



# The Daily

Statistics Canada

**Tuesday, October 20, 1998**

For release at 8:30 a.m.

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## MAJOR RELEASES

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- **Canadian international merchandise trade, August 1998** 2  
Both imports and exports rebounded strongly from the effects of the General Motors automotive strike in June and July. Exports, which climbed 7.1% in August, made up most of the ground lost over the last two months. Imports likewise returned to more normal levels gaining 5.3%.
  - **Wholesale trade, August 1998** 6  
Despite a steep decline in farm machinery and equipment, wholesalers in general halted a three month slide in sales with a 0.2% gain in August.
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## MAJOR RELEASES

### Canadian international merchandise trade

August 1998

Imports advanced 5.3% in August as most sectors posted gains. In particular, the machinery and equipment sector rose again (+1.6%) and has posted monthly gains since April. Imports of consumer goods also continued to climb, increasing another 2.2% in August.

Exports jumped 7.1% and surpassed the December 1997 record level by over \$900 million on the strength of automotive exports. All other major commodity groups also advanced in August on the heels of a relatively weak July. Exports to the United States remained strong while exports to most other countries felt the effects of a weakening global economy.

The trade balance jumped from a revised \$1.6 billion in July to \$2.2 billion in August. The trade balance was over \$2 billion for the first time since July 1997.

#### Note to readers

Merchandise trade is one component of the current account of Canada's balance of payments, which also includes trade in services.

### Exports of automotive products make up lost ground

Exports of automotive products (passenger cars, trucks, and motor vehicle parts) rose 31.2% in August after two months of substantial weakness. The \$1.5 billion increase in August simply compensated for a combined approximate \$2.0 billion decline between May and July. Compared with April 1998 (the last stable month of automotive product exports) exports of automotive products were 2.3% higher in August.

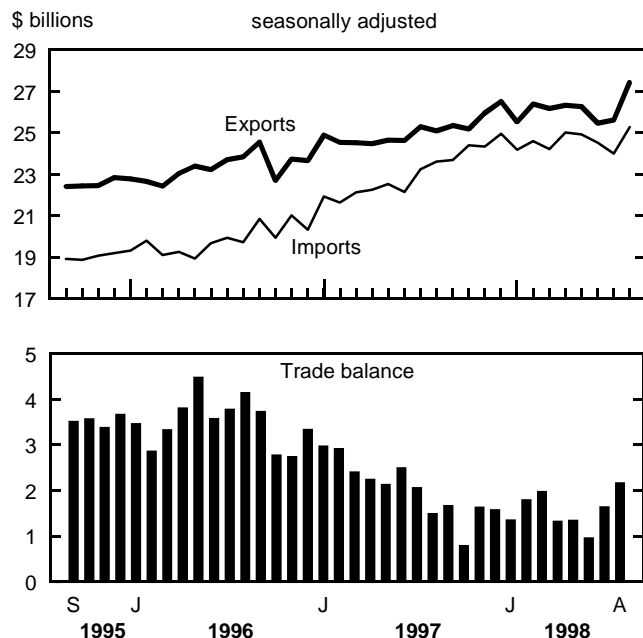
Exports of machinery and equipment have been climbing steadily over the last year and inched up another 0.3% in August. The office machines and equipment, telecommunication equipment and industrial machinery commodity groups have fuelled much of this growth. Exports of office machines and equipment, while strong over the last number of months, are expected to tail off as the Canadian computer manufacturing industry undergoes restructuring.

### Exports of forestry products buoyed by price increases

Forestry product exports rose 3.5% in August due to sharp increases in the price of softwood lumber and newsprint over the last two months. Restricted supply (due to a number of strikes in the newsprint sector) and longer than expected summer shutdowns in the softwood lumber industry placed upward pressure on the price of these goods. Removing the effect of the increase in price (often referred to as constant dollar exports) exports of forestry products actually fell by 0.2% in August.

While most of the forestry sector has been hurt by the weakening Asian economy and softwood lumber quotas, exports of other wood fabricated material continued to buck the trend and have now increased 65% since January 1997. Most of this increase was due to exports of oriented strand board (OSB) and waferboard. OSB, used by many builders as a substitute for plywood, has been a boon for Canadian exporters.

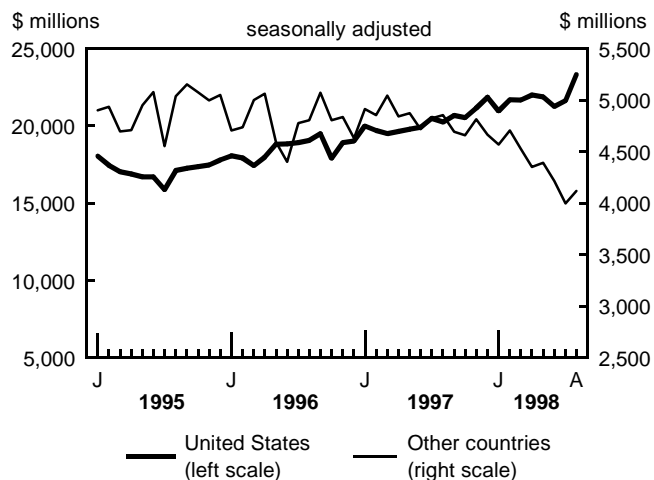
Exports, imports and trade balance



## Exports to the United States show signs of strength

Discounting the effects of the General Motors automotive strike, exports to the United States have grown by 7% since December 1997. This contrasts with exports to all other countries, which have now plunged 16% over the same period. The diverging performance between the U.S. economy and the Asian economies has resulted in a change in the nature of goods being exported. Most goods exported to the United States are finished products such as cars, machinery and equipment and consumer goods. Goods exported outside of North America tend to be resource intensive goods. Until recently, exports of resource intensive goods (including agricultural products, energy products, forestry products, and industrial goods) represented about half of total exports. Since mid-1997 this has been changing as exports of finished goods (automotive products, machinery and equipment and in particular consumer goods) began to account for a greater share of trade.

Exports: United States and other countries



## Imports of automotive products bounce back from June, July strike

Imports of automotive products rose sharply in August after two months of declines caused by the General Motors automotive strike. The rebound in August indicates a return to normal and automotive product imports are now equal to May levels (the month prior to the GM strike). The gains were equally split

between passenger cars and trucks, with the biggest gain coming in the automotive parts sector.

The end of the automotive strike also affected other commodity groups such as industrial goods and materials (in particular fabricated steel products) and consumer goods (car radios) which include goods used intensively by the automotive sector.

## Imports of machinery and equipment and consumer goods continue to grow

Machinery and equipment imports benefited from a few large one-time shipments which entered the country in August. Imports of machinery and equipment, after a pause at the beginning of the year, have now increased for fourth consecutive months and are nearing the stellar growth posted in 1997. Imports of consumer goods increased again in August and had posted gains in each of the previous five months. While these increases were widespread across most commodity groups, August's increase was mainly due to the imports of pharmaceutical products.

## Demand for steel boosts coal imports

Imports of coal and related products increased 19.8% in August and now stand 43% higher than in July 1997 when the recent upward trend started. Two factors currently drive this increase. First, the closure of nuclear generating stations in Ontario has forced hydro companies to find alternative means to produce electricity. They have turned to both fossil fuels and importing electricity directly. Second, steel consumption in Canada continues to remain near historic highs and many of the major steel producers are importing coal to meet the increasing demand.

## Revisions

In general, merchandise trade data are revised on a continuing basis for every month of the current year. Factors that create the need for revisions include the late receipt of import and export documentation, incorrect information on customs documents, replacement of estimated figures with actual figures (once available), changes in classification of merchandise based on more current information, and updated seasonal adjustments. Revised data can be obtained by consulting the appropriate CANSIM matrices.

**Available on CANSIM: matrices 3618, 3619, 3651, 3685-3713, 3718-3720, 3887-3913, 8430-8435 and 8438-8447.**

This release contains a summary of the merchandise trade data to be published shortly in *Canadian international merchandise trade* (65-001-XPB, \$19/\$188 or 65-001-XIB, \$14/\$141). The publication will include tables by commodity and country on a customs basis. Current account data (which incorporate merchandise trade statistics, services transactions, investment income and transfers) are available quarterly in *Canada's balance of international payments* (67-001-XPB, \$38/\$124). See *How to order publications*.

Readers wishing to receive merchandise trade data on a more timely basis may obtain them by fax on the morning of release.

For further information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods and data quality of this release, contact Jocelyne Elibani (613-951-9647 1 800 294-5583), Marketing and Client Services Section, International Trade Division. □

## Merchandise trade of Canada

	June 1998	July 1998	Aug. 1998	June to July 1998	July to Aug. 1998	Jan. to Aug. 1997	Jan. to Aug. 1998	Jan. - Aug. 1997 to Jan. - Aug. 1998	Aug. 1997 to Aug. 1998
seasonally adjusted, \$ current									
	\$ millions			% change		\$ millions		% change	
<b>Principal trading partners</b>									
<b>Exports</b>									
United States	21,255	21,626	23,314	1.7	7.8	159,175	174,344	9.5	15.2
Japan	764	722	784	-5.5	8.6	8,442	6,217	-26.4	-15.8
European Union	1,407	1,403	1,575	-0.3	12.3	11,068	11,782	6.5	9.7
Other OECD countries <sup>1</sup>	604	578	471	-4.3	-18.5	5,306	4,722	-11.0	-31.8
All other countries	1,439	1,296	1,289	-9.9	-0.5	14,095	12,145	-13.8	-28.3
Total	25,469	25,625	27,433	0.6	7.1	198,086	209,210	5.6	9.3
<b>Imports</b>									
United States	18,640	18,300	19,396	-1.8	6.0	136,604	150,815	10.4	7.3
Japan	824	836	855	1.5	2.3	5,489	6,555	19.4	15.5
European Union	2,208	2,083	2,170	-5.7	4.2	15,780	16,791	6.4	14.9
Other OECD countries <sup>1</sup>	904	857	876	-5.2	2.2	7,384	7,284	-1.4	-2.3
All other countries	1,944	1,921	1,980	-1.2	3.1	14,200	15,282	7.6	-1.5
Total	24,520	23,998	25,276	-2.1	5.3	179,457	196,727	9.6	7.1
<b>Balance</b>									
United States	2,615	3,326	3,918	...	...	22,571	23,529	...	...
Japan	-60	-114	-71	...	...	2,953	-338	...	...
European Union	-801	-680	-595	...	...	-4,712	-5,009	...	...
Other OECD countries <sup>1</sup>	-300	-279	-405	...	...	-2,078	-2,562	...	...
All other countries	-505	-625	-691	...	...	-105	-3,137	...	...
Total	949	1,627	2,157	...	...	18,629	12,483	...	...
<b>Principal commodity groupings</b>									
<b>Exports</b>									
Agricultural and fishing products	1,984	1,940	1,971	-2.2	1.6	16,039	16,244	1.3	-5.5
Energy products	1,997	2,131	2,136	6.7	0.2	18,055	16,102	-10.8	-5.4
Forestry products	2,889	2,887	2,988	-0.1	3.5	23,336	23,307	-0.1	5.2
Industrial goods and materials	4,889	4,836	4,900	-1.1	1.3	36,621	38,523	5.2	7.0
Machinery and equipment	6,438	6,804	6,826	5.7	0.3	44,126	51,582	16.9	22.2
Automotive products	5,350	4,952	6,497	-7.4	31.2	46,069	48,023	4.2	12.4
Other consumer goods	1,044	1,059	1,063	1.4	0.4	6,968	8,053	15.6	1.9
Special transactions trade <sup>2</sup>	385	507	515	31.7	1.6	2,664	3,286	23.3	36.9
Other BOP adjustments	491	509	536	3.7	5.3	4,208	4,090	-2.8	-0.3
<b>Imports</b>									
Agricultural and fishing products	1,459	1,452	1,481	-0.5	2.0	10,194	11,369	11.5	12.7
Energy products	803	614	668	-23.5	8.8	7,054	5,863	-16.9	-22.2
Forestry products	210	208	205	-1.0	-1.4	1,558	1,636	5.0	2.7
Industrial goods and materials	4,902	5,051	5,047	3.0	-0.1	35,246	39,530	12.2	9.7
Machinery and equipment	8,448	8,474	8,611	0.3	1.6	58,963	65,913	11.8	8.8
Automotive products	4,761	4,278	5,274	-10.1	23.3	39,076	41,842	7.1	1.8
Other consumer goods	2,861	2,887	2,951	0.9	2.2	19,101	22,294	16.7	16.7
Special transactions trade <sup>2</sup>	573	544	542	-5.1	-0.4	4,600	4,252	-7.6	0.1
Other BOP adjustments	503	490	498	-2.6	1.6	3,665	4,029	9.9	5.3

... Figures not appropriate or not applicable.

<sup>1</sup> Includes Australia, Iceland, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey, Poland, South Korea, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

<sup>2</sup> These are mainly low valued transactions, value of repairs to equipment, and goods returned to country of origin.

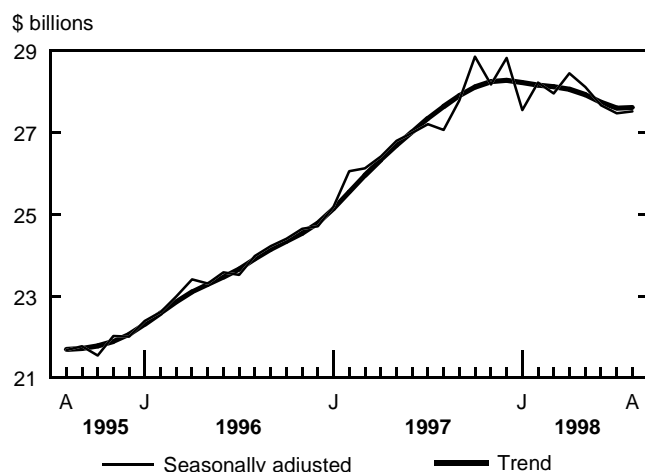
## Wholesale trade

August 1998 (preliminary)

Wholesalers reported a 0.2% gain in sales in August. Wholesalers in general halted a three month slide in sales — despite a steep decline in farm machinery and equipment sales in August. Sales have been weakening since the end of 1997 after more than two years of increases. Sales were up in 7 of the 11 trade groups in August. If not for the heavy decline posted by the farm machinery and equipment trade group, wholesalers in general would have reported a 0.8% increase in sales.

Wholesalers sold \$27.5 billion worth of goods and services in August. The largest percentage sales increases occurred for motor vehicles, parts and accessories, and lumber and building materials. The three month decline in total sales may have been stemmed by the resolution of the strike at General Motors in the United States, the end of the Ontario construction industry strike, and increased sales of goods attributed to the opening of the school year.

Wholesale sales increase by 0.2% from July 1998



### Motor vehicles rev up...

The end of strike at General Motors in the United States and strong sales in Ontario and Quebec helped push up total Canadian sales of motor vehicles, parts and accessories close to 4% in August. In addition, the start of the school year and the resulting strong sales of truck and bus products assisted in increasing sales. Sales of motor vehicles, parts and accessories have

been declining since the end of 1997 following more than two years of increases.

A halt to strikes in the construction industry in Ontario may have helped increase sales of lumber and building materials. Despite the Asian crisis (which continues to influence sales of lumber and building materials) the continuation of low domestic interest rates and an increase in residential building permits have spurred on sales. Lumber and building materials rose almost 3% in August. Sales of lumber and building materials have been declining since reaching a plateau during the latter part of 1997.

In anticipation of winter and Christmas, wholesalers of apparel and dry goods also continued to post increased sales over July. Sales of women's and misses' outerware helped wholesalers of apparel and dry goods post higher sales in August (+1%). However, the wholesaling of apparel and dry goods appears to be levelling off after more than two years of increased sales.

### ...but farm machinery and equipment stall

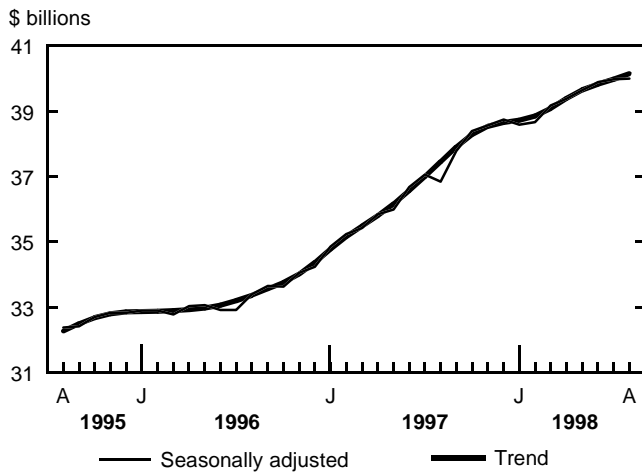
August was particularly a poor month for sales of farm machinery and equipment. After reporting strong sales in July, farm machinery and equipment registered the largest percentage decline in sales since February 1996 — falling 18% in August. Reasons behind this correction include an earlier than normal harvest on the Prairies and in Ontario, which advanced sales normally made in August up to July. Generally, the wholesaling of farm machinery and equipment has remained more or less stagnant since mid-1997.

Wholesale sales reported an overall decline of 13% in Saskatchewan in August. The Asian crisis, poor yields in spring wheat, and the dominance of primary industries in Saskatchewan may have been among the major factors influencing these weaker sales.

### Inventories start to flatten

Inventories held by wholesalers in August totalled approximately \$40 billion, relatively unchanged from July. This levelling off of inventories follows seven months of increases. Computers, packaged software and other electronic machinery showed the largest decrease in inventories (-4.6%) following a 12.2% gain in July.

### Wholesalers ease inventory accumulations



The increased sales in August, combined with the levelling off of inventory accumulation, has narrowed the inventories-to-sales ratio from 1.46 in July to 1.45 in August. Prior to August, the ratio had generally been increasing since the latter part of 1997.

**Available on CANSIM: matrices 59, 61, 648-649.**

The August 1998 issue of *Wholesale trade* (63-008-XIB, \$14/\$140) is available today via the Internet only. See *How to order publications*.

For further information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods and data quality of this release, contact Alexander Hays (613-951-3552; [haysale@statcan.ca](mailto:haysale@statcan.ca)). For data or general information, contact the Client Services Unit (613-951-7384), Wholesale Trade Section, Distributive Trades Division. □

## Wholesale merchants' sales and inventories

	Aug. 1997	May 1998 <sup>r</sup>	June 1998 <sup>r</sup>	July 1998 <sup>r</sup>	Aug. 1998 <sup>p</sup>	July 1998 to Aug. 1998	Aug. 1997 to Aug. 1998
seasonally adjusted							
	\$ millions					% change	
<b>Sales, all trade groups</b>	<b>27,069</b>	<b>28,113</b>	<b>27,670</b>	<b>27,477</b>	<b>27,521</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>1.7</b>
Food products	4,164	4,230	4,330	4,303	4,330	0.6	4.0
Beverage, drug and tobacco products	1,772	1,995	1,933	1,961	1,911	-2.5	7.8
Apparel and dry goods	519	558	519	546	552	1.1	6.4
Household goods	759	828	839	825	820	-0.6	8.0
Motor vehicles, parts and accessories	4,858	4,950	4,712	4,639	4,821	3.9	-0.8
Metals, hardware, plumbing and heating equipment and supplies	1,758	1,931	1,921	1,885	1,910	1.3	8.7
Lumber and building materials	2,080	1,979	2,006	1,943	2,000	2.9	-3.9
Farm machinery, equipment and supplies	758	743	740	862	706	-18.1	-6.8
Industrial and other machinery, equipment and supplies	4,075	4,060	4,092	3,920	4,024	2.6	-1.2
Computers, packaged software and other electronic machinery	2,376	2,530	2,631	2,731	2,735	0.1	15.1
Other products	3,946	4,309	3,945	3,861	3,711	-3.9	-6.0
Newfoundland	185	191	199	191	191	0.2	3.4
Prince Edward Island	44	52	49	51	50	-1.9	12.8
Nova Scotia	473	537	523	474	493	4.0	4.2
New Brunswick	316	344	337	341	347	1.8	9.6
Quebec	5,201	5,564	5,620	5,600	5,620	0.4	8.1
Ontario	13,143	13,452	13,169	13,052	13,245	1.5	0.8
Manitoba	949	967	868	927	859	-7.3	-9.5
Saskatchewan	863	1,027	960	993	863	-13.1	0.0
Alberta	2,680	2,792	2,776	2,733	2,720	-0.5	1.5
British Columbia	3,191	3,156	3,142	3,091	3,108	0.6	-2.6
Yukon	12	11	13	10	11	2.7	-9.5
Northwest Territories	13	19	16	15	14	-3.5	12.2
<b>Inventories, all trade groups</b>	<b>36,843</b>	<b>39,642</b>	<b>39,893</b>	<b>39,980</b>	<b>39,995</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>8.6</b>
Food products	2,557	2,618	2,629	2,643	2,600	-1.6	1.7
Beverage, drug and tobacco products	1,892	2,183	2,125	2,127	2,079	-2.2	9.9
Apparel and dry goods	1,097	1,187	1,243	1,237	1,270	2.7	15.8
Household goods	1,511	1,621	1,611	1,576	1,570	-0.4	3.9
Motor vehicles, parts and accessories	4,953	5,655	5,653	5,703	5,623	-1.4	13.5
Metals, hardware, plumbing and heating equipment and supplies	3,183	3,380	3,429	3,471	3,512	1.2	10.3
Lumber and building materials	3,372	3,473	3,587	3,617	3,661	1.2	8.6
Farm machinery, equipment and supplies	2,031	2,253	2,301	2,332	2,358	1.1	16.1
Industrial and other machinery, equipment and supplies	8,794	9,690	9,767	9,599	9,772	1.8	11.1
Computers, packaged software and other electronic machinery	2,323	2,311	2,284	2,562	2,444	-4.6	5.2
Other products	5,131	5,269	5,263	5,112	5,105	-0.1	-0.5

<sup>r</sup> Revised figures.

<sup>p</sup> Preliminary figures.

## OTHER RELEASES

### Export and import price indexes

August 1998

Current- and fixed-weighted export and import price indexes (1992=100) on a balance-of-payments basis are now available. Price indexes are listed from January 1992 to August 1998 for the five commodity sections and the major commodity groups (62 exports and 61 imports).

Current- and fixed-weighted U.S. price indexes (1992=100) are also available on a custom basis. Price indexes are listed from January 1992 to August 1998. Included with the U.S. commodity indexes are the 10 all countries and U.S. only standard international trade classification section indexes.

Indexes for the five commodity sections and the major commodity groups are also now available on a custom basis.

**Available on CANSIM: matrices 3618, 3619, 3651, 3685, 8430-8435 and 8438-8447.**

The August 1998 issue of *Canadian international merchandise trade* (65-001-XPB, \$19/\$188) will be available shortly. See *How to order publications*.

For further information on this release, contact Jocelyne Elibani (613-951-9647 or 1 800 294-5583), Marketing and Client Services Section, International Trade Division. ■

### Natural gas sales

August 1998 (preliminary)

Natural gas sales totalled 3 592 million cubic metres in August, down 2.2% from August 1997. Sales to the industrial sector (including direct sales) increased 0.7%, while both residential (-15.3%) and commercial (-12.0%) sales declined.

Year-to-date sales to the end of August declined 6.6% from the same period in 1997. Sales decreased to the residential (-18.4%) and commercial (-23.2%) sectors because of milder than normal weather during the first eight months of 1998. Year-to-date sales to the industrial sector (including direct sales) maintained steady growth, posting a 4.1% increase from the same period last year.

### Natural gas sales

	Aug. 1998 <sup>P</sup>	Aug. 1997	Aug. 1997 to Aug. 1998 % change
	thousands of cubic metres		
<b>Natural gas sales</b>	<b>3,592,082</b>	<b>3,673,721</b>	<b>-2.2</b>
Residential	359,288	424,061	-15.3
Commercial	279,029	317,189	-12.0
Industrial	1,725,772	1,880,161	0.7
Direct	1,227,993	1,052,310	
	Year-to-date		
	1998 <sup>P</sup>	1997	1997 to 1998 % change
	thousands of cubic metres		
<b>Natural gas sales</b>	<b>42,099,144</b>	<b>45,063,772</b>	<b>-6.6</b>
Residential	9,375,784	11,485,241	-18.4
Commercial	6,260,528	8,148,490	-23.2
Industrial	14,445,175	16,199,169	4.1
Direct	12,017,657	9,230,872	

<sup>P</sup> Preliminary figures.

**Available on CANSIM: matrices 182 and 1052-1055.**

The August 1998 issue of *Gas utilities* (55-002-XPB, \$17 / \$165) will be available in November. See *How to order publications*.

For further information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods and data quality of this release, contact Gary Smalldridge (613-951-3567; Internet: [smalgar@statcan.ca](mailto:smalgar@statcan.ca)) or Tom Lewis (613-951-3596; [talewis@statcan.ca](mailto:talewis@statcan.ca)), Energy Section, Manufacturing, Construction and Energy Division. ■

### For-hire motor carriers of freight — Top carriers

Second quarter 1998

The top 74 for-hire motor carriers based in Canada (those earning \$25 million or more annually) generated \$1.35 billion in operating revenues and incurred \$1.28 billion in operating expenses during the second quarter of 1998. The operating ratio (operating expenses divided by operating revenues) for all top for-hire carriers of freight was stable at 0.95 compared with the

second quarter of 1997 (any ratio greater than 1.00 represents an operating loss).

Although the operating ratio for carriers of general freight by type of trucking activity improved to 0.94 from 0.95 in the second quarter of 1997, the operating ratio for specialized freight carriers also improved by 1 point to 0.96 compared with 0.97 in the second quarter of 1997.

Second quarter 1998 data on the top for-hire carriers, taken from the Quarterly Motor Carriers of Freight Survey, provided results from 57 general freight carriers and 17 specialized freight carriers.

For further information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods and data quality of this release, contact Gilles Paré (613-951-2517; Internet: [paregil@statcan.ca](mailto:paregil@statcan.ca); fax: 613-951-0579), Transportation Division. ■

### **Stocks of frozen poultry meat**

October 1, 1998

Data for stocks of frozen poultry meat in cold storage are now available.

**Available on CANSIM: matrices 5675-5677.**

For further information on this release, contact Sandra Gielfeldt (613-951-2505), Livestock and Animal Products Section, Agriculture Division. ■

### **Financial education data**

Financial education data are now available for elementary and secondary education, education expenditures by source level (all levels of education), education-vocational training-source of funds, trade vocational training by type of program and university expenditures by function.

Data for 1995/96 are actual for every table. Table 00590101 has been revised back to 1992/93 for elementary and secondary education.

**Available on CANSIM: tables 00590101, 00590204, 00590205 and 00590207.**

To order the CANSIM tables, contact Heather Croner (613-951-7474). For further information about this release, contact Edith Paquin (613-951-1668) or Bernard Bourgoin (613-951-1506), Centre for Education Statistics. ■

## PUBLICATIONS RELEASED

**Wholesale trade, August 1998**  
**Catalogue number 63-008-XIB**  
(Canada: \$14/\$140; outside Canada: US\$14/US\$140).

**Touriscope, International travel, Advance information, August 1998**  
**Catalogue number 66-001-PPB**  
(Canada: \$8/\$73; outside Canada: US\$8/US\$73).

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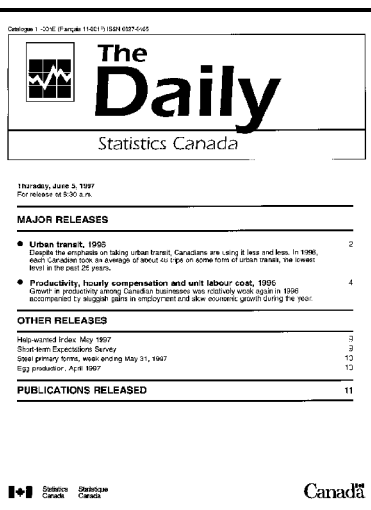
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### Statistics Canada's official release bulletin

Catalogue 11-001E.

Published each working day by the Communications Division, Statistics Canada, 10-H, R.H. Coats Bldg., Tunney's Pasture, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0T6.

To access *The Daily* on the Internet, visit our site at <http://www.statcan.ca>. To receive *The Daily* each morning by E-mail, send an E-mail message to [lstproc@statcan.ca](mailto:lstproc@statcan.ca). Leave the subject line blank. In the body of the message, type "subscribe daily firstname lastname".

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