

Frequently Asked Questions for Building Permits Survey Respondents

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Why am I requested to complete this survey?

The Building Permits Survey is a leading economic indicator used to track the housing industry. Local governments and organizations such as planning commissions, universities, libraries and home builders' associations use the data to obtain valuable information about your community. The data are used in conjunction with other leading economic indicators, by the Census Bureau for the annual creation of population estimates. Policy makers and government agencies use these estimates to allocate funding and other resources to your local jurisdiction for various planning purposes.

Am I required to complete and return this survey?

No, your response to this survey is voluntary, although the survey is mandated by law. The collection of the data are very important, because the data are used by economists, politicians, federal and local governments in determining trends in, not only your community but the overall national economy.

Should I complete the form if I don't issue any permits for the time period requested?

Yes. If no building permits were issued for new housing units during the time period requested, mark an "X" in the box provided in Section 3a and return the form to us.

Where can I get assistance to complete this form?

Instructions for completing the survey are located on the back of the C-404 form. If you have any additional questions, you can reach the statisticians in the Residential Construction Branch on 800-845-8244 or email us at MCD.RCB.BPS@census.gov.

Can I submit my data via email?

Unfortunately, we are not set up to receive survey data electronically. Electronic submissions are still in the developmental stages for some surveys at the Census Bureau. However, we can accept facsimiles of our form at 877-273-9501. We also accept computer printouts from your system that contain the data needed for this survey. The Bureau will provide you with a self-addressed

stamped envelope for your convenience. If you require an envelope please call us at 800-845-8249. For questions about this policy call 800-845-8244 or email us at MCD.RCB.BPS@census.gov.

Why are additions, alterations, and renovations data not being collected?

The Census Bureau terminated the collection of these data because local laws regulate what types of projects require permits and these vary greatly around the country. Many jurisdictions only require permits for projects above a certain dollar amount or above a certain square foot size. In addition, our survey only collects data on building or zoning permits issued, not plumbing and electrical permits. Since some plumbing and electrical work is included on building permits, there will be partial coverage of these data.

Our jurisdiction does not have a building permit officer, who should complete this form?

The person who collects and/or issues building or zoning permits should complete the C-404 form. This person may be the Mayor, City Clerk, Tax Assessor, etc.

Our jurisdiction no longer requires building permits, how should I complete the form?

If your building permit office no longer requires building permits for new privately-owned residential construction, place an "X" in the appropriate box in Section 2 (Box 051) on the C-404 form and provide the effective date when the permits were or will no longer be required. Include any comments in Section 5 (Comments).

How do I report geographical changes on the C-404 form?

If your office had any type of geographic change, (it split into 2 or more offices, merged with another office or annexed land area), mark an "X" in the appropriate box in Section 2 (Boxes 052 - 054) on the C-404 form and provide the date of the change or the effective date. Also, give additional information on the merged place, split place or annexation amount. Please use Section 5 (Comments) if you have additional information. For information on your office's coverage, see our most recent footnotes at <http://www.census.gov/const/www/foot1003.pdf>.

Are you concerned that your reporting status has changed?

Every ten years, the Residential Construction Branch of the Census Bureau has the responsibility of selecting a new monthly Building Permits sample, from which monthly estimates of housing units authorized are derived. We implemented a new sample in January 2004.

Some jurisdictions which reported only annually in the past are now being asked to report monthly. Your monthly or annual reporting status was determined using a statistical sampling technique which took into account previous years' residential construction activity and/or the current population statistics in your jurisdiction. If your reporting status has changed from annual to monthly, you are an important addition to this new sample. We need your response in order to provide the most accurate picture of the economy for business and government. Please complete your questionnaire in a timely manner. If you have any questions, please call us on 800-845-8244 or email us at MCD.RCB.BPS@census.gov.

Can I change from a monthly reporter to reporting annually?

Nationally, every 10 years, the Residential Construction Branch statistically selects which permit offices should report monthly and which should report annually. If your reporting status has changed from annual to monthly, you are an important addition to this new sample. We need your response in order to provide the most accurate picture of the economy for business and government. Please make an effort to complete your questionnaire in a timely manner. However, if your jurisdiction has an extreme hardship completing this form every month, please call us to discuss alternatives at 800-845-8244 or email us at MCD.RCB.BPS@census.gov. To view documentation of the sample methods used for the Building Permits Survey, please visit our website at <http://www.census.gov/const/www/newresconstdoc.html>.

Can I change from an annual to a monthly reporter?

To change from an annual reporter to a monthly reporter, please call us on 800-845-8244 or email us at MCD.RCB.BPS@census.gov and request a reporting status change.

Is it best to fax or mail the form?

Either method of receipt is acceptable. We are basically concerned with getting the information in a timely manner. If faxing the C-404 will expedite your process, then fax it to the number shown on the C-404, 877-273-9501. To avoid duplication of data received, please do not fax and mail the C-404 form for the same survey period.

Why did I receive a mail request for survey months that I already sent into your office?

Due to mail delivery or handling problems, your C-404 form may have been torn or mutilated. In this case, we receive only pieces of a form without proper identification information. At the end of a calendar year, we do a follow-up on those places in our system as not having reported for a given month during the year. To enable us to compile accurate statistics, a C-404 form is then mailed for those months that we have not received. If we do not receive five or more months at the end of a

calendar year, we will request your office to compile an annual report instead of individual forms for that year. Consequently, it is very important that you retain a copy of the form for your records.

How do I report a name and/or address change?

The label area of the C-404 form reads “Please correct any errors in name, address, and ZIP code”. This can be achieved by any of the following:

- a. marking through the field that needs to be changed and writing the correct information,
- b. supplying the correct information in Section 5 (Comments), indicating that it is a correction or change,
- c. calling us on 800-845-8244 or
- d. emailing us at MCD.RCB.BPS@census.gov to request a change in C-404 information.

What if I did not receive a C-404 form?

If, for some reason, you do not receive your C-404 form, call the Residential Construction Branch on 800-845-8244 and request a replacement form. Someone will take your identification information (State, ID number on the form) and the time period for which the form is needed. If you email us at MCD.RCB.BPS@census.gov please include the name of your jurisdiction. A replacement form will be mailed to you.

DEFINITION QUESTIONS

What is a housing unit?

A housing unit is a house, an apartment, a group of rooms or a single room intended for occupancy as separate living quarters. Separate living quarters are those in which the occupants live separately from any other individuals in the building and which have a direct access from the outside of the building or through a common hall.

What is the valuation of construction?

The valuation is the estimated value of the residential structure as shown on the building permit. If no value is listed on the permit, we accept estimates from the permit official reporting to Census. Please do not report permit fees as the value of construction. If no values are required for your municipality, please note this in Section 5 (Comments). We will then place the acronym NVR in the address label box of your forms. NVR denotes no value required.

Why are manufactured/mobile homes not included in this survey?

A manufactured/ mobile is a movable or portable dwelling constructed to be towed on its own chassis. It is manufactured with transportation gear as an integral part of the structure. Manufactured/mobile homes structures are described as multiple-wide, and expandable. Manufactured/mobile homes are built under the HUD Code, which means they are inspected at the factory and are exempt from local government building inspections. Manufactured or mobile homes are included in the Census Bureau's Manufactured Homes Survey (MHS) conducted by the Construction Expenditures Branch. To obtain information on this survey, visit the website at <http://www.census.gov/const/www/mhsindex.html> or call 301-763-1605.

If the manufactured/mobile home is placed on a permanent foundation, is it counted in the building permits survey?

No, if the manufactured home is HUD-coded, it is not counted in this survey.

Are modular homes included in this survey?

Yes, modular or prefabricated homes are considered new construction and are included in this survey. Sections of modular housing are built in a factory and are transported to the construction site to be joined together on a permanent foundation. Modular homes are not inspected by HUD at the factory.

What is the major difference between modular manufactured and HUD-coded manufactured homes?

Modular manufactured homes are constructed off-site, transported and assembled at the construction site and do not receive HUD certification at the factory. HUD-coded manufactured homes, however, always receive HUD certification and are built with transportation gear as an integral part of the structure.

CLASSIFICATION QUESTIONS

What is considered privately-owned construction?

Privately-owned construction is defined as buildings owned by a private company or individual at the time the building permit is issued. This includes houses built by nonprofit organizations and "Turnkey" housing, i.e. housing owned privately during construction to be sold to a public housing authority when completed. Also, housing units built with private/public partnerships (such as

military housing built by private developers) would be considered privately-owned construction.

What is an attached single-family residence?

An attached single-family residence meets *all* of the following criteria:

- a. be separated from adjoining units by a wall that extends from ground to roof,
- b. be side by side with no other units above or below,
- c. have separate heating systems, and
- d. have separate utility meters.

How do I classify attached single-family housing?

Include all new privately-owned attached single-family houses in Section 3b on the C-404 form. (See: 3b. What is an attached single-family residence?)

How do I report housing permits when our local government or the federal government is listed as the owner?

You don't. Housing units that are completely owned by local or federal jurisdictions are considered publicly-owned and are not included in this survey. However, include housing owned and built by a private contractor and turned over to a public government agency upon completion, i.e. "Turnkey" contracts. Units built with private/public partnerships (such as military housing built by private developers) should be included.

Are condominiums and cooperatives classified in this survey?

Condominiums and cooperatives are considered a type of home ownership, and this survey is only concerned with the structure of the residence. If the structure meets the criteria for an attached or detached single-family residence, then it is classified as single-family in Section 3b on the C-404 form. If they meet the criteria for multifamily units, then classify in Section 3c, 3d or 3e as appropriate. If you have questions regarding structure classifications, please call us at 800-845-8244 or email us at MCD.RCB.BPS@census.gov.

Where do I classify a "duplex"?

Classify the units according to how the structure is built:

- a. enter data in Section 3b for attached single-family homes (See: 3b. What is an attached single-family residence?) and meet this criteria.
- b. enter data in Section 3c if units do not meet all attached single-family homes criteria.

Do I include rebuilt homes in this survey?

Include rebuilt homes only when the home is totally rebuilt on an existing foundation. If the rebuilt homes are attached to an existing structure (wall, chimney, etc.), it is not included in the survey.

How do I classify a moved or relocated residence?

A moved or relocated residence is not considered new construction, and is not included in the survey.

What other building permits do I exclude?

Exclude permits issued for projects such as:

- publicly-owned buildings
- manufactured (mobile-HUD inspected) homes including related foundations and pads
- group quarters, such as dormitories, jails, nursing homes, etc.
- hotels/motels
- landscaping
- demolitions
- nonresidential buildings
- moved or relocated buildings
- maintenance and repair, which are expenses to keep a property in ordinary working condition
- farm buildings, such as silos, barns, etc.
- residential additions, alterations, renovations and conversions
- other structures on residential property, such as sheds, garages, pools, etc.

Do I include foundation and interior finish permits in this survey?

Yes, include foundation and interior permits when they are issued separately and show a valuation of construction. To eliminate double counting, do not list buildings and units when reporting foundation and interior permits. Please enter a zero for units and buildings. Enter the valuation of construction under the appropriate type of structure listed in Section (3b-3e) on the C-404 form. Buildings and units are reported later when the superstructure permit is issued.

Are senior citizen dwellings included in this survey?

Senior citizen dwellings, assisted living facilities, and congregate care are counted in this survey, unless the structure is intended for 24-hour skilled nursing care. Some structures have units that

are established for residents requiring 24-hour nursing care; please exclude these units from your data. If the residents will require 24-hour skilled nursing care, these facilities are usually called “nursing homes” and require the skill of a registered nurse, licensed practical nurse or professional therapist. Exclude all units that require 24 hour skilled nursing care. If you are not sure how to classify these units, please call us at 800-845-8244 or email us at MCD.RCB.BPS@census.gov .

Where do I classify non-residential construction projects?

You don't. This survey does not include non-residential construction. Please do not list non-residential construction on this form.

Where do I report new privately-owned residential/commercial rental property?

Some building permit offices report residential rental properties, assisted living facilities and apartments as commercial permits. These type of permits are in the scope of the Building Permits Survey and should be reported on the C-404 form.

Other commercial permits issued, such as professional buildings, churches, manufacturing plants, stores, hospitals, etc., are not in the scope of this survey.

How do I report new residential buildings that include commercial office space?

Include all new housing units in mixed use buildings (buildings with residential and nonresidential space). Report the valuation of construction as an estimate for the residential portion of the structure only.

Do I include Large Projects in section 4 on the C-404 form?

Yes. Residential construction with a valuation of \$1,000,000 or more should be detailed in Section 4 and included in Section 3 on the C-404 form. Please do not list non residential/ commercial structures in section 4.

How do I report permits for a multifamily building when individual units are permitted separately?

In order to publish our building permit data correctly, we need to know the total number of units that will be in a multi-family building. Do not report each individual permit separately on the C-404 form. When the first units of a multi-family building are authorized, report the total number

of buildings, units and valuation expected for the entire project. If this is not known, indicate this in the comments section on the C-404 form.

DATA QUESTIONS

How are the building permit data summarized?

Building permit statistics are summarized for the U.S., and by Census Regions, Census Divisions, Metropolitan areas and counties. Data are also available for individual permit offices. The survey collects the number of housing units and the valuation of construction for new single family and multifamily structures.

When and where are building permits data published?

Preliminary data are released on the 12th workday of each month in the New Residential Construction Press Release. The geographic level data available at preliminary are at the United States and the four Census regions level. The scheduled release dates for preliminary data are available at <http://www.census.gov/const/www/newresconstdates.html>.

Revised data are released on the 18th workday of each month. The geographic data available at revised are at the United States, Census Regions, States, Metropolitan Areas, Counties and individual permit offices levels. Data are available for a statistical sample of Counties and permit-issuing places which are requested to report monthly. The scheduled release dates for revised estimates are available at <http://www.census.gov/const/C40/release.html>.

Annual data are released on the 1st workday of May for the previous year. The geographic data available at the time of the annual are at the United States, Census Regions, States, Metropolitan Areas, Counties and individual permit offices levels. Data are available for all Counties and permit-issuing places.

The State and Metropolitan Area data are available on the Internet as text files at <http://www.census.gov/const/www/permitsindex.html>. Data for individual permit offices and County level data are available on the Internet at <http://censtats.census.gov/bldg/bldgprmt.shtml>. ASCII, comma delimited files for all geographic areas are available by calling the Residential Construction Branch on 800-845-8244 or emailing your request to MCD.RCB.BPS@census.gov.

Building Permit sample files and documentation are available on the Internet at the following website: <http://www.census.gov/const/www/C40/sample.html>.

How can I get copies of my C-404 reported data?

Copies of previously reported data can be obtained upon request by calling our office on 800-845-8244 or email your request to MCD.RCB.BPS@census.gov. It is advisable that before you fax or mail your form, please retain a copy for your records.

How can I get County level data?

County data can be obtained by visiting our website at <http://censtats.census.gov/bldg/bldgprmt.shtml>. The monthly files show county totals for all counties in which every permit office is requested to report monthly (about 900), and the annual file shows all counties that contain permit-issuing places.

Monthly data are available January 2000 forward and annual data from 1990 forward.

ASCII, comma delimited files for all geographic areas are available by calling the Residential Construction Branch on 800-845-8244 or emailing your request to MCD.RCB.BPS@census.gov.

Why is the requested place level data not shown on the website?

Data are not shown on the website because:

- a. at the time the data were published, we had not received the C-404 for the place, or
- b. because of the previous sample selection procedures, data for some places that report monthly are not included on our website. If data for the requested jurisdiction is submitted on time, and place level data are not shown on the website, please call 800-845-8244 for assistance.