

SUPPORTING STATEMENT
U.S. Department of Commerce
U.S. Census Bureau
Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey
OMB Control No. 0607-0190

PART A. JUSTIFICATION

1. Necessity of Information Collection

The Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey (MWTS) canvasses firms primarily engaged in merchant wholesale trade, excluding manufacturers' sales branches and offices (MSBOs), that are located in the United States. This survey provides the only continuous measure of monthly wholesale sales, end-of-month inventories, and inventories/sales ratios. The sales and inventory estimates produced from the MWTS provide current trends of economic activity by kind of business for the United States. Also, the estimates compiled from this survey provide valuable information for economic policy decisions by the government and are widely used by private businesses, trade organizations, professional associations, and other business research and analysis organizations.

As one of the U.S. Census Bureau's principal economic indicators, the estimates produced by the MWTS are critical to the accurate measurement of total economic activity of the United States. The estimates of sales made by wholesale locations represent only merchant wholesalers, excluding MSBOs, who take title to goods bought for resale to other companies. Wholesalers normally sell to industrial distributors, retail operations, cooperatives, and other businesses. The sales estimates include sales made on credit as well as on a cash basis, but exclude receipts from sales taxes and interest charges from credit sales.

The estimates of inventories represent all merchandise held in wholesale locations, warehouses, and offices, as well as goods held by others for sale on consignment or in transit for distribution to wholesale establishments. The estimates of inventories exclude fixtures and supplies not for resale, as well as merchandise held on consignment which are owned by others. Inventories are an important component in the Bureau of Economic Analysis's (BEA) calculation of the investment portion of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

We publish wholesale sales and inventory estimates based on the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) which has been widely adopted throughout both the public and private sectors.

The Census Bureau conducts this voluntary survey under the authority of an Act of Congress, Title 13, United States Code, Section 182.

2. Needs and Uses

The Census Bureau tabulates the collected data to provide, with measurable reliability, statistics on sales, end-of-month inventories, and inventories/sales ratios for merchant wholesalers, excluding MSBOs.

The BEA is the primary Federal user of data collected in the MWTS. The BEA uses data from this form to prepare the national income and product accounts (NIPA), input-output accounts (I-O), and gross domestic product (GDP) by industry. End-of-month inventories are used to prepare the change in private inventories component of GDP. Sales are used to prepare estimates of real inventory-sales ratios in the NIPAs, extrapolate proprietors' income for wholesalers (until tax return data become available) in the NIPAs, and extrapolate annual current-dollar gross output for the most recent year in annual I-O tables, GDP-by-industry, and advance GDP-by-industry estimates.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics uses the data as input to its Producer Price Indexes and in developing productivity measurements. Private businesses use the wholesale sales and inventory data in computing business activity indexes. Other government agencies and businesses use this information for market research, product development, and business planning to gauge the current trends of the economy.

Information quality is an integral part of the pre-dissemination review of the information disseminated by the Census Bureau (fully described in the Census Bureau's Information Quality Guidelines). Information quality is also integral to the information collections conducted by the Census Bureau and is incorporated into the clearance process required by the Paperwork Reduction Act.

3. Use of Information Technology

The use of the online reporting system "Centurion" allows respondents to report data through the internet at their convenience. The site also allows respondents to print copies of their completed form(s) for their records. Since its inception in September of 2009, the online reporting option has seen response rates as high as 43%, making it the most popular reporting option for respondents.

A fax machine connected to an "800" telephone line gives respondents the capability to fax data to our collection facility in Jeffersonville, Indiana, on a 24-hour basis. Use of this technology increases the response options, and decreases the number of more costly telephone follow-up inquiries. Approximately 30% of the response rate is via fax making it the second most popular option.

An automated system is used for check-in of returned forms and telephone follow-up

scheduling for delinquents. This allows for a more timely identification of completed questionnaires and fewer follow-up calls to respondents. The response rate via telephone is approximately 14% and returned forms via mail is 13%.

4. Efforts to Identify Duplication

Research with other governmental agencies, trade associations, and data users (both government and private sector) via telephone conversations, meetings, trade journal articles, and written correspondence indicates these data are not available from other sources on an ongoing basis.

Wholesale trade data are collected on an annual basis in the Annual Wholesale Trade Survey (AWTS) [OMB No. 0607-0195] and also in the quinquennial Economic Census. However, while the annual data are established to provide figures on wholesale trade in the intervening years between censuses, they do not provide a sufficient number of data points from which to do trend analysis as input to monitoring the current state of the economy. The monthly estimates are the only available data source for use as a trend series for evaluating current business conditions.

5. Minimizing Burden

The Census Bureau accepts data prepared on a company's own form. This relieves the respondent of the burden of posting data to a report form.

The stratified random sample design used in the MWTS uses the least number of sampling units required to produce national level estimates with the desired level of reliability, thus minimizing respondent burden. Sales and inventory data are collected from the largest wholesale firms and from a sample of small- and medium-sized firms. The effective sampling rate for the smallest businesses is 1 in 500. The selection of a new sample every five years replaces about 95 percent of the small- and medium-sized firms that participate in the survey, thus minimizing respondent burden by redistributing reporting requirements. The latest sample was introduced in Fall 2006.

Furthermore, firms are not required to maintain additional records. The data requested are generally carried on existing company records. Carefully prepared estimates are acceptable if book figures are not available. Finally, interviewers use computers with on-line edits of response data to conduct follow-up and delinquent interviews, thus reducing the number of call backs to respondents.

6. Consequences of Less Frequent Data Collection

The monthly sales and inventory estimates from the MWTS are the only source of monthly wholesale sales and inventory data and are used extensively by government and private economists to evaluate current economic conditions and to develop economic, fiscal, and monetary policies. These estimates are important economic indicators and provide timely input for computation of the National Income and Product Accounts. The Census Bureau publishes the data from this survey in its "Monthly Wholesale Trade: Sales and Inventories" report. Less frequent data collection would create a gap in statistics available on a monthly basis for this sector of the economy. Moreover, these statistics provide current-to-previous month and year-to-year trend data that are essential for evaluating current conditions and for formulating economic policy.

7. **Special Circumstances**

There are no special circumstances.

8. **Consultations Outside the Agency**

The Census Bureau issued a pre-submission notice published in the Federal Register dated January 6, 2011 located in Vol. 76, No. 4, on pages 770 and 771.

One comment was received from BEA expressing support for the MWTS (Attachment 1). The BEA is the Census Bureau's main source of consultation on the MWTS, and quarterly status meetings are conducted to address any program issues.

9. **Paying Respondents**

We do not provide any payment or gift to respondents.

10. **Assurance of Confidentiality**

Data collected in this survey are maintained in strictest confidence under the authority of an Act of Congress, Title 13, United States Code, Section 9, which states that data collected on our report forms (Attachment 2) may be seen only by persons sworn to uphold the confidentiality of Census Bureau information and may be used for statistical purposes only. Additionally, all reports are strictly confidential and are immune from legal process. The report forms also inform the respondent that this is a voluntary survey. The cover letter that accompany the initial mailing of the sample and the monthly fax reminder can be found in Attachment 3.

11. **Justification for Sensitive Questions**

The MWTS does not contain questions of a sensitive nature. The survey requests only financial data concerning business firms. It requests only data for company totals, and

under routine accounting practices these data are normally maintained in the firms' records.

12. **Estimate of Hour Burden**

There are approximately 4,500 businesses selected to report in the MWTS. This number is comprised of about 1,800 large firms and 2,700 smaller firms. According to information provided by a sample of respondents, the estimated time to complete the questionnaire is approximately 7 minutes. This time translates into an estimated annual burden of 6,300 hours.

The estimated annual cost to respondents is approximately \$182,763, which is based on the response burden of 6,300 hours at approximately \$29.01 per hour (median hourly salary for accountants and auditors; Occupational Employment Statistics - Bureau of Labor Statistics May 2009 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates; \$29.01 represents the median hourly wage of the full-time wage and salary earnings of accountants and auditors SOC code 13-2011).

<http://stats.bls.gov/oes/2009/may/oes132011.htm>

<u>Sample Size</u>	<u>Annual Responses</u>	<u>Annualized Responses</u>	<u>Hours</u>	<u>Burden</u>
4,500	12	54,000	.11666	6,300

13. **Estimate of Cost Burden**

We do not expect respondents to incur any costs other than that of their time to respond. The information requested is of the type and scope normally carried in company records and no special hardware or accounting software or system is necessary to provide answers to this information collection. Therefore, respondents are not expected to incur any capital and start-up costs or system maintenance costs in responding. Furthermore, purchasing of outside accounting or information collection services, if performed by the respondent, is part of usual and customary business practices and not specifically required for this information collection.

14. **Cost to Federal Government**

The total cost to the Federal Government for the MWTS in fiscal year 2011 is expected to be \$1,521,644, all borne by the Census Bureau.

15. Reason for Change in Burden

There was no change in burden from the previous OMB clearance package.

16. Project Schedule

Report forms are mailed to respondents at the end of each month and request data for the month just ending. Businesses are asked to return the completed form 8 days after receipt. The data are tabulated at the two-, three-, four-, and selected five-digit NAICS levels. The summary data are analyzed to ensure the estimates are consistent with other economic series and meet publication standards.

The estimates are published monthly by the U. S. Census Bureau as part of the "Monthly Wholesale Trade: Sales and Inventories" report which is released approximately 40 days after the reference month.

17. Request to Not Display Expiration Date

We wish to continue to display the expiration date.

18. Exceptions to the Certification

There are no exceptions to the certification statement.

19. NAICS Codes Affected

The following are the four-digit NAICS codes for the wholesalers affected by this information collection.

NAICS	KIND OF BUSINESS
4231	Motor Vehicles and Motor Vehicle Parts and Supplies
4232	Furniture and Home Furnishings
4233	Lumber and Other Construction Materials
4234	Professional and Commercial Equipment and Supplies
4235	Metals and Minerals, Except Petroleum
4236	Electrical and Electronic Goods
4237	Hardware, and Plumbing and Heating Equipment and Supplies
4238	Machinery, Equipment and Supplies
4239	Miscellaneous Durable Goods
4241	Paper and Paper Products
4242	Drugs and Druggists' Sundries
4243	Apparel, Piece Goods, and Notions
4244	Groceries and Related Products
4245	Farm Product Raw Materials
4246	Chemical and Allied Products
4247	Petroleum and Petroleum Products

4248
4249

Beer, Wine and Distilled Alcoholic Beverages
Miscellaneous Nondurable Good