.950	1.001	0.971	1.077	0.999	0.989	1.022	1.077
4243	..Apparel	0.940	0.807	1.016	1.176	1.024	0.835	1.020	0.970	0.967	1.015	1.064	0.969
4244	..Groceries	0.978	0.974	0.979	1.015	0.961	0.993	0.999	1.017	1.030	1.022	1.003	1.017
4245	..Farm products	1.138	1.018	1.128	1.136	0.890	1.056	1.220	1.177	1.186	1.119	0.831	1.180
4246	..Chemicals ³	1.038	0.874	0.947	1.032	0.960	0.912	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
4247	..Petroleum	1.004	0.941	0.959	0.999	0.942	0.957	1.013	1.031	0.942	0.926	0.945	1.029
4248	..Alcohol	0.798	1.116	1.051	1.058	0.927	1.171	0.969	0.935	1.035	1.034	0.996	0.936
4249	..Misc. Nondur.	0.886	0.864	0.920	0.984	0.893	0.875	1.054	0.998	0.959	0.948	0.950	0.991

Footnotes:

¹ Revised factors.

² 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.

³ 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 4,500. Approximately 71% 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 34% of the total sales estimate and 31% 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>.