

The Daily

Statistics Canada

Friday, March 20, 1998
For release at 8:30 a.m.

MAJOR RELEASES

- **Retail trade, January 1998**

There was a large decline in retail sales in January. An ice storm in parts of Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick resulted in a disruption of sales. Motor and recreational vehicle dealers throughout the country posted a large decrease in sales after a strong December.

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- **Household facilities by income and other characteristics, 1997**

Personal computers were a fixture in one-half of single-family households with children under the age of 18 in 1997, up from 45% in 1996.

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PUBLICATIONS RELEASED

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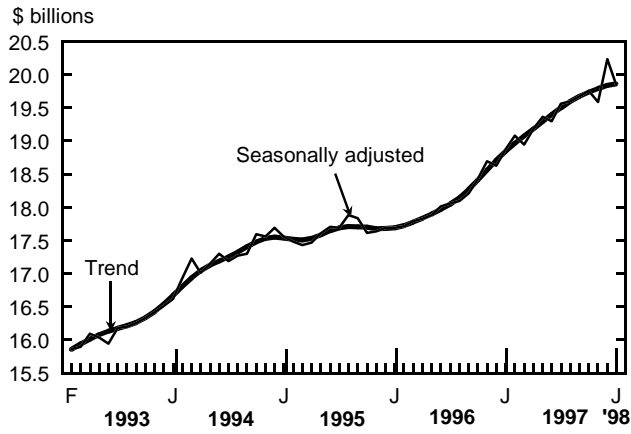
MAJOR RELEASES

Retail trade

January 1998

Retailers reported a large decline in sales in January (-1.9% to \$19.8 billion) following a strong increase in December (+3.3%). The January ice storm in parts of Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick and the resulting power outages resulted in a disruption of sales in some sectors. Excluding Quebec, the province where retailers were most affected by the ice storm, sales fell by 1.0%.

Ice storm disrupts retail sales in January



In addition, motor and recreational vehicle dealers posted a large decrease in sales after a significant increase in December. Excluding sales by motor and recreational vehicle dealers, retail sales advanced by 0.3% in January, which was 3.8% higher than the same month in 1997.

Despite the decline, the level of retail sales in January was 5.1% higher than the same month in 1997. While retail sales have generally been rising since the start of 1996, the rate of increase has been slowing in recent months, after a period of strong advances from the fall of 1996 to the fall of 1997.

Quebec sales drop in wake of ice storm

In terms of retail activity, the province of Quebec was most vulnerable to the ice storm and the resulting power outages. The region of Quebec that had received a significant amount of freezing rain (at least 40mm) had about three-fifths of all retail sales for the province in 1995 (the most recent year of small area retail

sales data). In comparison, the affected areas in New Brunswick accounted for one-sixth of all retail sales; and Ontario one-eighth.

Retailers in Quebec were hit with a 5.0% decline in sales in January. This drop was not uniform across all sectors, as Quebec consumers focused their purchases on necessities. Food stores, drugstores, general merchandise stores and stores classified as "other retail" (which include hardware stores) experienced increases in sales. These advances were offset by declines in sales by the automotive, furniture and clothing sectors. Improvements in retail sales in Quebec levelled off in the last half of 1997, after a period of strong increases from the spring of 1996.

As in Quebec, consumers in New Brunswick spent less in clothing stores, furniture stores and in the automotive sector, resulting in a 1.0% decline in retail sales. Retail sales in New Brunswick posted a strong increase in the spring of 1996 and have remained at this higher level since then.

While eastern Ontario was hit by the ice storm, the affected area accounted for a relatively small proportion of retail activity in the province. The 1.4% decline in retail sales in January was concentrated in food stores and the automotive sector. Despite January's decline, retail sales have been rising since the end of 1996. The level of sales in January was 11.3% higher than the same month in 1997. This was the largest year-over-year increase in sales in Ontario since January 1988.

Apart from Saskatchewan and the Yukon Territory, all provinces and territories posted decreases in retail sales. In most provinces, falling sales in the automotive sector was a major contributor to their declines.

Auto sales slowing

The automotive sector experienced a large decline in sales in January (-6.0%). About half of this decline came from Quebec, the province most affected by the ice storm. Sales by motor and recreational vehicle dealers fell by 8.0% in January. Industry sources had suggested that dealer incentives pushed up sales of new motor vehicles in December, possibly taking away from January sales. The level of sales by motor vehicle dealers was 9.2% higher in January 1998 than the same month in 1997.

Sales by gasoline service stations fell in January (-3.2%). January's sales were the lowest recorded since November 1995 and were 9.6% lower than the peak reported in May 1995.

Sales in the automotive sector have generally been rising since the spring of 1995, with a period of strong growth from the fall of 1996 to the summer of 1997.

Other sectors move ahead

Sales by general merchandise stores (+1.3%), clothing stores (+0.5%) and stores classified as other retail (+2.2%) improved in January.

Sales by general merchandise stores have generally been rising since the summer of 1993, with a pause in the last half of 1995. Sales in clothing stores have been flat since the fall of 1997, after a period of gradual advances from early 1996. Food store sales, in general, have remained flat since the summer of 1997, following a period of increases from the spring of 1996. Sales by furniture stores have been growing strongly since the spring of 1996 after a contraction that had started in early 1995.

Related indicators of February sales

Initial estimates indicate a slight increase in the number of new motor vehicles sold in February. The number of employees in retail trade increased by 0.2% in February from January. Total employment rose by 0.6% in the same period. The number of housing starts in February rose by 11.0% from January. All of these indicators may have been affected by the ice storm.

Available on CANSIM: matrices 2299, 2398-2417 and 2420.

The January 1998 issue of *Retail trade* (63-005-XPB, \$21/\$206) will be available shortly. See *How to order publications*.

For further information on this release, contact Louise Généreux (613-951-3549, Internet: logener@statcan.ca). For analytical information, contact Greg Peterson (613-951-3592, Internet: petegre@statcan.ca), Retail Trade Section, Distributive Trades Division. □

Retail sales

Trade group	Jan. 1997	Oct. 1997 ^r	Nov. 1997 ^r	Dec. 1997 ^r	Jan. 1998 ^p	Dec. 1997 to Jan. 1998	Jan. 1997 to Jan. 1998
	seasonally adjusted						
	\$ millions					% change	
Food	4,664	4,725	4,708	4,748	4,766	0.4	2.2
Supermarkets and grocery stores	4,306	4,390	4,365	4,403	4,427	0.5	2.8
All other food stores	358	336	343	345	340	-1.5	-5.1
Drug and patent medicine stores	1,068	1,068	1,017	1,077	1,068	-0.8	0.0
Clothing	1,088	1,121	1,095	1,112	1,118	0.5	2.7
Shoe stores	150	152	135	139	140	1.1	-6.7
Men's clothing stores	128	132	132	133	135	1.8	5.5
Women's clothing stores	350	351	352	356	362	1.6	3.3
Other clothing stores	460	485	476	484	480	-0.8	4.5
Furniture	945	992	998	1,040	1,030	-1.0	9.1
Household furniture and appliance stores	735	772	780	798	795	-0.5	8.1
Household furnishings stores	210	220	217	242	236	-2.6	12.4
Automotive	7,070	7,508	7,459	7,881	7,411	-6.0	4.8
Motor vehicle and recreational vehicle dealers	4,576	4,993	5,053	5,435	4,998	-8.0	9.2
Gasoline service stations	1,399	1,368	1,350	1,318	1,276	-3.2	-8.8
Automotive parts, accessories and services	1,095	1,147	1,056	1,128	1,137	0.8	3.8
General merchandise stores	2,036	2,226	2,223	2,237	2,266	1.3	11.3
Retail stores not elsewhere classified	2,002	2,116	2,087	2,135	2,183	2.2	9.0
Other semi-durable goods stores	666	662	661	664	665	0.2	-0.1
Other durable goods stores	459	530	517	545	529	-2.9	15.3
All other retail stores not elsewhere classified	877	924	909	927	988	6.6	12.7
Total, retail sales	18,874	19,756	19,588	20,230	19,843	-1.9	5.1
Total excluding motor vehicle and recreational vehicle dealers	14,298	14,764	14,535	14,795	14,845	0.3	3.8
Provinces and territories							
Newfoundland	295	300	302	310	308	-0.6	4.5
Prince Edward Island	81	87	84	89	89	-0.7	9.0
Nova Scotia	580	588	576	606	596	-1.7	2.7
New Brunswick	436	469	459	486	481	-1.0	10.3
Quebec	4,572	4,595	4,559	4,651	4,416	-5.0	-3.4
Ontario	6,624	7,266	7,229	7,480	7,372	-1.4	11.3
Manitoba	680	709	702	724	720	-0.5	5.9
Saskatchewan	621	670	651	691	696	0.7	12.1
Alberta	2,109	2,246	2,218	2,321	2,303	-0.8	9.2
British Columbia	2,810	2,759	2,741	2,800	2,791	-0.3	-0.7
Yukon	25	25	25	26	26	0.6	3.4
Northwest Territories	42	44	44	45	45	-0.8	6.3

^r Revised figures.

^p Preliminary figures.

Retail sales

Trade group	Jan. 1997	Dec. 1997 ^r	Jan. 1998 ^p	Jan. 1997 to Jan. 1998
	unadjusted			
	\$ millions			% change
Food	4,579	4,976	4,857	6.1
Supermarkets and grocery stores	4,260	4,562	4,554	6.9
All other food stores	318	415	304	-4.5
Drug and patent medicine stores	1,056	1,354	1,062	0.5
Clothing	801	1,859	856	6.9
Shoe stores	112	174	111	-0.6
Men's clothing stores	102	267	113	10.8
Women's clothing stores	250	584	272	9.2
Other clothing stores	338	833	360	6.5
Furniture	786	1,477	874	11.2
Household furniture and appliance stores	621	1,170	690	11.0
Household furnishings stores	165	307	184	11.8
Automotive	5,936	7,342	6,079	2.4
Motor vehicle and recreational vehicle dealers	3,680	4,774	3,901	6.0
Gasoline service stations	1,333	1,315	1,216	-8.8
Automotive parts, accessories and services	923	1,253	961	4.2
General merchandise stores	1,471	3,722	1,656	12.6
Retail stores not elsewhere classified	1,536	3,355	1,704	11.0
Other semi-durable goods stores	492	1,027	501	1.8
Other durable goods stores	359	1,015	404	12.6
All other retail stores not elsewhere classified	685	1314	800	16.7
Total, retail sales	16,165	24,087	17,088	5.7
Total excluding motor vehicle and recreational vehicle dealers	12,485	19,313	13,187	5.6
Provinces and territories				
Newfoundland	239	375	250	4.9
Prince Edward Island	65	105	72	9.9
Nova Scotia	492	734	511	3.9
New Brunswick	355	581	392	10.4
Quebec	3,903	5,210	3,779	-3.2
Ontario	5,696	9,190	6,325	11.0
Manitoba	584	874	627	7.2
Saskatchewan	536	817	608	13.4
Alberta	1,799	2,800	2,009	11.7
British Columbia	2,439	3,321	2,455	0.7
Yukon	20	28	21	3.0
Northwest Territories	36	51	39	7.2

^r Revised figures.

^p Preliminary figures.



Household facilities by income and other characteristics

1997

Personal computers were a fixture in one-half of single-family households with children under the age of 18 in 1997, up from 45% in 1996.

Just over 1.9 million single-family households with children had a home computer in 1997, up about 14% from 1996. Of these households, about a third, or 651,000, surfed the Internet at home compared with just over one-fifth in 1996 (when data on home Internet use were first collected).

Computer ownership and Internet use continued to increase for other types of households as well. For example, 35% of single-family households without children had a computer in 1997 compared with 30% a year earlier. Internet use in these computer-equipped households also climbed, to 37% in 1997 from 25% a year earlier.

Recent data from the 1997 Household Facilities and Equipment Survey showed that 4.2 million households in Canada (36%) had a computer, more than triple the proportion in 1986, when these data were first collected. The survey also found that 1.5 million households (13%) used the Internet from home in 1997, almost double the 1996 rate (7%).

Households in the on-line world

1997

Type of household	Total	With a home computer	With a modem-equipped computer	Use the Internet from home
Estimated number of households (thousands)				
One person	2,915	521	326	205
Single family households without children under 18 years of age	4,308	1,508	890	553
Single family households with children under 18 years of age	3,834	1,925	1,133	651
Multi-family households	523	212	146	91

Income remained a major factor in computer ownership

Income remained a driving factor in computer ownership and Internet use in 1997. Households with the highest income were still four times as likely to have computers as those with the lowest income.

Note to readers

On November 27, 1997, Statistics Canada released data from the Household Facilities and Equipment (HFE) Survey showing, among other things, the rapid growth in the number of Canadian households that are able to travel the information highway.

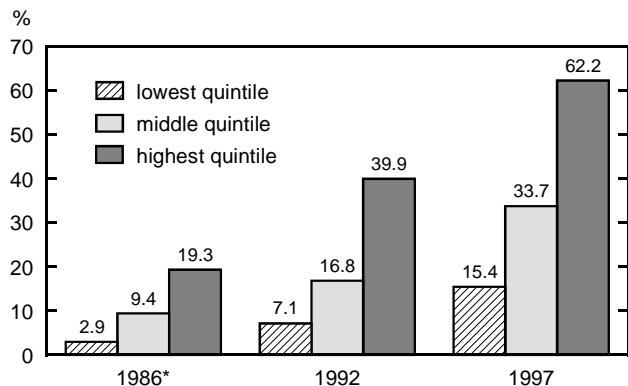
Today, the Agency releases data linking 1997 demographic, housing, and facilities information from the HFE survey to 1996 income data from the Survey of Consumer Finances (SCF). Initial 1996 income results were released on December 22, 1997. Detailed analysis of the 1996 income data can be found in Income distributions by size in Canada, 1996 (13-207-XPB).

Both surveys were conducted in the spring of 1997 and used the same sample of households. They represent virtually all private households in Canada, except for those in the Yukon and Northwest Territories and households on Indian reserves.

For the fifth of households with the highest incomes, 62% had a computer in 1997, compared with 15% for the fifth of households with the lowest incomes. This compares with 1986 when 19% of households in the highest income quintile had a computer compared with just 3% for those in the lowest quintile.

In 1997, 26% of households with the highest incomes used the Internet from home, five times the proportion (5%) of households with the lowest incomes. In 1996, the proportion of households in the highest income quintile that used the Internet from home was 17%, while for the lowest income group it was 3%.

Computers in the home: high-income households have a large advantage



* Not available for 1987.

Time-saving and leisure items popular with households with children

For most time-saving and leisure equipment, two-parent households, the majority of which were dual-

income households, had higher ownership rates than any other household type. The average household income in 1996 for two-parent households with children under 18 years of age was \$63,700, compared with \$48,900 for all households.

Time-saving appliances were particular favourites in dual-parent households with children under 18. In 1997, 94% of them had a microwave oven and 64% a dishwasher. By comparison, 73% of one-person households had a microwave oven and 27% a dishwasher.

Leisure items were also popular for two-parent families with children: 96% had a VCR; 69%, two or more colour televisions; 74%, a compact disc player, and 34% a camcorder. Meanwhile, one-person households, with lower average incomes (\$25,300 in 1996) had fewer entertainment items: 65% had a VCR; 40% a CD player; 25% owned two or more colour televisions; and 6% had a camcorder.

Vans and trucks a favourite of families with children

A two-parent family with children under 18 years of age was also more likely than other household types to own a van or truck. In 1997, almost one half of these families owned a van or truck compared with 40% in 1992 and 33% in 1987. By comparison, 37% of families consisting of only a married couple owned a van or truck in 1997.

Home ownership continues its upward trend

In 1997, the proportion of households owning their homes attained its highest level at just over 64%, from a low of just under 62% in 1987. Lower interest rates over the past several years may have contributed to the higher home ownership rate.

Households consisting of a married couple only experienced a major increase in home ownership over the past decade from 68% in 1987 to 76% in 1997. Over the same period, home ownership by one-person households also increased substantially, from 33% to just over 40% in 1997.

In 1997, renters spent, on average, 21% of their income on rent (up from 18% in 1987). The average monthly rent was \$540 in April 1997.

Data on households by income, province, household type and other characteristics are presented in *Household facilities by income and other characteristics, 1997* (13-218-XPB, \$37), which is now available. See *How to order publications*.

A microdata file containing 1997 household facilities and equipment data, along with dwelling and socio-demographic characteristics and 1996 household income will be available in the fall. This file will be carefully reviewed to ensure that it does not contain information that would allow identification of specific households, families or individuals.

For more information concerning these data, or the availability of special request tabulations or microdata files, contact the Data Dissemination Unit, (613-951-7355; 1 888 297-7355; fax: 613-951-3012; Internet: Expenditure@statcan.ca), Household Surveys Division. ■

OTHER RELEASES

Sales of natural gas

January 1998 (preliminary)

Natural gas sales totalled 8 318 million cubic metres in January, down 2.8% from January 1997. Warmer than normal weather conditions throughout most of the country resulted in sharply lower sales to the residential (-10.8%) and commercial (-13.6%) sectors. The gain in sales (+9.2%) to the industrial sector (including direct sales) was due to higher demand for natural gas by electric utilities, mines and the chemical industry.

Sales of natural gas

	Jan. 1998 ^P	Jan. 1997	Jan. 1997 to Jan. 1998
	thousands of cubic metres		% change
Total	8,318,417	8,557,027	-2.8
Residential	2,574,301	2,885,261	-10.8
Commercial	1,707,286	1,975,175	-13.6
Industrial	2,193,598	2,375,082	9.2
Direct	1,843,232	1,321,509	

^P Preliminary figures.

Available on CANSIM: matrices 1052-1055.

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

For further information on this release, contact Gary Smallbridge (613-951-3567; Internet: smalgar@statcan.ca), Energy Section, Manufacturing, Construction and Energy Division. ■

Railway carloadings

Seven-day period ending March 7, 1998

Carloadings of freight (excluding intermodal traffic) during the seven-day period ending March 7, 1998, decreased 0.3% to 4.8 million tonnes from the same period of last year. The number of cars loaded decreased 1.6%.

Intermodal traffic (piggyback) tonnage totalled 340 000 tonnes, down 5.2% from the same period of last year. The year-to-date figures show a decrease of 6.1%.

Total traffic (carloadings of freight and intermodal traffic) fell 0.7% during the period. This brought the year-to-date total to 46 million tonnes, up 7.2% from the previous year.

All year-to-date figures have been revised.

For further information on this release, contact Robert Larocque (613-951-2486; fax: 613-951-0009; Internet: larocque@statcan.ca), Transportation Division. ■

Annual wholesale and retail trade data 1995

Annual wholesale and retail trade data for 1995 are now available.

For further information, contact Louise Généreux (613-951-3549) or Bob Gervais (613-951-5705) for Retail Trade data. For Wholesale Trade data, contact Greg Parsons (613-951-0062). ■

PUBLICATIONS RELEASED

Infomat — A weekly review, March 20, 1998
Catalogue number 11-002-XPE
(Canada: \$4/\$145; outside Canada: US\$4/US\$145).

Pulpwood and wood residue statistics,
January 1998
Catalogue number 25-001-XPB
(Canada: \$8/\$73; outside Canada: US\$8/US\$73).

Department store sales and stocks, December 1997
Catalogue number 63-002-XPB
(Canada: \$17/\$165; outside Canada: US\$17/US\$165).

New motor vehicle sales, December 1997
Catalogue number 63-007-XPB
(Canada: \$17/\$165; outside Canada: US\$17/US\$165).

Touriscope: International travel, Advance
information, Vol. 14, no. 1
Catalogue number 66-001-PPB
(Canada: \$8/\$73; outside Canada: US\$8/US\$73).

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MAJOR RELEASES

- **Urban transit, 1995** 2
Despite the emphasis on taking urban transit, Canadians are using it less and less. In 1995, each Canadian took an average of about 60 trips on some form of urban transit, the lowest level in the past 25 years.
- **Productivity, hourly compensation and unit labour cost, 1996** 4
Growth in productivity among Canadian businesses was noticeably weak again in 1996 accompanied by sluggish gains in employment and slow nominal growth during the year.

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RELEASE DATES

March 23 to 27
(Release dates are subject to change.)

Release date	Title	Reference period
23	Earnings of men and women	1996
24	Consumer Price Index	February 1998
24	Canada's international transactions in securities	January 1998
24	Employment Insurance	January 1998
25	Composite Index	February 1998
25	Perspectives on labour and income	Spring 1998
26	Industrial Product Price Index	February 1998
26	Raw Materials Price Index	February 1998
27	Employment, earnings and hours	January 1998
27	Film, video and audio-visual production	1995-1996
