

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
Effects of Hurricanes on the August 2017 Monthly Retail Trade Survey

How much do the areas that had the biggest impact from Hurricane Harvey typically represent of the nation's retail estimates?

The monthly retail trade program is not designed to measure retail activity at specific geographic levels, so current estimates of spending in those areas are unavailable.

For data from other Census Bureau sources on the areas impacted by Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, please see the Census Bureau's Emergency Preparedness page at <https://www.census.gov/topics/preparedness.html>.

Does the Census Bureau produce monthly retail estimates for the affected sample areas?

No. We cannot isolate the effect of Hurricane Harvey on the Monthly Retail Trade Survey (MRTS) estimates since the sample is designed to measure retail activity at the national level and not at specific geographic areas.

Even though we cannot isolate the effect, we did receive indications from the companies that the hurricane had both positive and negative effects on their sales data while others indicated they were not impacted at all. Some firms reported a drop in sales due to permanent or temporary store closures and stores having reduced business due to damage, shipment delays, etc. For companies impacted by Hurricane Harvey, we review their contribution to the estimates to ensure accurate representation to the overall industry estimates.

Does this report include retail establishments in Puerto Rico? Will Hurricane Maria impact future estimates?

No. This report covers retail establishments operating only in the 50 states and District of Columbia. U.S. Territories, such as Puerto Rico, generally present their economic statistics separately from those of the United States. Sales and/or inventories of in scope companies that obtain goods from suppliers or sell to customers in Puerto Rico could be impacted by Hurricane Maria, but we cannot isolate those effects on the Monthly Retail Trade Survey (MRTS) estimates.

How was the collection of retail data affected by the Hurricanes Harvey and Irma?

Overall response was within the range of the past 12 months. For surveyed companies, approximately 46.3% provided data for the August Advance report, compared to a range of 44.2% to 50.1% in the preceding 12 months. This resulted in a total quantity response rate of 54.8% for the August Advance report, compared to a range of 47.5% to 58.9% in the preceding 12 months. Approximately 48.1% provided sales data for the August full Monthly Retail Trade Report, compared to a range of 46.5% to 52.3% in the preceding 12 months. Approximately 48.1% provided inventory data for the full report, compared to a range of 46.3% to 52.0% in the preceding 12 months. This resulted in a total quantity response rate of 60.6% for sales, compared to a range of 58.6% to 66.5% in the preceding 12 months and a total quantity response rate of 59.2% for inventories, compared to a range of 57.2% to 64.5% in the preceding 12 months.

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

Yes. Our electronic instrument requested responding companies describe how their business was impacted by Hurricane Harvey and our data collection staff inquired about the impacts of Hurricane Harvey as part of their normal follow-up operations.

Were there any estimates withheld or delayed because of data collection problems?

No. All estimates were released as scheduled.

As a result of Hurricane Harvey, did the Census Bureau modify its usual weighting or estimation methods used to produce monthly retail estimates for August 2017?

No, the sample is designed to measure retail 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 retail estimates changed because of Hurricane Harvey?

No, the reliability of the monthly retail 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 August 2017 exhibited variation similar to that for prior months. While a few individual firms reported large increases or decreases in their data because of the effects of the hurricane, this additional variation was not large enough to substantially affect the reliability of the published estimates.

Did the Census Bureau alter the procedures for developing seasonally adjusted estimates for monthly retail data?

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

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
Economic Indicators Division

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