

Annual Wholesale Trade Survey Summary: 2019

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Annual Wholesale Trade Survey (AWTS) has been conducted annually since 1978. The AWTS samples employer businesses that are classified in the Wholesale Trade sector, as defined by the 2012 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), and located in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. (The 2012 NAICS definition of Wholesale Trade can be viewed at www.census.gov/naics.) The AWTS excludes data for businesses located in the U.S. territories.

There are two main types of wholesalers included in this survey: merchant wholesalers and business-to-business electronic markets, agents, and brokers. Merchant wholesalers are establishments that sell goods on their own account, such as distributors, jobbers, drop shippers, and import/export merchants. Manufacturers' sales branches and offices (MSBOs) fall under the "merchant wholesalers" category as well. MSBOs are establishments maintained by manufacturing, refining, or mining enterprises apart from their plants or mines for the purpose of marketing their products. Sales branches will typically

carry inventories, while sales offices usually do not. Conversely, business-to-business electronic markets, agents, and brokers are establishments that arrange sales and purchases for others, generally for a commission or fee.

Currently, the AWTS sample consists of approximately 8,400 firms: 6,700 merchant wholesalers, excluding MSBOs; 1,000 MSBOs; and 700 business-to-business electronic markets, agents, and brokers.

This survey produces national estimates of total annual sales, e-commerce sales, end-of-year inventories, purchases, total operating expenses, gross margins, and commissions. Each spring, the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey sales and inventories estimates are benchmarked to the AWTS data, which are published on a 2012 NAICS basis. The Bureau of Economic Analysis uses the AWTS data when developing its gross domestic product estimates and the national accounts' input-output tables. Additionally, business and industry groups utilize the data to forecast future demand.

A detailed description of the AWTS methodology is located at www.census.gov/programs-surveys/awts/technical-documentation/methodology.html.

2019 AWTS DATA

The U.S. Census Bureau released the 2019 AWTS estimates on January 21, 2021. The data tables can be found at www.census.gov/data/tables/2019/econ/awts/annual-reports.html. The sections below highlight some of the estimates published in the 2019 AWTS data tables.

Sales

Sales are the dollar value of transactions between the reporting firm and its customers. Sales include transactions to foreign affiliates. However, transactions among domestic affiliates are excluded.

Merchant Wholesalers

Merchant wholesalers in the United States had sales of \$8,633.5 billion in 2019. In 2018, U.S. merchant wholesalers had sales of \$8,633.6 billion.¹

¹ Sales estimates for 2018 and 2019 are not statistically different at the 90 percent confidence level.

Motor Vehicle and Motor Vehicle Parts and Supplies Merchant Wholesalers (NAICS code 4231); Drugs and Druggists' Sundries Merchant Wholesalers (NAICS code 4242); and Beer, Wine, and Distilled Alcoholic Beverage Merchant Wholesalers (NAICS code 4248) grew in sales in 2019. Motor Vehicle and Motor Vehicle Parts and Supplies Merchant Wholesalers (NAICS code 4231) sales were \$962.5 billion in 2019, up 2.3 percent from \$940.6 billion in 2018. Drugs and Druggists' Sundries Merchant Wholesalers (NAICS code 4242) had sales of \$1,016.8 billion in 2019, an increase of 4.4 percent from \$974.3 billion in 2018. Beer, Wine, and Distilled Alcoholic Beverage Merchant Wholesalers (NAICS code 4248) sales were \$178.2 billion in 2019, an increase of 4.9 percent from \$169.9 billion in 2018.

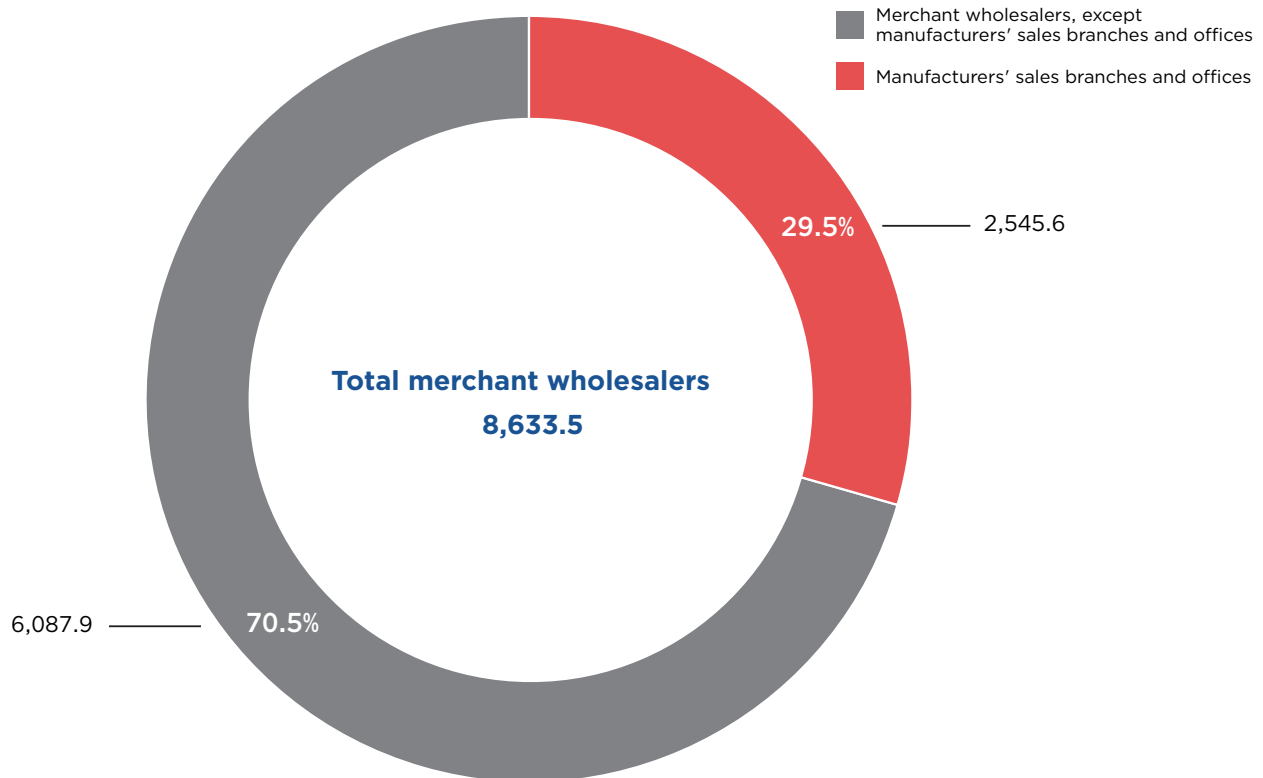
Metal and Mineral (except Petroleum) Merchant Wholesalers (NAICS code 4235), Miscellaneous Durable Goods Merchant Wholesalers (NAICS code 4239), and Petroleum and Petroleum Products Merchant Wholesalers (NAICS code 4247) sales decreased in 2019. Metal and Mineral (except Petroleum) Merchant Wholesalers (NAICS code 4235) sales were \$239.2 billion in 2019, down 5.3 percent from \$252.6 billion in 2018. Miscellaneous Durable Goods Merchant Wholesalers (NAICS code 4239) is an industry group that includes establishments primarily engaged in the merchant wholesale distribution of precious stones; precious metals; and sporting, recreational, toy, hobby, and jewelry goods and supplies. This industry had sales of \$253.9 billion in 2019, a decrease of 6.5 percent from \$271.7 billion in 2018. Petroleum and Petroleum Products Merchant Wholesalers (NAICS code 4247) had sales of \$1,303.7 billion in 2019, a decrease of 3.8 percent from \$1,354.9 billion in 2018.

Merchant Wholesalers, Except MSBOs

Excluding MSBOs, U.S. merchant wholesalers had sales of \$6,087.9 billion in 2019. These firms accounted for 70.5 percent of the sales made by merchant wholesalers in 2019 (Figure 1). In 2018, U.S. merchant wholesalers, except MSBOs, had sales of \$6,099.9 billion.²

² Ibid.

Figure 1.
Sales of U.S. Merchant Wholesalers by Type of Operation: 2019
(In billions of dollars)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 Annual Wholesale Trade Survey.

MSBOs

The U.S. MSBOs in Wholesale Trade had sales of \$2,545.6 billion in 2019, up 0.5 percent from \$2,533.6 billion in 2018. In 2019, MSBOs accounted for 29.5 percent of the sales generated by merchant wholesalers (Figure 1).

Inventories

Inventories are the value, at cost, of merchandise on hand and available for sale at the end of the reference year. All goods owned by a firm, regardless of location, are included. Items, such as fixtures, equipment, and supplies, that are not held for resale are excluded. The value of goods on a firm's premises that are not owned by the firm is also excluded.

Merchant Wholesalers

Merchant wholesalers in the United States had total inventories of \$907.5 billion in 2019, an increase of 2.0 percent from \$889.7 billion in 2018.

Merchant Wholesalers, Except MSBOs

In 2019, U.S. merchant wholesalers, except MSBOs, had total inventories of \$683.6 billion, an increase of 1.4 percent from \$673.9 billion in 2018.

MSBOs

The U.S. MSBOs in Wholesale Trade had total inventories of \$223.9 billion in 2019, up 3.8 percent from \$215.8 billion in 2018.