

Wednesday, April 21, 1999
For release at 8:30 a.m.

## MAJOR RELEASES

- Consumer Price Index, March 1999

In March, Canadian consumers paid 1.0\% more than they did a year ago for the goods and services contained in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) basket. Annual increases have ranged from $0.6 \%$ to $1.2 \%$ since November 1997.

- Wholesale trade, February 1999

Despite gains in 7 of the 11 trade groups, wholesale sales remained unchanged in February.

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## MAJOR RELEASES

## Consumer Price Index

March 1999
In March, Canadian consumers paid 1.0\% more than they did a year ago for the goods and services contained in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) basket. Annual increases have ranged from $0.6 \%$ to $1.2 \%$ since November 1997.

Compared with March 1998, commodities and services with notable average price increases included piped gas, tuition fees, property taxes and new cars and trucks. Their upward pressure on the index was partly offset by lower average prices for computer equipment, telephone services, fuel oil and fresh vegetables.


The price index for piped gas increased 13.1\% since March 1998. Prices of piped gas are influenced by changes in the raw material price of natural gas, which rose $22.9 \%$ from February 1998 to February 1999. The increase can be explained by a higher demand for natural gas and a tightening of the supply of natural gas in Canada.

## From February to March, the CPI rose 0.4\%

Higher prices for gasoline, air transportation, men's and women's clothing and travel tours contributed to the $0.4 \%$ increase in the index from February to March. Lower prices for fresh fruit, fresh and frozen chicken
and fuel oil exerted downward pressure on overall consumer prices.

Despite a $4.9 \%$ drop in the world price of crude oil in February, prices for gasoline rose $3.5 \%$ from February to March. In the past, it has taken about one month for declines in crude oil prices to reach consumers. However, increased North American demand and shortened supplies of gasoline more than negated the effect of February's drop in crude oil prices. The increase in the price of gasoline was its largest monthly gain since August 1997 (+4.7\%).


Prices for air transportation increased $8.0 \%$ in March due to higher rates for domestic, transborder and transatlantic flights. March increases in air transportation prices have ranged from $5.6 \%$ to $8.9 \%$ since 1996.

The average price of travel tour packages rose $6.4 \%$ in March, similar to the February-to-March increases seen in past years. The upward movement of prices was mainly due to increased demand for Florida destinations.

The introduction of the new season's clothing lines brought average price increases in March for both women's ( $+2.6 \%$ ) and men's ( $+1.9 \%$ ) clothing.

The average price for fresh fruit fell $2.8 \%$ in March, continuing a downward re-adjustment of prices that began in February. The index for fresh fruit took a large jump in January due to December's cold weather in California. The index for fresh and frozen chicken fell
$3.4 \%$ in March, the result of increased marketing of fresh and frozen chicken to compete with falling prices for pork.

Due to competition and lower wholesale prices, the average price of fuel oil fell $2.6 \%$ in March, continuing a general downward trend that began in March 1997.

## Provincial highlights

Since March 1998, the highest average price increases among provinces were faced by residents of Alberta ( $+1.9 \%$ ) while residents of Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick faced no change in their All-items indexes ( $0.0 \%$ ).

From February to March, the All-items index for Quebec led the increases among provinces ( $+0.8 \%$ ), while the All-items index for Manitoba decreased $0.1 \%$.

## Provincial spotlight: Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia

Since March 1998, consumers in Saskatchewan have faced an average price increase of $1.6 \%$, somewhat higher than the $1.0 \%$ increase in the All-items index for Canada. Nova Scotia enjoyed a considerably lower increase of $0.1 \%$ in overall consumer prices.

Residents of Saskatchewan paid more for their telephone services compared with that for Canada as a whole. Local access charges in Saskatchewan increased in January, resulting in a $2.1 \%$ rise in its index for telephone services from March 1998 to March 1999. Average prices for piped gas rose $13.4 \%$ over the last 12 months, slightly above the increase at the national level (+13.1\%). These gains were primarily due to increased demand and higher gas transmission costs.

Motor vehicle insurance premiums went up $5.5 \%$, the highest increase among provinces. On average, these rates rose $1.0 \%$ in Canada. Price increases in Saskatchewan for fresh and frozen beef (+12.1\%),
restaurant meals ( $+2.4 \%$ ), furniture ( $+8.8 \%$ ) and eggs ( $+14.2 \%$ ) were also among the highest in Canada.

In contrast, the average price declines for fresh vegetables and gasoline were larger than the ones recorded for Canada as a whole. Residents of Saskatchewan also enjoyed average price declines for fresh milk ( $-7.2 \%$ ), fresh fruit ( $-3.9 \%$ ), and toilet soap ( $-13.8 \%$ ), while Canadians experienced price increases.

Over the last year, residents of Nova Scotia benefited from sharp declines in average prices for gasoline ( $-7.2 \%$ ) and fuel oil ( $-14.9 \%$ ), much larger than the declines in the national averages. In Nova Scotia, average price declines were also recorded for restaurant meals ( $-1.4 \%$ ), motor vehicle insurance premiums ( $-2.1 \%$ ), soft drinks ( $-9.2 \%$ ), homeowners' maintenance and repairs ( $-2.9 \%$ ) and furniture ( $-0.4 \%$ ). On average, the prices of these commodities went up for Canada as a whole.

In contrast, charges for telephone services remained unchanged in Nova Scotia while declining on average for Canada. Consumers in Nova Scotia also saw increases in average prices for new homes and children's clothing, and growth in mortgage interest costs which were all higher than the national average.

## Available on CANSIM: matrices 9940-9970.

## Available at 7 a.m. on the Internet at www.statcan.ca

The March 1999 issue of the Consumer Price Index (62-001-XPB, $\$ 11 / \$ 103$ ) is now available. See How to order publications.

The April 1999 Consumer Price Index will be released on May 21, 1999.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods, and data quality of this release, contact Prices Division (613-951-9606; fax: 613-951-1539; infounit@statcan.ca).

The Consumer Price Index and major components
1992=100

|  | $\begin{gathered} \hline \text { Mar. } \\ 1999 \end{gathered}$ | $\begin{aligned} & \hline \text { Feb. } \\ & 1999 \end{aligned}$ | $\begin{gathered} \hline \text { Mar. } \\ 1998 \end{gathered}$ | Feb. <br> to <br> Mar. <br> 1999 | $\begin{array}{r} \text { Mar. } \\ 1998 \\ \text { to } \\ \text { Mar. } \\ 1999 \\ \hline \end{array}$ |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | not seasonally adjusted |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| All-items | 109.5 | 109.1 | 108.4 | 0.4 | 1.0 |
| Food | 110.7 | 110.5 | 109.2 | 0.2 | 1.4 |
| Shelter | 104.5 | 104.5 | 103.4 | 0.0 | 1.1 |
| Household operations and furnishings | 108.7 | 108.5 | 108.5 | 0.2 | 0.2 |
| Clothing and footwear | 106.2 | 104.4 | 104.7 | 1.7 | 1.4 |
| Transportation | 121.3 | 119.9 | 120.3 | 1.2 | 0.8 |
| Health and personal care | 109.2 | 109.2 | 107.2 | 0.0 | 1.9 |
| Recreation, education and reading | 117.3 | 116.8 | 116.4 | 0.4 | 0.8 |
| Alcoholic beverages and tobacco products | 93.7 | 93.7 | 92.1 | 0.0 | 1.7 |
| Goods | 106.7 | 106.2 | 105.9 | 0.5 | 0.8 |
| Services | 112.8 | 112.4 | 111.3 | 0.4 | 1.3 |
| All-items excluding food and energy | 109.9 | 109.4 | 108.7 | 0.5 | 1.1 |
| Energy | 103.8 | 102.3 | 103.6 | 1.5 | 0.2 |
| Purchasing power of the consumer dollar expressed in cents, compared to 1992 | 91.3 | 91.7 | 92.3 |  |  |
| All-items (1986=100) | 140.3 |  |  |  |  |

Note: Last month's release of the CPI should have read 139.8 for Canada All-items (not seasonally adjusted) on the 1986=100 base.
The Consumer Price Index by province, Whitehorse and Yellowknife
1992=100

|  |  |  |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |

## Wholesale trade

February 1999 (preliminary)
Despite gains in 7 of the 11 trade groups, wholesale sales remained unchanged in February at $\$ 28.7$ billion. Sales have been generally increasing since the summer of 1998. However, slower sales in January (+0.3\%) and February 1999 (0.0\%) recall the slowdown reported at the beginning of 1998. Prior to 1998, wholesalers had generally enjoyed sustained increases.

Important declines in wholesale sales were noted in food products (-3.4\%), and motor vehicles, parts and accessories (-2.2\%). The combined sales of these two trade groups typically represent one-third of monthly wholesale activity.

Increased sales in seven other trade groups were able to offset their declines. Strong sales were reported in apparel and dry goods (+5.6\%), farm machinery, equipment and supplies (+2.8\%), metals, hardware, plumbing and heating equipment and supplies (+2.7\%), and other products (+2.7\%), which include groups such as agricultural feeds, agricultural chemicals, and other farm products.


As a result of the drop in sales of food products and motor vehicles, parts and accessories, all provinces, except the three Prairie provinces, reported declines in wholesale sales. Sales by Alberta wholesalers rose $0.5 \%$. Manitoba (+7.3\%) and Saskatchewan (+7.6\%) were buoyed by strong sales in farm machinery, equipment and supplies; metals, hardware, plumbing and heating equipment and supplies; and other products.

## Food products sales still positive overall despite February's decline

After six months of increases, wholesale sales of food products fell $3.4 \%$ to $\$ 4.5$ billion. Despite this decline, wholesale sales for food products have been generally positive. Except for a slowdown in mid-1997, food products have been generally rising over the last few years. During the 1990s, food wholesalers have benefited from growing consumer demand for a wider variety of domestic and exotic food products. The recent strength of Canadian food wholesalers can be partially attributed to this wider acceptance of new products by Canadian consumers.


## Wholesale sales weakening for motor vehicles, parts and accessories

Sales of motor vehicles, parts and accessories declined $2.2 \%$ to $\$ 5.1$ billion in February. Following a period of general increases since early 1997, sales began to fall during the spring of 1998, rebounded in the summer of 1998, but weakened and declined by the end of the year. Shipments of motor vehicles, parts and accessories from manufacturers also declined in February. In addition, both imports and exports of automobile products were down.

## A good month for wholesalers of apparel and dry goods, and household goods

Wholesale sales for apparel and dry goods rose $5.6 \%$ following January's decline of $4.3 \%$. Sales have
been volatile since the beginning of 1998. Prior to 1998, sales had been on the rise. Apparel and dry goods wholesalers reported continued strong sales for spring and summer merchandise, as well as for the start to their fall line.

Household products also reported a rise ( $+1.9 \%$ ). Sales have been generally falling since early 1998. Prior to this, sales had been on the increase.

## Inventories decline slightly

Inventories held by wholesalers declined slightly in February to $\$ 40.9$ billion ( $-0.3 \%$ ). Following a period which saw inventories rising since mid-1996, inventory accumulation started to ease by the beginning of 1998. By the end of the year, inventories had levelled off.

The inventories-to-sales ratio (1.43) remained unchanged from January. After having been on the
rise since late 1997, the ratio levelled off during the summer of 1998 and began to fall during the last quarter.

Available on CANSIM: matrices 59, 61, 648 and 649.
The February 1999 issue of Wholesale trade ( $63-008-\mathrm{XIB}, \$ 14 / \$ 140$ ) will be available shortly. See How to order publications.

For data or general information, contact the Client Services Unit (1 877 421-3067 or 613-951-3549; wholesaleinfo@statcan.ca). To enquire about the concepts, methods and data quality of this release, contact Alexander Hays (613-951-3552; haysale@statcan.ca), Wholesale Trade Section, Distributive Trades Division.

Wholesale merchants' sales and inventories

|  | $\begin{aligned} & \text { Feb. } \\ & 1998^{r} \end{aligned}$ | $\begin{aligned} & \hline \text { Nov. } \\ & 1998^{r} \end{aligned}$ | $\begin{aligned} & \text { Dec. } \\ & 1998^{r} \end{aligned}$ | $\begin{gathered} \text { Jan. } \\ 1999^{r} \end{gathered}$ | Feb. 1999 ${ }^{\text {p }}$ | $\begin{array}{r} \text { Jan. } \\ \text { to } \\ \text { Feb. } \\ 1999 \end{array}$ | $\begin{array}{r} \text { Feb. } \\ 1998 \\ \text { to } \\ \text { Feb. } \\ 1999 \end{array}$ |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | seasonally adjusted |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | \$ millions |  |  |  |  | \% change |  |
| Sales, all trade groups | 27,782 | 28,396 | 28,597 | 28,688 | 28,686 | 0.0 | 3.3 |
| Food products | 4,135 | 4,437 | 4,477 | 4,633 | 4,475 | -3.4 | 8.2 |
| Beverage, drug and tobacco products | 1,913 | 1,871 | 1,896 | 1,919 | 1,912 | -0.3 | 0.0 |
| Apparel and dry goods | 549 | 535 | 555 | 531 | 561 | 5.6 | 2.1 |
| Household goods | 846 | 798 | 793 | 773 | 788 | 1.9 | -6.9 |
| Motor vehicles, parts and accessories | 5,028 | 5,158 | 5,293 | 5,211 | 5,099 | -2.2 | 1.4 |
| Metals, hardware, plumbing and heating equipment and supplies | 1,952 | 1,934 | 1,874 | 1,872 | 1,923 | 2.7 | -1.5 |
| Lumber and building materials | 2,072 | 2,088 | 2,131 | 2,111 | 2,140 | 1.4 | 3.3 |
| Farm machinery, equipment and supplies | 774 | 660 | 610 | 738 | 758 | 2.8 | -2.1 |
| Industrial and other machinery, equipment and supplies | 4,100 | 4,162 | 4,173 | 4,238 | 4,207 | -0.7 | 2.6 |
| Computers, packaged software and other electronic machinery | 2,484 | 2,924 | 2,928 | 2,876 | 2,933 | 2.0 | 18.1 |
| Other products | 3,931 | 3,830 | 3,865 | 3,787 | 3,890 | 2.7 | -1.0 |
| Sales by province and territory |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Newfoundland | 191 | 195 | 197 | 204 | 200 | -1.9 | 4.8 |
| Prince Edward Island | 47 | 50 | 50 | 49 | 49 | -0.4 | 5.6 |
| Nova Scotia | 473 | 518 | 571 | 557 | 555 | -0.5 | 17.3 |
| New Brunswick | 337 | 334 | 332 | 342 | 340 | -0.6 | 0.9 |
| Quebec | 5,477 | 5,788 | 5,809 | 5,913 | 5,898 | -0.3 | 7.7 |
| Ontario | 13,500 | 14,050 | 14,151 | 14,211 | 14,120 | -0.6 | 4.6 |
| Manitoba | 947 | 910 | 929 | 923 | 991 | 7.3 | 4.6 |
| Saskatchewan | 920 | 825 | 803 | 852 | 917 | 7.6 | -0.3 |
| Alberta | 2,694 | 2,565 | 2,586 | 2,561 | 2,573 | 0.5 | -4.5 |
| British Columbia | 3,174 | 3,135 | 3,143 | 3,048 | 3,018 | -1.0 | -4.9 |
| Yukon | 10 | 10 | 11 | 11 | 9 | -18.3 | -11.3 |
| Northwest Territories | 14 | 15 | 18 | 18 | 17 | -1.5 | 25.1 |
| Inventories, all trade groups | 38,634 | 40,926 | 40,924 | 41,063 | 40,933 | -0.3 | 6.0 |
| Food products | 2,572 | 2,719 | 2,692 | 2,650 | 2,651 | 0.0 | 3.1 |
| Beverage, drug and tobacco products | 2,169 | 2,208 | 2,261 | 2,227 | 2,236 | 0.4 | 3.1 |
| Apparel and dry goods | 1,210 | 1,306 | 1,231 | 1,237 | 1,232 | -0.5 | 1.8 |
| Household goods | 1,544 | 1,537 | 1,535 | 1,533 | 1,550 | 1.2 | 0.4 |
| Motor vehicles, parts and accessories | 5,388 | 5,740 | 5,853 | 5,857 | 5,790 | -1.1 | 7.5 |
| Metals, hardware, plumbing and heating equipment and supplies | 3,309 | 3,525 | 3,503 | 3,494 | 3,523 | 0.8 | 6.5 |
| Lumber and building materials | 3,438 | 3,654 | 3,689 | 3,746 | 3,717 | -0.8 | 8.1 |
| Farm machinery, equipment and supplies | 2,254 | 2,309 | 2,308 | 2,278 | 2,262 | -0.7 | 0.4 |
| Industrial and other machinery, equipment and supplies | 9,328 | 9,822 | 9,837 | 9,897 | 9,903 | 0.1 | 6.2 |
| Computers, packaged software and other electronic machinery | 2,352 | 2,735 | 2,656 | 2,589 | 2,614 | 1.0 | 11.1 |
| Other products | 5,069 | 5,372 | 5,358 | 5,555 | 5,455 | -1.8 | 7.6 |

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## OTHER RELEASES

## Natural gas sales

February 1999 (preliminary)
Natural gas sales totalled 7053 million cubic metres in February, up 5.5\% from February 1998. Sales to the industrial sector (including direct sales) rose $6.8 \%$ from February 1998, due to higher demand for natural gas by electric utilities. Unusually cold weather throughout most of the country resulted in higher sales to the residential (+3.0\%) and commercial (+6.0\%) sectors.

Year-to-date sales increased $5.5 \%$ from the same period in 1998. Sales to the residential (+2.4\%) and commercial (+4.2\%) sectors rose due to colder weather during the first two months of 1999. Sales to the industrial sector (including direct sales) continued to maintain strong growth, posting a $7.8 \%$ increase over the same period last year.

## Natural gas sales

|  | $\begin{aligned} & \text { Feb. } \\ & 1999^{p} \end{aligned}$ | $\begin{gathered} \text { Feb. } \\ 1998 \end{gathered}$ | $\begin{array}{r} \text { Feb. } \\ 1998 \\ \text { to } \\ \text { Feb. } \\ 1999 \end{array}$ |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | '000 of cubic metres |  | change |
| Natural gas sales | 7,053,353 | 6,683,533 | 5.5 |
| Residential | 2,012,416 | 1,953,159 | 3.0 |
| Commercial | 1,324,094 | 1,249,046 | 6.0 |
| Industrial | 1,796,805 | 1,821,463 |  |
| Direct | 1,920,038 | 1,659,865 |  |


|  | Year-to-date |  |  |
| :--- | ---: | ---: | ---: |
|  | $1999^{p}$ |  | 1998 |
|  |  | 1998 <br> to <br> 1999 |  |
|  | '000 of cubic metres |  | $\%$ <br> change |
| Natural gas sales | $\mathbf{1 5 , 7 2 7 , 5 0 7}$ | $\mathbf{1 4 , 9 1 1 , 8 2 0}$ | $\mathbf{5 . 5}$ |
| Residential | $4,627,158$ | $4,518,032$ | 2.4 |
| Commercial | $3,049,675$ | $2,925,879$ | 4.2 |
| Industrial | $3,863,508$ | $3,966,122$ | 7.8 |
| Direct | $4,187,166$ | $3,501,787$ |  |
| $p \quad$ Preliminary figures. |  |  |  |

## Available on CANSIM: matrices 1052-1055.

The February 1999 issue of Gas utilities (55-002-XPB, $\$ 17 / \$ 165$ ) will be available in May. See How to order publications.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods and data quality of 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.

## Occupational surveillance in Canada: Cause-specific mortality among workers

 1965-1991Selected results are now available from an occupational surveillance study that investigated the risks of dying from specific causes related to occupation. The study tracked the mortality outcomes of close to 700,000 working people across Canada - 456,220 men and 242, 200 women - until the end of 1991. These individuals all worked in an occupation for at least one year between 1965 and 1971.

A CD-ROM product containing the full results of the study, covering some 670 occupations and 70 causes of death, will be released in summer 1999.

For information on the concepts and methods of the study, contact Maureen Carpenter (613-951-1760; fax: 613-951-0792; maureen.carpenter@statcan.ca), Health Statistics Division. For more information on data availability, contact Client Custom Services Unit (613-951-1746), Health Statistics Division.

## Electric lamps <br> First quarter 1999

Data on manufacturers' imports, production and inventories of electric lamps for the first quarter of 1999 are now available.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods, and data quality for this release, contact Russell Kowaluk (613-951-0600; kowarus@statcan.ca), Manufacturing, Construction and Energy Division.

## Stocks of frozen poultry meat <br> April 1, 1999 (preliminary)

Preliminary data for stocks of frozen poultry meat in cold storage on April 1, 1999 are now available.

## Available on CANSIM: matrices 5675-5677.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods, and data quality for this release, contact Sandra Gielfeldt (613-951-2505), Livestock and Animal Products Section, Agriculture Division.

## Deliveries of major grains

## March 1999

Data on March grain deliveries are now available.

## Available on CANSIM: matrix 976-981.

Delivery data are in the March issue of Cereals and oilseeds review (22-007-XPB, \$15/\$149), which will be available in June. See How to order publications.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods, and data quality for this release, contact Karen Gray (204-983-2856; graykar@statcan.ca), or Susan Anderson (613-951-3859; andesue@statcan.ca), Grain Marketing Unit, Agriculture Division.

## PUBLICATIONS RELEASED

Electric lamps, light bulbs and tubes, March 1999 Catalogue number 43-009-XIB
(Canada: \$5/\$47; outside Canada: US\$5/US\$47).

The Consumer Price Index, March 1999
Catalogue number 62-001-XPB
(Canada: \$11/\$103; outside Canada: US\$11/US\$103).
All prices exclude sales tax.
Catalogue numbers with an -XIB or an -XIE extension are Internet versions; those with -XMB or -XME are microfiche; and -XPB or -XPE denote a paper version.

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[^0]:    $r$ Revised figures.
    p Preliminary figures.

