

FOR WIRE TRANSMISSION 8:30 A.M. ET, Thursday, January 14, 1999

**ADVANCE MONTHLY RETAIL SALES  
DECEMBER 1998**

The Census Bureau of the Department of Commerce announced today that advance estimates of U.S. retail sales in December adjusted for seasonal, holiday, and trading-day differences, but not for price changes, were \$231.4 billion, an increase of 0.9 percent ( $\pm 0.7\%$ ) from the previous month and up 6.7 percent ( $\pm 0.9\%$ ) from December 1997. Total sales for the 12 months of 1998 were 2.7 trillion, up 5.1 percent ( $\pm 0.5\%$ ) from the 1997 total. The October to November 1998 percent change was unrevised from +0.6 percent ( $\pm 0.3\%$ ) reported last month.

Durable goods increased 1.8 percent ( $\pm 1.4\%$ ) from November and were 8.5 percent above last year. Building materials were up 12.5 percent from December a year ago, while Automotive sales were up 8.2 percent during the same period.

Nondurable goods increased 0.2 percent ( $\pm 0.6\%$ ) from last month and were 5.4 percent above last year. General merchandise sales were up 7.2 percent from December a year ago, while gasoline sales were down 4.9 percent during the same period.

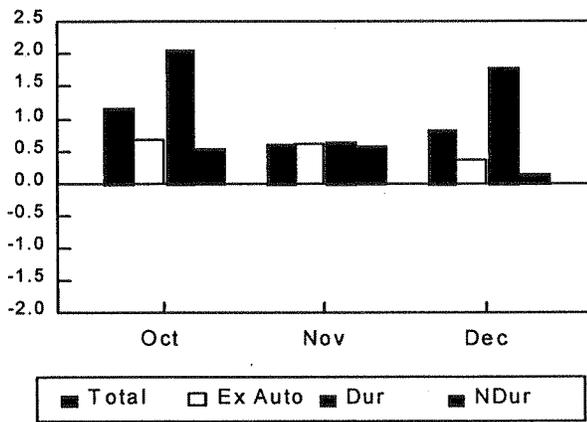
The scheduled release dates for 1999 are as follows: February 11, March 11, April 13, May 13, June 11, July 14, August 12, September 14, October 14, November 12, and December 14.

*The advance estimates are based on a small subsample of the Bureau's full retail sales sample. Estimates from the advance and the subsequent full survey can differ because of the earlier reporting in the advance and because of sampling variability present in both surveys.*

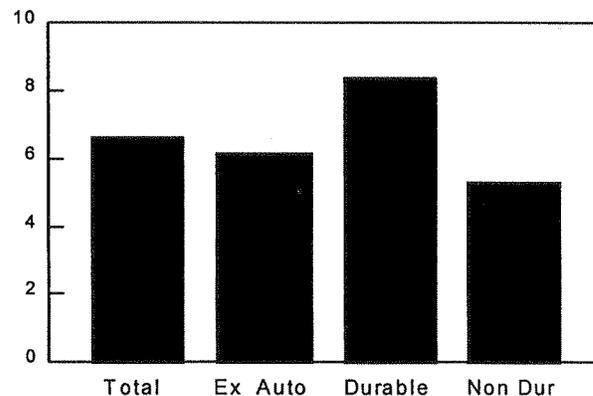
**Percent Change in Retail Sales**

(Data adjusted for seasonal, holiday, and trading-day differences, but not for price changes)

**From Previous Month**



**From Previous Year**



The Advance Monthly Retail Sales Report for January is scheduled to be released February 11, 1999 at 8:30 a.m.

Address inquiries concerning this report to Ronald Pienckyoski, Service Sector Statistics Division, Bureau of the Census, Washington, D.C. 20233. Telephone: (301) 457-2713 or (301) 457-2666.

This report is available the day of issue through the Department of Commerce's online Economic Bulletin Board. For information call (202) 482-1986. The data are also available on the internet - <http://www.census.gov/svsd/www/advtable.html>.

# Table 1. Estimated Monthly Retail Sales, By Kind of Business

(In Millions of Dollars and Annual Percent Change)

SIC code	Kind of business	Not adjusted							Adjusted <sup>1</sup>				
		12 month total		1998			1997		1998			1997	
		1998	Change from 1997	Dec. <sup>2</sup> (a)	Nov. (p)	Oct. (r)	Dec.	Nov.	Dec. <sup>2</sup> (a)	Nov. (p)	Oct. (r)	Dec. (r)	Nov. (r)
	<b>Retail trade, total .....</b>	<b>2,696,097</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>276,809</b>	<b>228,421</b>	<b>230,438</b>	<b>258,278</b>	<b>215,632</b>	<b>231,351</b>	<b>229,346</b>	<b>227,885</b>	<b>216,864</b>	<b>216,084</b>
	Total (excl. auto group)...	2,034,532	4.8	224,209	178,238	173,510	210,166	169,362	173,373	172,760	171,718	163,263	163,522
	<b>Durable goods, total.....</b>	<b>1,132,696</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>107,889</b>	<b>90,998</b>	<b>96,587</b>	<b>98,932</b>	<b>83,766</b>	<b>98,440</b>	<b>96,676</b>	<b>96,036</b>	<b>90,753</b>	<b>89,490</b>
52	Building mat., hardware, garden supply, and mobile home dealers...	165,961	10.3	13,223	13,249	14,986	11,756	11,739	14,436	14,255	14,032	12,832	12,725
521,3	Building mat. and supply stores...	(*)	(*)	(*)	10,344	11,691	8,885	9,116	(*)	11,004	10,755	9,927	9,771
525	Hardware stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	1,259	1,323	1,230	1,187	(*)	1,290	1,276	1,151	1,204
55 ex. 554	Automotive dealers.....	661,565	5.7	52,600	50,183	56,928	48,112	46,270	57,978	56,586	56,167	53,601	52,562
551,2,5, 6,7,9	Motor vehicle and miscellaneous automotive dealers.....	622,770	6.0	49,526	47,033	53,421	45,190	43,259	54,725	53,325	52,892	50,492	49,439
551	Motor vehicle (franchised).....	(*)	(*)	(*)	41,107	45,908	39,749	37,928	(*)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
553	Auto and home supply stores....	(*)	(*)	(*)	3,150	3,507	2,922	3,011	(*)	3,261	3,275	3,109	3,123
57	Furniture, home furnishings, and equipment stores.....	159,233	8.6	19,197	14,654	13,259	17,924	13,688	13,557	13,479	13,403	12,755	12,587
571	Furniture and home furnishings...	(*)	(*)	(*)	7,057	6,557	7,522	6,746	(*)	6,427	6,366	6,248	6,144
5722,31,4	Household appliance, radio, TV and computer stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	6,639	5,757	8,592	5,972	(*)	6,113	6,028	5,547	5,509
5722	Household appliance stores...	(*)	(*)	(*)	901	889	1,055	896	(*)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
	<b>Nondurable goods, total.....</b>	<b>1,563,401</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>168,920</b>	<b>137,423</b>	<b>133,851</b>	<b>159,346</b>	<b>131,866</b>	<b>132,911</b>	<b>132,670</b>	<b>131,849</b>	<b>126,111</b>	<b>126,594</b>
53	General merchandise group stores..	353,602	6.7	50,239	35,053	29,420	46,690	32,895	30,123	30,170	29,755	28,098	28,103
531	Dept. stores (ex. leased depts)....	278,715	6.7	40,515	27,807	23,005	37,859	26,319	23,721	23,645	23,379	22,257	22,248
531	Dept. stores (in. leased depts) <sup>3</sup> ....	(*)	(*)	(*)	28,274	23,392	38,519	26,821	(*)	24,088	23,775	22,717	22,670
533	Variety stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	1,199	1,054	1,539	1,089	(*)	1,077	1,031	911	969
539	Misc. general mdse. stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	6,047	5,361	7,292	5,487	(*)	5,448	5,345	4,930	4,886
54	Food stores.....	442,847	3.0	41,053	36,839	37,808	38,789	35,910	37,692	37,560	37,346	35,960	36,120
541	Grocery stores.....	414,442	2.8	37,954	34,535	35,417	35,832	33,658	35,306	35,204	34,962	33,677	33,827
554	Gasoline service stations.....	149,392	-5.9	12,083	11,834	12,775	12,771	12,581	12,255	12,289	12,379	12,887	13,105
56	Apparel and accessory stores.....	123,933	5.2	16,704	11,592	10,573	16,039	11,137	10,375	10,435	10,316	9,901	9,928
561	Men's and boy's clothing and furnishings stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	1,101	992	1,569	1,049	(*)	978	973	852	917
562,3	Women's clothing, specialty stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	2,819	2,607	4,356	2,809	(*)	2,620	2,558	2,651	2,589
565	Family clothing stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	4,998	4,283	6,639	4,666	(*)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
566	Shoe stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	1,669	1,680	2,256	1,689	(*)	1,719	1,743	1,743	1,713
58	Eating and drinking places.....	246,812	4.5	21,209	20,122	21,690	19,639	18,837	21,337	21,248	21,079	19,918	19,642
591	Drug and proprietary stores.....	105,767	7.7	11,193	8,848	8,947	10,281	8,072	9,130	9,103	9,001	8,345	8,373
592	Liquor stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	2,148	2,141	2,799	2,068	(*)	2,172	2,124	2,078	2,048
5961	Total mail order.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	5,625	5,153	6,146	4,951	(*)	4,607	4,668	3,975	4,102
53,56,57, 594	GAF(4).....	(*)	(*)	(*)	70,346	60,736	97,506	66,491	(*)	62,339	61,790	58,560	58,570

\* Advance estimates are not available from the subsample panel for these kinds of business.

NA Not available. (a) Advance estimates. (p) Preliminary. (r) Revised.

- (1) Data are concurrently adjusted for seasonal variations, holiday, and trading-day differences, but not for price changes. Concurrent seasonal adjustment uses all available unadjusted estimates as input to the X-11 program and the factors derived from the program are used in calculating all seasonally adjusted data shown in this publication. Factors and explanatory material are contained in the Monthly Retail Trade Report, BR-98-11.
- (2) Advance estimates are based on early reporting by a small subsample of the full survey panel. All other estimates are based on the full sample.
- (3) Includes data for leased departments operated within department stores. Data for this line not included in broader kind-of-business totals.
- (4) GAF represents stores which specialize in department store types of merchandise (general merchandise, apparel, furniture, and miscellaneous shopping goods stores).

Note: Totals include data for kinds of business not shown separately.

## Table 2. Percent Change in Estimated Monthly Retail Sales, by Kind of Business

(Adjusted for seasonal variations, holiday, and trading-day differences, but not for price changes)

SIC code	Kind of business	Percent change <sup>1</sup>					
		Dec. 1998 Advance from --		Nov. 1998 Preliminary from --		Oct. 1998 through Dec. 1998 from --	
		Nov. 1998 (p)	Dec. 1997 (r)	Oct. 1998 (r)	Nov. 1997 (r)	July 1998 through Sept. 1998	Oct. 1997 through Dec. 1997
	<b>Retail trade, total .....</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>6.3</b>
	Total (excl. automotive group) .....	0.4	6.2	0.6	5.6	1.3	5.7
	<b>Durable goods, total .....</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>8.4</b>
52	Building materials, hardware, garden supply, and mobile home dealers ....	1.3	12.5	1.6	12.0	3.0	11.7
55 ex. 554	Automotive dealers.....	2.5	8.2	0.7	7.7	5.1	8.1
551,2,5,6,7,9	Motor vehicle and miscellaneous automotive dealers.....	2.6	8.4	0.8	7.9	5.4	8.3
57	Furniture, home furnishings, and equipment stores.....	0.6	6.3	0.6	7.1	0.6	7.1
	<b>Nondurable goods, total.....</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>4.7</b>
53	General merchandise group stores.....	-0.2	7.2	1.4	7.4	1.9	6.8
531	Dept. stores (ex. leased dept.).....	0.3	6.6	1.1	6.3	1.6	6.1
531	Dept. stores (in. leased dept.) <sup>2</sup> .....	(NA)	(NA)	1.3	6.3	(NA)	(NA)
54	Food stores.....	0.4	4.8	0.6	4.0	1.0	4.2
541	Grocery stores.....	0.3	4.8	0.7	4.1	1.1	4.2
554	Gasoline service stations.....	-0.3	-4.9	-0.7	-6.2	-1.7	-5.9
56	Apparel and accessory stores.....	-0.6	4.8	1.2	5.1	0.3	4.8
58	Eating and drinking places.....	0.4	7.1	0.8	8.2	3.4	7.3
591	Drug and proprietary stores.....	0.3	9.4	1.1	8.7	1.8	8.9

NA Not available. (p) Preliminary. (r) Revised.

(1) Percent change rounded to nearest tenth.

(2) Includes data for leased departments operated within department stores. Data for this line not included in broader kind-of-business totals.

Official Business

Penalty for Private Use, \$300

### Reliability of Data

The Advance estimates are based on a small subsample of the Bureau's full retail sales sample. Estimates from the Advance and the subsequent full survey can differ because of the earlier reporting in the Advance and because of sampling variability present in each survey. The margin of sampling error, as used on page 1, gives a range about the estimate which is a 90% confidence interval. If, for example, the trend estimate is +1.2% and the standard error is 0.9%, then the margin of sampling error is  $\pm 1.65 \times 0.9\%$  or  $\pm 1.5\%$ , and the 90% confidence interval is -0.3% to +2.7%. If the interval contains 0, it is uncertain whether there was an increase or decrease. For monthly level, the coefficient of variation (CV) is given. The resulting confidence interval is the estimated value  $\pm 1.65 \times CV \times$  (the estimated value).

Estimates of sampling variability are given in Table 3. They are based on two components. The first component is a measure of the average difference

between the Advance and the Preliminary estimates. The second reflects the variability of the Preliminary estimate. Additionally, both the Advance and the full survey are subject to nonsampling errors. Such errors can occur because of nonresponse, insufficient coverage of the universe of retail businesses, and response errors, among others. Precautionary steps are taken to minimize these errors, but their magnitude is not directly measured.

Preliminary estimates for the current month and final estimates for the previous month based on the full sample are published next month in the Monthly Retail Trade Report. This report will provide sales estimates in greater detail and additional measures of sampling variability. It will also present a description of revisions and the techniques used in developing the estimates, and an explanation of confidence intervals and sampling variability (Appendix B, Reliability of Data).

**Table 3. Measures of Variability of and Revision to Advance Estimates for Level and Trend**

SIC code	Kind of Business	Level of sales: Estimated CV <sup>1</sup> for Current Mo. (x 100)	Trend (percent change): Estimated standard error <sup>1</sup> for			Revision for month- to-month change <sup>2</sup>	
			Current Mo. to Previous Mo.	Current Qtr. to Previous Qtr.	Current Mo. to Current Mo. Last Yr.	Average revision	Median absolute revision
	<b>Retail trade, total.....</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.2</b>
	Total (excl. auto) .....	1.0	0.6	0.3	0.7	0.1	0.2
	<b>Durable goods, total .....</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.2</b>
52	Building materials, group stores .....	3.5	1.9	1.1	2.7	0.3	0.3
55 ex. 554	Automotive dealers .....	1.6	1.2	0.8	1.5	0.1	0.5
551,2,5,6,7,9	Motor vehicle and misc. automotive dealers.....	1.8	1.3	0.9	1.6	0.1	0.6
57	Furniture, home furn, and equipment stores .....	2.0	1.4	0.7	1.8	0.3	0.5
	<b>Nondurable goods, total .....</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.2</b>
53	General merch. group, total.....	0.6	0.6	0.2	0.6	0.0	0.2
531	Dept. stores (ex. leased depts.) ....	0.4	0.5	0.1	0.4	0.0	0.2
54	Food stores.....	1.2	0.2	0.3	0.6	0.1	0.2
541	Grocery stores .....	1.2	0.2	0.3	0.6	0.1	0.2
554	Gasoline service stations .....	2.2	1.2	1.4	1.4	-0.1	0.4
56	Apparel and accessory stores .....	1.9	1.5	0.6	1.6	-0.4	0.7
58	Eating and drinking places .....	5.1	1.0	0.9	2.2	0.4	0.7
591	Drug and proprietary stores .....	1.7	0.8	0.4	1.2	0.1	0.4



- (1) The coefficients of variation (CVs) for level of sales and the standard errors for trends are medians based on estimates for the preceding 12 months.
- (2) These columns measure the difference between the Advance/Preliminary ratio and the Preliminary/Final ratio estimates -- i.e., the difference between estimates of trend for the same pair of data months. The revisions are based on the latest 12 months of data.