

**Note:** In order to incorporate information from the 1997 economic census, we will delay the release of revised data, originally scheduled for the week of April 26, until this summer. A new release date will be announced next month.

FOR WIRE TRANSMISSION 8:30 A.M. ET, Tuesday April 13, 1999

**ADVANCE MONTHLY RETAIL SALES  
 MARCH 1999**

The Census Bureau of the Department of Commerce announced today that advance estimates of U.S. retail sales for March adjusted for seasonal, holiday, and trading-day differences, but not for price changes, were \$239.6 billion, an increase of 0.2 percent ( $\pm 0.7\%$ ) from the previous month and up 8.7 percent ( $\pm 0.9\%$ ) from March 1998. Total sales for the first quarter were up 8.3 percent ( $\pm 0.7\%$ ) from the same quarter a year ago. The January to February 1999 percent change was revised from +0.9 percent ( $\pm 0.7\%$ ) to +1.7 percent ( $\pm 0.4\%$ ).

Durable goods decreased 0.2 percent ( $\pm 1.4\%$ ) from February but were 11.0 percent above last year. Building materials were up 14.1 percent from March a year ago, while automotive sales were up 11.3 percent during the same period.

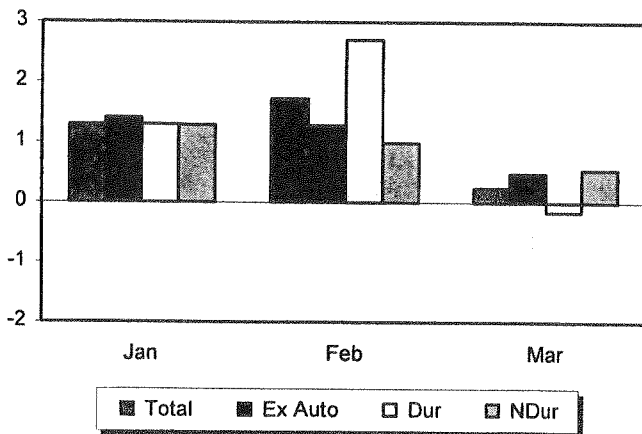
Nondurable goods increased 0.6 percent ( $\pm 0.6\%$ ) from last month and were up 7.0 percent from March 1998. General merchandise sales were up 9.3 percent from March a year ago.

*The advance estimates are based on a small subsample of the Bureau's full retail sales sample. Estimates from the advance and the subsequent full survey can differ because of the earlier reporting in the advance and because of sampling variability present in both surveys.*

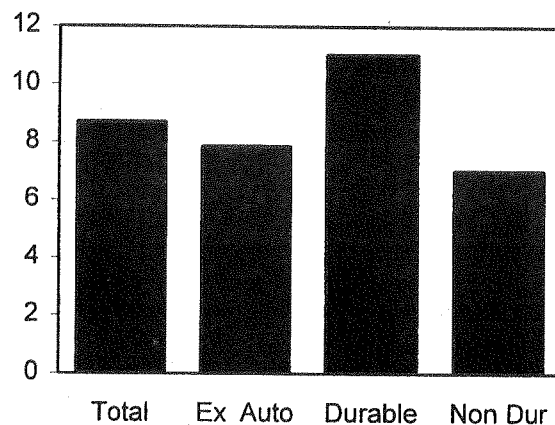
**Percent Change in Retail Sales**

(Data adjusted for seasonal, holiday, and trading-day differences, but not for price changes)

**From Previous Month**



**From Previous Year**



The Advance Monthly Retail Sales Report for April is scheduled to be released May 13, 1999 at 8:30 a.m.

Address inquiries concerning this report to Ronald Piencykoski, Service Sector Statistics Division, Bureau of the Census, Washington, D.C. 20233. Telephone: (301) 457-2713 or (301) 457-2666.

This report is available the day of issue through the Department of Commerce's online Economic Bulletin Board. For information call (202) 482-1986. The data are also available on the internet - <http://www.census.gov/svsd/www/advtable.html>.

**Table 1. Estimated Monthly Retail Sales, By Kind of Business**

(In Millions of Dollars and Annual Percent Change)

SIC code	Kind of business	Not adjusted						Adjusted <sup>1</sup>					
		3 month total		1999			1998		1999			1998	
		1999	Change from 1998	Mar. <sup>2</sup> (a)	Feb. (p)	Jan. (r)	Mar.	Feb.	Mar. <sup>2</sup> (a)	Feb. (p)	Jan. (r)	Mar. (r)	Feb. (r)
	<b>Retail trade, total.....</b>	<b>653,770</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>240,314</b>	<b>208,214</b>	<b>205,242</b>	<b>216,181</b>	<b>191,274</b>	<b>239,639</b>	<b>239,050</b>	<b>234,999</b>	<b>220,446</b>	<b>219,995</b>
	Total (excl. auto group).....	483,392	7.8	174,726	153,602	155,064	158,636	142,668	179,646	178,778	176,517	166,532	166,221
	<b>Durable goods, total.....</b>	<b>279,019</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>105,554</b>	<b>89,268</b>	<b>84,197</b>	<b>92,819</b>	<b>79,948</b>	<b>102,460</b>	<b>102,624</b>	<b>99,920</b>	<b>92,280</b>	<b>92,118</b>
52	Building mat., hardware, garden supply, and mobile home dealers.....	37,575	14.6	14,932	11,702	10,941	12,676	10,044	15,474	15,540	14,957	13,562	13,376
521,3	Building mat. and supply stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	9,119	8,590	9,700	7,854	(*)	11,827	11,499	10,265	10,200
525	Hardware stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	1,044	1,138	1,128	921	(*)	1,379	1,365	1,267	1,218
55 ex. 554	Automotive dealers.....	170,378	11.0	65,588	54,612	50,178	57,545	48,606	59,993	60,272	58,482	53,914	53,774
551,2,5, 6,7,9	Motor vehicle and miscellaneous automotive dealers.....	161,218	11.2	62,144	51,787	47,287	54,383	45,920	56,597	56,909	55,113	50,730	50,573
551	Motor vehicle (franchised)....	(*)	(*)	(*)	44,156	41,164	46,522	39,302	(*)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
553	Auto and home supply stores....	(*)	(*)	(*)	2,825	2,891	3,162	2,686	(*)	3,363	3,369	3,184	3,201
57	Furniture, home furnishings, and equipment stores.....	38,598	6.7	13,495	12,313	12,790	12,421	11,503	13,984	13,961	13,811	13,039	13,095
571	Furniture and home furnishings	(*)	(*)	(*)	5,802	5,806	6,052	5,521	(*)	6,623	6,480	6,291	6,331
5722,31,4	Household appliance, radio, TV and computer stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	5,658	6,111	5,488	5,154	(*)	6,364	6,372	5,801	5,817
5722	Household appliance stores	(*)	(*)	(*)	761	793	834	754	(*)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
	<b>Nondurable goods, total.....</b>	<b>374,751</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>134,760</b>	<b>118,946</b>	<b>121,045</b>	<b>123,362</b>	<b>111,326</b>	<b>137,179</b>	<b>136,426</b>	<b>135,079</b>	<b>128,166</b>	<b>127,877</b>
53	General merchandise group stores.....	78,523	10.5	29,168	25,122	24,233	26,027	22,977	31,546	31,316	31,157	28,864	28,840
531	Dept. stores (ex. leased depts).. <sup>3</sup>	61,200	10.0	22,879	19,605	18,716	20,459	18,033	24,841	24,629	24,497	22,758	22,827
531	Dept. stores (in. leased depts) <sup>3</sup> ..	(*)	(*)	(*)	19,892	19,010	20,832	18,348	(*)	24,985	24,838	23,232	23,216
533	Variety stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	949	797	872	792	(*)	1,130	1,087	957	950
539	Misc. general mdse. stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	4,568	4,720	4,696	4,152	(*)	5,557	5,573	5,149	5,063
54	Food stores.....	109,293	5.5	37,964	34,539	36,790	35,583	32,574	38,174	38,382	37,817	36,369	36,166
541	Grocery stores.....	102,634	5.6	35,635	32,366	34,633	33,324	30,491	35,814	35,962	35,412	34,004	33,841
554	Gasoline service stations.....	34,899	0.0	12,456	10,879	11,564	12,007	10,997	12,607	12,419	12,421	12,340	12,554
56	Apparel and accessory stores.....	26,688	8.7	10,573	8,260	7,855	9,327	7,748	11,094	10,923	10,850	10,335	10,265
561	Men's and boy's clothing and furnishings stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	739	819	807	703	(*)	955	959	946	908
562,3	Women's clothing, specialty stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	2,132	2,046	2,385	2,012	(*)	2,776	2,784	2,635	2,627
565	Family clothing stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	3,115	2,933	3,477	2,808	(*)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
566	Shoe stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	1,445	1,313	1,669	1,430	(*)	1,797	1,816	1,753	1,788
58	Eating and drinking places.....	60,892	6.6	21,644	19,605	19,643	20,293	18,255	21,536	21,615	21,305	20,212	20,171
591	Drug and proprietary stores.....	27,918	11.7	9,869	8,964	9,085	8,548	8,049	9,591	9,496	9,337	8,548	8,536
592	Liquor stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	1,845	1,891	1,859	1,738	(*)	2,194	2,146	2,032	2,069
5961	Total mail order.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	4,319	4,392	4,434	3,724	(*)	5,111	4,891	4,461	4,444
53,56,57, 594	GAF <sup>4</sup> .....	(*)	(*)	(*)	52,687	51,741	54,533	48,754	(*)	64,995	64,365	60,490	60,430

\* Advance estimates are not available from the subsample panel for these kinds of business.

NA Not available. (a) Advance estimates. (p) Preliminary. (r) Revised.

(1) Data are concurrently adjusted for seasonal variations, holiday, and trading-day differences, but not for price changes. Concurrent seasonal adjustment uses all available unadjusted estimates as input to the X-11 program and the factors derived from the program are used in calculating all seasonally adjusted data shown in this publication. Factors and explanatory material are contained in the Monthly Retail Trade Report, BR-99-02.

(2) Advance estimates are based on early reporting by a small subsample of the full survey panel. All other estimates are based on the full sample.

(3) Includes data for leased departments operated within department stores. Data for this line not included in broader kind-of-business totals.

(4) GAF represents stores which specialize in department store types of merchandise (general merchandise, apparel, furniture, and miscellaneous shopping goods stores).

Note: Totals include data for kinds of business not shown separately.

**Table 2. Percent Change in Estimated Monthly Retail Sales, by Kind of Business**

(Adjusted for seasonal variations, holiday, and trading-day differences, but not for price changes)

SIC code	Kind of business	Percent change <sup>1</sup>					
		Mar. 1999 Advance from --		Feb. 1999 Preliminary from --		Jan. 1999 through Mar. 1999 from --	
		Feb. 1999 (p)	Mar. 1998 (r)	Jan. 1999 (r)	Feb. 1998 (r)	Oct. 1998 through Dec. 1998	Jan. 1998 through Mar. 1998
	<b>Retail trade, total .....</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>8.3</b>
	<b>Total (excl. automotive group) .....</b>	0.5	7.9	1.3	7.6	3.1	7.5
	<b>Durable goods, total .....</b>	<b>-0.2</b>	<b>11.0</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>11.4</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>10.5</b>
52	Building materials, hardware, garden supply, and mobile home dealers ....	-0.4	14.1	3.9	16.2	7.1	14.2
55 ex. 554	Automotive dealers.....	-0.5	11.3	3.1	12.1	4.7	10.9
551,2,5,6,7,9	Motor vehicle and miscellaneous automotive dealers.....	-0.5	11.6	3.3	12.5	4.8	11.2
57	Furniture, home furnishings, and equipment stores.....	0.2	7.2	1.1	6.6	2.8	6.7
	<b>Nondurable goods, total.....</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>6.8</b>
53	General merchandise group stores.....	0.7	9.3	0.5	8.6	4.2	9.2
531	Dept. stores (ex. leased dept.).....	0.9	9.2	0.5	7.9	4.3	8.7
531	Dept. stores (in. leased dept.) <sup>2</sup> .....	(NA)	(NA)	0.6	7.6	(NA)	(NA)
54	Food stores.....	-0.5	5.0	1.5	6.1	1.5	5.4
541	Grocery stores.....	-0.4	5.3	1.6	6.3	1.5	5.6
554	Gasoline service stations.....	1.5	2.2	0.0	-1.1	0.8	-0.3
56	Apparel and accessory stores.....	1.6	7.3	0.7	6.4	5.4	7.1
58	Eating and drinking places.....	-0.4	6.6	1.5	7.2	1.0	6.7
591	Drug and proprietary stores.....	1.0	12.2	1.7	11.2	4.4	11.1

NA Not available. (p) Preliminary. (r) Revised.

(1) Percent change rounded to nearest tenth.

(2) Includes data for leased departments operated within department stores. Data for this line not included in broader kind-of-business totals.

Official Business

Penalty for Private Use, \$300

### Reliability of Data

The Advance estimates are based on a small subsample of the Bureau's full retail sales sample. Estimates from the Advance and the subsequent full survey can differ because of the earlier reporting in the Advance and because of sampling variability present in each survey. The margin of sampling error, as used on page 1, gives a range about the estimate which is a 90% confidence interval. If, for example, the trend estimate is +1.2% and the standard error is 0.9%, then the margin of sampling error is  $\pm 1.65 \times 0.9\%$  or  $\pm 1.5\%$ , and the 90% confidence interval is -0.3% to +2.7%. If the interval contains 0, it is uncertain whether there was an increase or decrease. For monthly level, the coefficient of variation (CV) is given. The resulting confidence interval is the estimated value  $\pm 1.65 \times CV \times$  (the estimated value).

Estimates of sampling variability are given in Table 3. They are based on two components. The first component is a measure of the average

difference between the Advance and the Preliminary estimates. The second reflects the variability of the Preliminary estimate. Additionally, both the Advance and the full survey are subject to nonsampling errors. Such errors can occur because of nonresponse, insufficient coverage of the universe of retail businesses, and response errors, among others. Precautionary steps are taken to minimize these errors, but their magnitude is not directly measured.

Preliminary estimates for the current month and final estimates for the previous month based on the full sample are published next month in the Monthly Retail Trade Report. This report will provide sales estimates in greater detail and additional measures of sampling variability. It will also present a description of revisions and the techniques used in developing the estimates, and an explanation of confidence intervals and sampling variability (Appendix B, Reliability of Data).

**Table 3. Measures of Variability of and Revision to Advance Estimates for Level and Trend**

SIC code	Kind of Business	Level of sales: Estimated CV <sup>1</sup> for Current Mo. (x 100)	Trend (percent change): Estimated standard error <sup>1</sup> for			Revision for month- to-month change <sup>2</sup>	
			Current Mo. to Previous Mo.	Current Qtr. to Previous Qtr.	Current Mo. to Current Mo. Last Yr.	Average revision	Median absolute revision
	<b>Retail trade, total.....</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>0.1</b>
	Total (excl. auto) .....	1.0	0.6	0.3	0.7	0.1	0.2
	<b>Durable goods, total .....</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.2</b>
52	Building materials, group stores .....	3.5	1.9	1.1	2.7	0.5	0.6
55 ex. 554	Automotive dealers.....	1.6	1.2	0.8	1.5	0.1	0.5
551,2,5,6,7,9	Motor vehicle and misc. automotive dealers.....	1.8	1.3	0.9	1.6	0.1	0.5
57	Furniture, home furn, and equipment stores .....	2.0	1.4	0.7	1.8	0.0	0.5
	<b>Nondurable goods, total.....</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>0.2</b>
53	General merch. group, total.....	0.6	0.6	0.2	0.6	0.0	0.2
531	Dept. stores (ex. leased depts.)..	0.4	0.5	0.1	0.4	0.1	0.1
54	Food stores.....	1.2	0.2	0.3	0.6	0.3	0.3
541	Grocery stores .....	1.2	0.2	0.3	0.6	0.3	0.3
554	Gasoline service stations .....	2.2	1.2	1.4	1.4	0.2	0.4
56	Apparel and accessory stores .....	1.9	1.5	0.6	1.6	-0.2	0.5
58	Eating and drinking places .....	5.1	1.0	0.9	2.2	0.2	0.4
591	Drug and proprietary stores .....	1.7	0.8	0.4	1.2	0.3	0.3



- (1) The coefficients of variation (CVs) for level of sales and the standard errors for trends are medians based on estimates for the preceding 12 months.
- (2) These columns measure the difference between the Advance/Preliminary ratio and the Preliminary/Final ratio estimates -- i.e., the difference between estimates of trend for the same pair of data months. The revisions are based on the latest 12 months of data.