New Residential Sales

Press Release FAQs

1. **How do you obtain the data for this survey?**

   The Survey of Construction estimates the amount of new, privately-owned construction in areas that require a building permit and in areas that do not require a building permit. Areas that do not require a building permit are referred to as non-permit (NP) areas. Less than 2 percent of all new construction takes place in NP areas. Census Field Representatives collect data for both of these areas. For areas requiring a permit, they visit a sample of permit offices and select a sample of permits authorizing private new residential construction. These permits are then followed through to see when they are started and completed, and when they are sold for single-family units that are built to be sold. Information on physical and financial characteristics are also collected. For NP areas, roads in sampled NP areas are driven as least once every 3 months to see if there is any new construction. Further information on how data for this survey are obtained can be found on our How the Data are Collected page.

2. **Why are monthly estimates revised?**

   Each month the US Census Bureau publishes preliminary estimates of New Single-Family Houses Sold. The US Census Bureau releases these estimates to provide government and private data users with early measures of new residential sales activity. A necessary part of the process of issuing these early data involves the issuance of subsequent revisions. The revisions to new single-family houses sold estimates are primarily the result of the replacement of imputed data with data which are reported in subsequent months. New residential sales have larger revisions than other residential construction series. This is due to the fact that most of the new residential construction survey data are based on a permit being issued. Since many homes have a sales contract signed prior to a permit being issued, an estimate must be determined for these sales prior to permit authorization.

3. **What is a months' supply?**

   The months' supply is the ratio of houses for sale to houses sold. This statistic provides an indication of the size of the for-sale inventory in relation to the number of houses currently being sold. The months' supply indicates how long the current for-sale inventory would last given the current sales rate if no additional new houses were built.

4. **What is a seasonally adjusted annual rate?**

   Most of the seasonally adjusted series are shown as seasonally adjusted annual rates (SAAR). The seasonally adjusted annual rate is the seasonally adjusted monthly value multiplied by 12. The benefit of the annual rate is that not only can one monthly estimate be compared with another; monthly data can also be compared with an annual total. The seasonally adjusted annual rate is neither a forecast nor a projection; rather it is a description of the rate of building permits, housing starts, housing completions, or new home sales in the particular month for which they are calculated.

5. **Why is the data seasonally adjusted?**

   Seasonal movements are often large enough that they mask other characteristics of the data that are of interest to analysts of current economic trends. For example, if each month has a different seasonal tendency toward high or low values it can be difficult to detect the general direction of a time series' recent monthly movement (increase, decrease, turning point, no change, consistency with another economic indicator, etc.). Seasonal adjustment produces data in which the values of neighboring months are usually easier to compare. Many data users prefer seasonally adjusted data because they want to see those characteristics that seasonal movements tend to mask, especially changes in the direction of the series.

6. **What is the RSE (relative standard error)?**

   The estimated standard error expressed as a percent of the estimated total or proportion, that is, the estimated standard error times 100 divided by the estimate. This is also called coefficient of variation (CV). It is a measure of sampling error.

7. **What is a 90% confidence interval?**

   The sample estimate and an estimate of its standard error allow us to construct interval estimates with prescribed confidence that the interval includes the average result of all possible samples with the same size and design. To illustrate, if all possible samples were surveyed under essentially the same conditions, and estimates calculated from each sample.

8. **What states are in each of the 4 Census regions?**

   A map of the regions can be found at: https://www.census.gov/geo/reference/webatlas/regions.html.

Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Connecticut	Illinois	Alabama	Alaska
Maine	Indiana	Arkansas	Arizona
Massachusetts	Iowa	Delaware	California
New Hampshire	Kansas	District of Columbia	Colorado
New Jersey	Michigan	Florida	Hawaii
New York	Minnesota	Georgia	Idaho
Pennsylvania	Missouri	Kentucky	Montana
Rhode Island	Nebraska	Louisiana	Nevada
Vermont	North Dakota	Maryland	New Mexico
	Ohio	Mississippi	Oregon
	South Dakota	North Carolina	Utah
	Wisconsin	Oklahoma	Washington
		South Carolina	Wyoming
		Tennessee	
		Texas	
		Virginia	
		West Virginia	

9. **Are the data available at the state level?**

   New residential sales data is not available at a smaller geographic area. New residential construction; however, has housing units authorized by building permits data available at the state level. Building permits data are collected from individual permit offices, most of which are municipalities; the remainder are counties, townships, or New England and Middle Atlantic-type towns. Because building permits are public records, local area data can be published without any confidentiality concerns. From local area data, estimates are tabulated for counties, states, Metropolitan Areas, Census Divisions, Census Regions, and the United States. Please go to the Building Permits Survey page for more information.

10. **Is a (Z) a true zero?**

    A (Z) is not necessarily a true zero. It represents a relative standard error less than 0.5 percent.

11. **Where can I find historic releases?**

    Historic New Residential Construction press releases can be found on our Historic Releases page.