



The Daily

Statistics Canada

Tuesday, May 23, 2000

For release at 8:30 a.m.

MAJOR RELEASES

There are no major releases today.

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OTHER RELEASES

Monthly Survey of Large Retailers

March 2000 (preliminary)

March sales by the group of large retailers totalled \$5.7 billion, up 8.1% from March 1999. Changes in 1999 to the composition of the group of large retailers affect year-over-year sales comparisons. This is especially true in the food sector, where several supermarket chains have been restructured. (All data in this release are unadjusted for seasonality.)

Sales in March were up in all the major commodity groups sold by the group of large retailers. For the second consecutive month, the commodity groups with the largest year-over-year percentage increases were other goods and services (+16.0%), hardware and lawn and garden products (+15.7%), and home furnishing and electronics (+13.8%).

In March, the three largest product lines within the other goods and services category were tobacco products and supplies (with sales of \$166.6 million), automotive fuels, oils and additives (\$121.9 million), and automotive parts and accessories (\$109.3 million). Sales of automotive fuels, oils and additives rose 43.6%. The strong increases in the price of crude oil has led to higher energy costs; gasoline prices were up 38.0% from March 1999. Sales of tobacco products and supplies rose 7.8%, while automotive parts and accessories were up 6.3%.

Sales of hardware and lawn and garden products by the group reached \$196.4 million in March, a 15.7% advance over March 1999. The commodities within this

category that posted the largest percent increases were lawn and garden furniture (+43.8%), lawn and garden related products such as barbecues, wheelbarrows and garden tools (+26.1%), and nursery stock, flowers and potted plants (+22.2%).

March's 13.8% increase in sales of home furnishings and electronics represents the largest year-over-year rise in this category since the introduction of the Monthly Survey of Large Retailers. Robust consumer demand for big-ticket items continued to push up sales. Sales of home electronics by the group continued to advance at a healthy pace, increasing 18.2% in March. Furniture sales rose 15.4%, and sales of appliances 11.8%. Sales of home furnishings, such as floor coverings, draperies and linens, were up 6.3%.

Fuelled by strong increases in prescription and over-the-counter drugs (+22.3%), March sales of health and personal care products rose 11.9%. This continues the trend of double-digit year-over-year increases posted since the beginning of the survey.

The smallest year-over-year increase in March was in the clothing, footwear and accessories category (+2.9%).

For data or general information, contact the Client Services Unit (613-951-3549 or 1-877-421-3067; retailinfo@statcan.ca). For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact Catherine Draper (613-951-0669; drapcat@statcan.ca), Distributive Trades Division.

Sales by commodity for the group of large retailers

	Feb. 1999	Feb. 2000 ^r	Feb. 1999 to Feb. 2000 unadjusted	March 1999	March 2000 ^p	March 1999 to March 2000
	\$ millions		% change	\$ millions		% change
Commodities						
Food and beverages	1,824	1,907	4.6	2,005	2,111	5.3
Clothing, footwear and accessories	769	801	4.1	1,009	1,038	2.9
Home furnishings and electronics	600	674	12.2	672	765	13.8
Health and personal care products	381	425	11.5	415	465	11.9
Housewares	217	234	7.7	238	265	11.5
Sporting and leisure goods	167	188	12.0	213	226	5.9
Hardware and lawn and garden products	120	139	15.9	170	196	15.7
All other goods and services	444	515	15.8	527	611	16.0
Total	4,523	4,881	7.9	5,249	5,677	8.1

^r Revised figures.

^p Preliminary figures.

Natural gas sales

March 2000 (preliminary)

Natural gas sales totalled 7 209 million cubic metres in March, down 4.3% from March 1999. Warmer than usual temperatures throughout Canada resulted in sharply lower sales to the residential (-10.7%) and commercial (-10.9%) sectors. Sales to the industrial sector, including direct sales, increased 0.9%.

Year-to-date sales were up 3.8% over the same period in 1999. Use by the industrial sector (including direct sales) rose 8.7% over March 1999. This increase was due to higher demand for natural gas from electric utilities and the chemical industry. Consumption by the residential and commercial sectors both decreased 1.7%.

Natural gas sales

	March 2000 ^P	March 1999	March 1999 to March 2000
	thousands of cubic metres		% change
Natural gas sales	7 209 067	7 533 695	-4.3
Residential	1 745 633	1 954 854	-10.7
Commercial	1 253 351	1 406 279	-10.9
Industrial	1 861 902	1 925 209	0.9
Direct	2 348 181	2 247 353	
Year-to-date			
	2000 ^P	1999	1999 to 2000
	thousands of cubic metres		% change
Natural gas sales	24 308 876	23 425 768	3.8
Residential	6 392 544	6 503 637	-1.7
Commercial	4 477 077	4 556 418	-1.7
Industrial	5 768 620	5 790 690	8.7
Direct	7 670 635	6 575 023	

^P Preliminary figures.

Available on CANSIM: matrices 1052-1055.

The March 2000 issue of *Natural gas transportation and distribution* (55-002-XIB, \$13/\$125) will be available in June. See *How to order publications*.

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

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
MAJOR RELEASES

- **Urban transit, 1995** 2
Discards the estimates on taking urban transit. Canadians are using it less and less. In 1996, each Canadian took an average of about 40 trips on some form of urban transit, the lowest level in the past 25 years.
- **Productivity, hourly compensation and unit labour cost, 1995** 4
Growth in productivity among Canadian businesses was relatively weak again in 1996, accompanied by sluggish gains in employment and slow moderate growth during the year.

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Short-term Expectations Survey
- **Steel primary forms, year ending May 31, 1997** 12
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