



The Daily

Statistics Canada

Monday, July 20, 1998

For release at 8:30 a.m.

MAJOR RELEASES

- **Wholesale trade, May 1998** 2
 Total sales by wholesalers declined 1.2% in May, after increasing 1.9% in April. Since the end of 1997, wholesale sales remained relatively flat with a pattern of alternating ups and downs.

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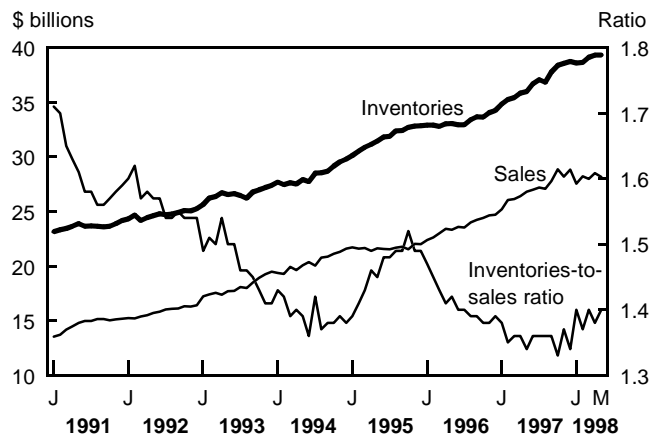
MAJOR RELEASES

Wholesale trade

May 1998 (preliminary)

Total sales by wholesalers declined 1.2% in May, after increasing 1.9% in April. Since the end of 1997, wholesale sales remained relatively flat with a pattern of alternating ups and downs. In 1996 and 1997, sales grew in almost every month. In May, sales by wholesalers were only 5.1% higher than in the same month of 1997. This was the lowest year-over-year percentage change since February 1996. In comparison, the 1997-over-1996 average percentage change for sales was 14.7%.

Slowdown in wholesale sales



Wholesalers sold \$28.2 billion worth of goods and services in May, down \$353 million from April. Sales were down in all trade groups, except for beverage, drug and tobacco (+2.7%) and household goods (+1.0%). The largest declines in percentage terms were reported by wholesalers of farm machinery (-4.8%), computers and other electronic machinery (-2.6%) and food products (-2.3%).

Higher sales of alcoholic beverages were mostly responsible for the May increase in the beverage, drug and tobacco trade group. Nevertheless, sales in that trade group have generally been flat since January 1998 after a period of growth throughout 1997. May's increase in the household goods trade group can be attributed to higher sales of electronic and electrical goods by wholesalers in Ontario. Contrary to most other

trade groups, which had slowing sales in 1998, sales of household goods continued the upward trend started at the end of 1995.

Wholesalers held back by weaker international trade

The slowdown in wholesale sales since the end of 1997 partially reflects weaker international trade. On average, since December 1997, both Canadian exports (-0.3%) and imports (-0.4%) showed slight declines in activity. One of the many functions of wholesalers is to act as intermediaries between domestic and foreign markets. About 8% of all sales by Canadian wholesalers are destined for foreign markets. However, this proportion can go up to 17% for lumber and building materials. In the case of lumber and building materials, wholesale sales have generally been declining since the middle of 1997.

No change in inventories

Wholesale inventories remained unchanged at \$39.3 billion in May. The combination of stagnant inventories and lower sales pushed the inventories-to-sales ratio to 1.40 in May from 1.38 in April. The inventories-to-sales ratio has generally been increasing since the historical low of 1.33 in October 1997. A ratio greater than 1.0 indicates that inventories on hand are sufficient to cover more than one month of sales. For example, the 1.40 ratio in May means that wholesalers had enough inventories on hand for about 42 days. In May, the inventories-to-sales ratio ranged from a minimum of 0.63 for food products and 0.95 for computers and other electronic equipment to a maximum of 2.35 for industrial machinery and 2.97 for farm machinery. The inventories-to-sales ratio is usually set by the nature of the product, its storage cost, the volatility of the demand, the time needed for production as well as other factors.

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

The May 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 on this release, contact Richard Trudeau (613-951-7385; trudric@statcan.ca) or Jacques Dorion (613-951-3538), Wholesale Trade Section, Distributive Trades Division. □

Sales and inventories of wholesale merchants

	May 1997	Feb. 1998 ^r	March 1998 ^r	April 1998 ^r	May 1998 ^p	April to May 1998	May 1997 to May 1998
	seasonally adjusted						
	\$ millions					% change	
Sales, all trade groups	26,803	28,222	27,995	28,526	28,173	-1.2	5.1
Food products	4,225	4,222	4,204	4,310	4,209	-2.3	-0.4
Beverage, drug and tobacco products	1,702	2,012	1,900	1,906	1,957	2.7	15.0
Apparel and dry goods	508	537	545	575	568	-1.2	11.7
Household goods	737	854	828	824	833	1.0	13.1
Motor vehicles, parts and accessories	4,683	5,072	5,069	5,132	5,071	-1.2	8.3
Metals, hardware, plumbing and heating equipment and supplies	1,772	1,977	1,946	1,969	1,952	-0.9	10.2
Lumber and building materials	2,113	2,136	2,036	2,032	2,005	-1.4	-5.1
Farm machinery, equipment and supplies	751	776	722	791	753	-4.8	0.3
Industrial and other machinery, equipment and supplies	3,928	4,122	4,128	4,165	4,091	-1.8	4.1
Computers, packaged software and other electronic machinery	2,280	2,490	2,444	2,493	2,427	-2.6	6.4
Other products	4,105	4,025	4,173	4,329	4,308	-0.5	4.9
Newfoundland	181	192	193	192	190	-1.2	4.6
Prince Edward Island	45	45	47	48	52	9.5	16.5
Nova Scotia	471	469	492	501	530	5.6	12.4
New Brunswick	305	337	336	346	342	-0.9	12.2
Quebec	5,293	5,530	5,457	5,754	5,467	-5.0	3.3
Ontario	12,719	13,702	13,581	13,594	13,539	-0.4	6.4
Manitoba	935	1,016	1,000	1,044	1,009	-3.3	7.9
Saskatchewan	925	937	947	1,013	1,046	3.3	13.1
Alberta	2,708	2,744	2,753	2,831	2,783	-1.7	2.8
British Columbia	3,194	3,223	3,162	3,176	3,186	0.3	-0.2
Yukon	12	10	11	10	10	3.4	-16.3
Northwest Territories	14	16	16	17	19	8.7	36.1
Inventories, all trade groups	35,998	38,666	39,137	39,320	39,327	0.0	9.2
Food products	2,517	2,646	2,643	2,652	2,656	0.2	5.5
Beverage, drug and tobacco products	1,813	2,088	2,028	2,036	2,075	1.9	14.5
Apparel and dry goods	1,090	1,193	1,200	1,194	1,185	-0.7	8.7
Household goods	1,423	1,554	1,545	1,580	1,624	2.8	14.1
Motor vehicles, parts and accessories	4,693	5,389	5,473	5,547	5,517	-0.5	17.6
Metals, hardware, plumbing and heating equipment and supplies	2,992	3,332	3,351	3,335	3,373	1.2	12.7
Lumber and building materials	3,266	3,461	3,396	3,400	3,446	1.4	5.5
Farm machinery, equipment and supplies	1,938	2,250	2,254	2,212	2,235	1.1	15.4
Industrial and other machinery, equipment and supplies	8,554	9,308	9,520	9,569	9,631	0.7	12.6
Computers, packaged software and other electronic machinery	2,338	2,354	2,357	2,344	2,295	-2.1	-1.8
Other products	5,374	5,091	5,370	5,452	5,289	-3.0	-1.6

^r Revised figures.

^p Preliminary figures.

OTHER RELEASES

Employer pension plans

January 1, 1997

Membership in registered pension plans (those sponsored by employers or unions) fell for a fifth consecutive year in 1997. As of January 1, 1997, about 5,115,000 Canadians were members of 15,308 registered pension plans.

The decline in membership in registered pension plans (RPPs) should not be interpreted as a decline in the number of Canadians preparing for retirement. Since 1995, registered retirement savings plans have surpassed RPPs as the primary means of saving for retirement, both in terms of the number of Canadians contributing and in amounts contributed.

Membership in RPPs increased steadily throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s. It began to slide in 1993. From 1993 to 1997, membership dropped by about 129,000. The decrease was concentrated among men belonging to RPPs. Between 1993 and 1997, their numbers fell 5.3% to 2.9 million.

While declines in male membership since 1993 were observed in many sectors of the economy, it was particularly evident in the public sector, where the decline went hand-in-hand with falling employment. Federal and provincial government downsizing over the past four years has contributed to declining male membership in public administration and defense. Many of these men were older workers taking early retirement packages.

A decrease in public sector employment affects RPP membership significantly because coverage in that sector is high. Even though there were only about 1,200 public sector plans at the beginning of 1997 (8% of all plans), they accounted for close to half (47%) of all members.

The rapid growth in registered pension plans during the late 1980s and early 1990s was the result of increasing participation by women. This was due both to rising numbers in the paid workforce and changes to pension legislation regarding the eligibility of part-time employees. This increased participation fuelled membership growth from 1989 to 1993. Consequently, the number of women participating in registered pension plans increased 19% over this period, while the number of men dropped 2%.

The increase in female membership has since levelled off, and has not been strong enough to offset the decline in the membership of men. In 1997, women accounted for 44% of all RPP members, compared with 42% in 1993 and 38% at the beginning of 1989.

As of January 1, 1997, about 42% of the paid workforce belonged to registered pension plans, compared with 45% in 1993. The decline in coverage between 1993 and 1997 was due both to the drop in RPP membership and to the increase in the paid workforce. About 43% of men were covered in 1997, compared with 40% of women. These rates were much closer than they had been in 1989 when 47% of men were covered, compared with 36% of women.

The coverage for paid workers was highest in Newfoundland (55%), followed by Manitoba (49%), Saskatchewan (48%), Quebec (45%), and Nova Scotia (45%), all of which had a higher than average proportion of paid workers in the public sector. Prince Edward Island, the only province without pension regulatory legislation, had the lowest coverage rate (34%).

Membership in defined contribution plans (i.e., plans that define the employer contribution rather than the benefit to be received) has grown significantly (+25%) between 1993 and 1997. On the other hand, the number belonging to defined benefit plans (i.e., plans for which the expected benefit is prescribed) dropped 5% over the same period. This is largely the result of the drop in public sector membership, as almost all public sector members (95%) belong to defined benefit plans. Despite the drop in membership, defined benefit plans continued to cover the large majority (87%) of plan members.

Data on Canadian registered pension plans, their membership and plan provisions for January 1, 1997, are now available from the Pension Plans in Canada Survey. Survey results and data will also be available this fall in *Pension plans in Canada, statistical highlights and key tables, January 1, 1997* (74-401-SPB, \$40).

For more information, contact the Client Services Unit (613-951-7355; 1 888 297-7355; fax: 613-951-3012; income@statcan.ca), Income Statistics Division. ■

Construction Union Wage Rate Index

June 1998

In June, the Construction Union Wage Rate Index (including supplements) remained unchanged from May at 111.6 (1992=100). On a year-over-year basis, index increased 1.3% compared with June 1997.

Union wage rates are published for 16 trades in 20 metropolitan areas for both the basic rates and rates including selected supplementary payments. Indexes

on a 1992=100 time base are calculated for the same metropolitan areas and are published for those where a majority of trades are covered by current collective agreements.

Available on CANSIM: matrices 956, 958 and 9922-9927.

The second quarter 1998 issue of *Construction price statistics* (62-007-XPB, \$24/\$79) will be available in September. See *How to order publications*.

For further information on this release, contact Elvira Marinelli (613-951-3350; infounit@statcan.ca, fax: 613-951-2848) Client Services Unit, Prices Division. ■

Selected financial indexes

June 1998

June 1998 figures are now available for the Selected Financial Indexes on a 1992=100 time base.

Available on CANSIM: matrix 9928.

The second quarter 1998 issue of *Construction price statistics* (62-007-XPB, \$24/\$79), will be available in September. See *How to order publications*.

For further information on this release, contact Elvira Marinelli (613-951-3350; infounit@statcan.ca, fax: 613 951-2848) Client Services Unit, Prices Division. ■

Natural gas sales

May 1998 (preliminary)

Natural gas sales totalled 4 027 million cubic metres in May, down 17.8% from May 1997. Unusually warm weather throughout Canada resulted in sharply lower sales to the residential (-37.7%) and commercial (-40.7%) sectors. Sales to the industrial sector (including direct sales) decreased 6.4%.

Year-to-date sales to the end of May declined 7.8% from the same period in 1997. Sales to the residential (-19.1%) and commercial (-24.1%) sectors decreased due to milder weather in the first five months of 1998. Year-to-date sales to the industrial sector (including direct sales) maintained their strong growth, posting a 5.7% increase from the same period last year. The increase was largely due to increased use of natural gas by electric utilities, mines and the chemical industry.

Natural gas sales

	May 1998 ^P	May 1997	May 1997 to May 1998 %
	thousands of cubic metres		change
Natural gas sales	4,027,087	4,900,131	-17.8
Residential	624,040	1,001,926	-37.7
Commercial	426,770	720,073	-40.7
Industrial	1,619,828	2,036,112	-6.4
Direct	1,356,449	1,142,020	
	Year-to-date		
	1998 ^P	1997	1997 to 1998 %
	thousands of cubic metres		change
Natural gas sales	31,449,207	34,126,810	-7.8
Residential	8,140,756	10,065,239	-19.1
Commercial	5,398,335	7,113,858	-24.1
Industrial	9,491,892	10,772,792	5.7
Direct	8,418,224	6,174,921	

^P Preliminary figures.

Available on CANSIM: matrices 1052-1055.

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

For further information on this release, contact Gary Smalldridge (613-951-3567; smalgar@statcan.ca) or Tom Lewis (613-951-3596; talewis@statcan.ca), Energy Section, Manufacturing, Construction and Energy Division. ■

Pulpwood and wood residue statistics

May 1998

Pulpwood receipts in May totalled 1 336 340 cubic metres, down 17.5% from 1 619 246 cubic metres in May 1997. Wood residue receipts totalled 5 224 368 cubic metres, down 16.9% from 6 285 709 cubic metres in May 1997. Consumption of pulpwood and wood residue totalled 7 708 604 cubic metres, down 13.4% from 8 907 938 cubic metres in May 1997.

The closing inventory of pulpwood and wood residue decreased 2.7% to 12 597 608 cubic metres, down from 12 938 868 cubic metres in May 1997. Year-to-date consumption of pulpwood and wood residue (40 991 781 cubic metres) decreased 11.6%

from 46 345 244 cubic metres a year earlier. Figures for 1997 have been revised.

Available on CANSIM: matrix 54.

The May 1998 issue of *Pulpwood and wood residue statistics* (25-001-XPB, \$8/\$73) will be available shortly. See *How to order publications*.

For further information on this release, contact Gilles Simard (613-951-3516; simales@statcan.ca), Manufacturing, Construction and Energy Division. ■

Construction type plywood

May 1998

Canadian firms produced 125 210 cubic metres of construction type plywood during May 1998, down 22.9% from the 162 326 cubic metres produced during May 1997.

January-to-May 1998 production totalled 750 702 cubic metres, a decrease of 3.5% from the 778 020 cubic metres produced during the same period in 1997.

Available on CANSIM: matrix 122 (level 1).

The May 1998 issue of the *Construction type plywood* (35-001-XPB, \$7/\$62) will be available shortly. See *How to order publication*.

For further information on this release, contact Gilles Simard (613-951-3516; simales@statcan.ca), Manufacturing, Construction, and Energy Division. ■

Stocks of frozen poultry meat

July 1, 1998 (preliminary)

Data for stocks of frozen poultry meat in cold storage as of July 1, 1998, 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. ■

PUBLICATIONS RELEASED

Monthly Survey of Manufacturing, May 1998
Catalogue number 31-001-XPB
(Canada: \$20/\$196; outside Canada: US\$20/US\$196).

Industry price indexes, May 1998
Catalogue number 62-011-XPB
(Canada: \$22/\$217; outside Canada: US\$22/US\$217).

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

Touriscope, International travel, advance information, Vol. 14, no. 5
Catalogue number 66-001-PPB
(Canada: \$8/\$73; outside Canada: US\$8/US\$73).

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Statistics Canada

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MAJOR RELEASES



- **Urban transit, 1996** 2
Despite the emphasis on taking urban transit, Canadians are using it less and less. In 1996, 44.9% of Canadians took an average of about 20 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 notably weak again in 1996, accompanied by sluggish gains in employment and slow economic growth during the year.

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