

Building Permits Survey

Frequently Asked Questions for Survey Respondents

1. 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 population estimates to allocate funding and other resources to your local jurisdiction for various planning purposes.

2. 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 is very important, because the data are used by economists, politicians, federal and local governments in determining trends, not only in your community, but in the overall national economy.

3. Should I complete the survey 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 of the C-404 form and return it to us.

If reporting via Internet, select "No" to question "a" on the New Housing Units page. Your report is important even if no permits were issued for new residential construction for the time period requested.

4. Where can I get assistance to complete this survey?

Instructions for completing the survey are located on the back of the C-404 form and in the online version of the questionnaire. If you have any additional questions, you can reach the statisticians in the Residential Construction Branch on 1-800-845-8244 or email us at MCD.RCB.BPS@census.gov.

5. Is it best to fax, mail the form or report electronically via Internet?

Any method of receipt is acceptable. We are basically concerned with getting the information in a timely manner. If faxing the form, fax it to the number shown on the C-404 form, 1-877-273-9501.

You can report electronically via Internet by using the Username and Password assigned to your jurisdiction as shown on the C-404 form when we initiated this data collection. Access the Business Help Site to submit your survey data via Internet.

To avoid duplication of data received, please use only one reporting method to submit data for the same survey period.

6. Can I submit my data via email?

Although we are not set up to receive survey data via email, electronic submissions are now available via Internet at the Business Help Site. We accept facsimiles of our form at 1-877-273-9501. 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 1-800-845-8249.

7. Our jurisdiction does not have a building permit officer, who should complete this survey?

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

8. Can I change my reporting status (i.e. monthly to annual; annual to monthly)?

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. 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. Visit our website to view documentation of the sample methods used for the Building Permits Survey.

If your jurisdiction has an extreme hardship completing this survey based on your current reporting status, please call us to discuss alternatives at 1-800-845-8244 or email us at MCD.RCB.BPS@census.gov.

9. 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.

10. How do I change my contact information (name, address, email, etc.)?

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:

1. marking through the field that needs to be changed and writing the correct information,
2. supplying the correct information in Section 5 (Comments), indicating that it is a correction or change,
3. calling us on 1-800-845-8244, or

4. emailing us at MCD.RCB.BPS@census.gov to request a change in C-404 information.

If reporting via Internet, click "EDIT" next to the Contact Information on the Main Menu page.

11. 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 1-800-845-8244 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.

If you report via Internet, monthly reporters will not receive a C-404 form every month. Instead, we will send an email message informing you when it is time to submit your survey data. Please review the accuracy of your email address shown on the Contact Information page. However, Annual reporters will continue to receive a form each year due to Census Bureau's password guidelines.

12. 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.