

Advance Monthly Retail Sales

March 1985

OR WIRE TRANSMISSION 8:30 A.M. EST, Thursday, April 11, 1985

CB-85-73

SEE "NOTICE OF REVISED RETAIL SALES ESTIMATES" BELOW TABLE 1 OF PAGE 2. THE SALES COMPARISONS IN THIS REPORT ARE BASED ON REVISED DATA.

Advance estimates of U.S. retail sales for March, adjusted for seasonal, holiday, and trading-day differences but not for price changes, were \$110.5 billion, down 1.9 percent from the revised level of \$112.7 billion in February but .8 percent above a year ago. This monthly decrease follows a 1.6 percent increase last month and is the largest decline since June 1982. Excluding the automotive group, total sales were down 1.4 percent in March, but were 4.5 percent above sales a year ago. First quarter sales were 1.4 percent higher than the prior quarter and 5.6 percent above the same period last year.

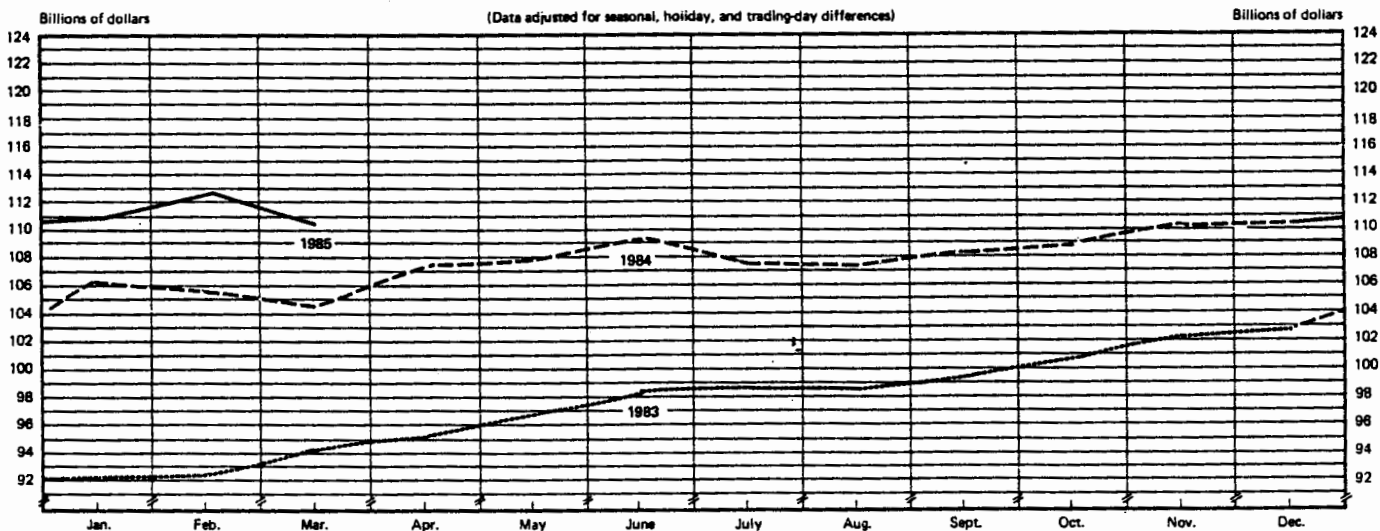
Durable goods sales dropped 2.4 percent in March, primarily due to a 4.0 percent decrease in automotive sales. This is the first monthly decline in seven months for the automotive group but sales rose 10.4 percent compared to a year ago. After a 3.4 percent increase in February, furniture stores dropped 3.7 in March but were 10.1 percent above the previous year level. Building materials gained 3.6 percent and were 7.2 above March 1984.

The nondurable goods group declined 1.7 percent in March but was 3.4 above sales a year ago. All major groups showed declines except for apparel, which was up 0.9 percent during the month. General merchandise sales were down 2.2 percent in March but rose 9.2 percent above last year. Sales of food stores decreased 1.6 percent but were 2.8 above last year. After a gain of 2.1 percent in February, eating and drinking places declined 2.4 percent during the month, but were 4.2 above March 1984. Drug store sales also declined in March, down 1.9 percent, but were up 9.0 percent above a year ago. Gasoline service stations were down 1.0 from February and were 5.7 percent below year ago sales. The decline from March 1984 is due to lower pump prices.

For a description of the sample design and reliability of the data, see back page.

The Advance Monthly Retail Sales report for April is scheduled to be released May 14, 1985, at 8:30 a.m.

ESTIMATED MONTHLY RETAIL SALES January 1983-March 1985



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The Advance Monthly Retail Sales report, the Monthly Retail Trade report, and the Annual Retail Trade report are available on a single subscription from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, at \$37 per year. Add \$9.25 for each subscription to a foreign address. Postage stamps not acceptable; currency submitted at sender's risk. Remittances from foreign countries must be by international money order or by a draft on a U.S. bank. This report is available electronically in CENDATA, the Bureau's on-line information service, through a commercial vendor. For further information, contact Customer Services, DUSD, Bureau of the Census, Washington, D.C. 20233, or call (301) 763-4100 or (301) 763-7561.

Table 1. Estimated Monthly Retail Sales, by Kind of Business

(Sales in millions of dollars)

SIC code	Kind of business	Not adjusted					Adjusted				
		1985			1984		1985			1984	
		Mar. ² adv.	Feb. prel.	Jan. final	Mar.	Feb.	Mar. ² adv.	Feb. prel.	Jan. final	Mar.	Feb.
	Retail trade, total.....	108,979	96,122	98,817	104,381	93,648	110,541	112,736	110,972	104,525	105,726
	Total (excl. auto group)..	83,121	73,712	77,027	80,509	72,058	86,499	87,694	86,351	82,757	82,757
	Durable goods, total.....	40,726	35,392	35,375	37,731	33,910	40,312	41,314	40,622	36,635	37,882
52	Building mat., hardware, garden supply, and mobile home dealers..	5,295	4,236	4,452	5,051	4,308	5,923	5,716	5,774	5,527	5,589
521,3	Building mat. and supply stores.	(*)	3,119	3,252	3,678	3,188	(*)	4,175	4,180	4,033	4,103
525	Hardware stores.....	(*)	608	691	705	607	(*)	810	836	765	773
55 ex. 554	Automotive dealers.....	25,858	22,410	21,790	23,872	21,590	24,042	25,042	24,621	21,768	22,969
551,2,5,6,7,9	Motor vehicle and miscellaneous automotive dealers.....	23,975	20,794	20,044	21,956	19,898	22,056	23,002	22,598	19,780	20,923
551	Motor vehicle (franchised)....	(*)	18,996	18,612	19,994	18,298	(*)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
553	Auto and home supply stores.....	(*)	1,616	1,746	1,916	1,692	(*)	2,040	2,023	1,988	2,046
57	Furniture, home furnishings, and equipment stores.....	5,318	4,901	5,132	4,920	4,422	5,528	5,738	5,547	5,020	4,999
571	Furniture and home furnishings..	(*)	2,618	2,694	2,791	2,469	(*)	3,055	2,891	2,794	2,790
5722,32	Household appliance, radio, and TV stores.....	(*)	1,914	2,071	1,779	1,615	(*)	2,265	2,254	1,861	1,842
5722	Household appliance stores....	(*)	583	629	566	528	(*)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
	Nondurable goods, total.....	68,253	60,730	63,442	66,650	59,738	70,229	71,422	70,350	67,890	67,844
53	General merchandise group stores..	11,779	9,358	9,134	10,924	8,935	13,184	13,480	12,893	12,077	12,501
531	Department stores.....	9,956	7,821	7,644	9,218	7,467	11,062	11,318	10,781	10,119	10,502
533	Variety stores.....	(*)	568	541	671	579	(*)	776	737	737	761
539	Misc. general mdse. stores.....	(*)	969	949	1,035	889	(*)	1,386	1,375	1,221	1,238
54	Food stores.....	22,851	20,832	22,279	22,579	20,485	22,741	23,104	23,076	22,116	22,002
541	Grocery stores.....	21,456	19,559	21,003	21,177	19,183	21,328	21,732	21,720	20,701	20,649
554	Gasoline service stations.....	7,792	7,282	7,990	8,277	7,668	8,117	8,200	8,349	8,604	8,344
56	Apparel and accessory stores.....	5,409	4,239	4,449	4,962	4,077	5,816	5,762	5,490	5,386	5,363
561	Men's and boys' clothing and furnishings stores.....	(*)	486	564	572	493	(*)	694	696	691	675
562,3,8	Women's clothing, specialty stores, furriers.....	(*)	1,815	1,853	2,128	1,742	(*)	2,414	2,274	2,233	2,248
565	Family clothing stores.....	(*)	1,088	1,117	1,222	986	(*)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
566	Shoe stores.....	(*)	669	733	820	669	(*)	879	855	854	851
58	Eating and drinking places.....	10,465	9,377	9,495	10,100	9,135	10,486	10,741	10,515	10,060	10,139
591	Drug and proprietary stores.....	3,790	3,613	3,703	3,520	3,361	3,863	3,936	3,853	3,545	3,530
592	Liquor stores.....	(*)	1,408	1,471	1,490	1,368	(*)	1,653	1,636	1,583	1,551
5961 (pt.)	Mail-order houses (department store merchandise).....	(*)	278	336	364	303	(*)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
53,56,57	GAF ³	(*)	21,334	21,662	23,598	20,051	(*)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
594											

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

NA Not available.

¹Data adjusted for seasonal variations, holiday, and trading-day differences. (See Explanatory Material in the Monthly Retail Trade Report, BR-85-02).

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

³GAF represents stores which specialize in department store types of merchandise.

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

NOTICE OF REVISED RETAIL SALES ESTIMATES - The adjusted and unadjusted monthly estimates of retail sales from January 1977 to December 1984 have been revised utilizing the results from the 1982 Census of Retail Trade and the 1983 Annual Retail Trade Survey. The revised estimates and a description of the methodology are contained in the Revised Monthly Retail Sales and Inventories January 1975-December 1984 Report (BR-13-84S), which was released the week of April 8.

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

(Adjusted for seasonal variations, holiday, and trading-day differences)

SIC code	Kind of business	Percent change					
		Mar. 1985 advance from--		Feb. 1985 preliminary from--		Jan. 1985 through Mar. 1985	
		Feb. 1985 prelim.	Mar. 1984 final	Jan. 1985 final	Feb. 1984 final	Oct. 1984 through Dec. 1984	Jan. 1984 through Mar. 1984
	Retail trade, total.....	-1.9	+5.8	+1.6	+6.6	+1.4	+5.6
	Total (excl. automotive group).....	-1.4	+4.5	+1.6	+6.0	+0.7	+4.7
	Durable goods, total.....	-2.4	+10.0	+1.7	+9.1	+2.3	+8.9
52	Building materials, hardware, garden supply, and mobile home dealers.....	+3.6	+7.2	-1.0	+2.3	-0.7	+5.0
55 ex. 554	Automotive dealers.....	-4.0	+10.4	+1.7	+9.0	+3.9	+9.1
551,2,5,6,7,9	Motor vehicle and miscellaneous automotive dealers.....	-4.1	+11.5	+1.8	+9.9	+4.2	+10.1
57	Furniture, home furnishings, and equipment stores.....	-3.7	+10.1	+3.4	+14.8	+0.4	+11.4
	Nondurable goods, total.....	-1.7	+3.4	+1.5	+5.3	+0.8	+3.9
53	General merchandise group stores.....	-2.2	+9.2	+4.6	+7.8	+0.9	+6.7
531	Department stores.....	-2.3	+9.3	+5.0	+7.8	+0.4	+6.6
54	Food stores.....	-1.6	+2.8	+0.1	+5.0	+1.0	+4.2
541	Grocery stores.....	-1.9	+3.0	+0.1	+5.2	+1.4	+4.4
554	Gasoline service stations.....	-1.0	-5.7	-1.8	-1.7	-1.5	-3.0
56	Apparel and accessory stores.....	+0.9	+8.0	+5.0	+7.4	0.0	+6.1
58	Eating and drinking places.....	-2.4	+4.2	+2.1	+5.9	+0.9	+4.6
591	Drug and proprietary stores.....	-1.9	+9.0	+2.2	+11.5	+2.3	+9.5

Table 3. Estimated Monthly Retail Sales of Group II Companies, by Kind of Business

(Sales in millions of dollars)

SIC code	Kind of business	Not adjusted			Adjusted ¹		
		Feb. 1985 prelim.	Jan. 1985 final	Feb. 1984	Feb. 1985 prelim.	Jan. 1985 final	Feb. 1984
	Retail trade, total.....	31,590	32,650	30,870	38,980	38,313	36,789
53	General merchandise group stores.....	8,638	8,395	8,253	12,513	11,987	11,598
531	Department stores.....	7,480	7,307	7,143	10,841	10,321	10,046
533	Variety stores.....	467	448	481	648	630	644
539	Miscellaneous general merchandise stores.....	691	640	629	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
54	Food stores.....	11,641	12,585	11,486	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
541	Grocery stores.....	11,482	12,437	11,331	12,645	12,704	12,093
56	Apparel and accessory stores.....	1,543	1,548	1,440	2,254	2,172	2,031
562,3,8	Women's clothing, specialty stores, furriers.....	692	672	645	983	957	890
566	Shoe stores.....	319	335	320	439	428	423
591	Drug stores and proprietary stores.....	1,950	1,993	1,785	2,181	2,127	1,934

¹Data adjusted for seasonal variations, holiday, and trading-day differences. (See Explanatory Material in the Monthly Retail Trade Report, BR-85-02).

Note: The Group II component of the sample consists of companies which had 11 or more retail establishments according to the most recent update of multi-establishment files and which were selected with certainty (i.e., their sales size exceeded specified dollar volume cutoffs which vary by kind of business).

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Sample Design and Reliability of Data

The advance sales estimates are based on early reporting of sales by a small subsample of the Bureau's retail survey panel. Because of the early reporting, the advance estimates can differ from the subsequent estimates which are based on monthly reports obtained from the full sample of retail stores. In addition, sampling variability between the subsample used for the advance estimates and the full sample can cause a difference.

Percentage differences between advance and full sample preliminary estimates of month-to-month percentage change in seasonally adjusted total retail store sales have ranged from approximately -1.1 percent to +0.4 percent with the average of the absolute differences about 0.3 percent for the past 12 months. For individual kind-of-business groups, these differences tend to be higher. Sampling variability of and revisions to advance-to-preliminary estimates are shown in table 4 below.

Preliminary estimates for February 1985 and final estimates for January 1985 based on the full sample will be published late this month in the Monthly Retail Trade Report for February (BR-85-02). The complete report will provide sales estimates in greater detail and will present a description of revisions, and the techniques used in developing the estimates. The complete report will include additional measures of sampling variability.

Table 4. Sampling Variability of and Revision to Advance-to-Preliminary Estimate

SIC code	Kind of business	Estimated coefficient of variation in percent of the advance-to-preliminary ratio			Preliminary-to-final percent change minus the advance-to-preliminary percent change			
		Range ¹		Median	Range ²		Mean	Average of absolute difference
		From	To		From	To		
	Retail trade, total.....	0.6	0.8	0.7	-1.1	+0.4	-0.1	0.3
	Total (excl. automotive group).....	0.6	0.9	0.7	-0.9	+1.0	0.0	0.4
	Durable goods stores, total.....	1.0	1.7	1.4	-2.0	+2.7	0.0	1.0
52	Building materials, hardware, garden supply, and mobile home dealers.....	1.3	3.6	2.0	-2.4	+5.0	+0.6	1.6
55 ex. 554	Automotive dealers.....	1.5	2.4	1.8	-2.0	+2.4	+0.1	1.1
551,2,5, 6,7,9	Motor vehicle and miscellaneous automotive dealers.....	1.2	2.2	1.4	-2.4	+2.9	+0.2	1.3
57	Furniture, home furnishings, and equipment stores.....	1.3	3.3	2.5	-4.6	+3.4	-0.4	1.6
	Nondurable goods stores, total.....	0.4	0.7	0.5	-0.6	+0.7	0.0	0.3
53	General merchandise group stores.....	0.4	0.6	0.5	-1.3	+1.6	+0.2	0.6
531	Department stores.....	0.1	0.5	0.2	-1.1	+1.9	+0.3	0.7
54	Food stores.....	0.8	1.1	1.0	-1.0	+0.6	+0.1	0.4
541	Grocery stores.....	0.2	0.5	0.4	-1.2	+0.6	0.0	0.3
554	Gasoline service stations.....	0.6	1.3	0.9	-3.8	+3.0	-0.4	1.7
56	Apparel and accessory stores.....	1.1	3.7	2.1	-1.7	+2.2	0.0	1.1
58	Eating and drinking places.....	0.5	1.2	0.9	-2.5	+3.2	+0.1	1.4
591	Drug stores and proprietary stores.....	0.5	1.4	0.6	-2.1	+2.2	-0.1	0.9

¹The ranges of sampling variability shown are based on sales estimates unadjusted for seasonal variation, holiday, and trading-day differences for the data months of January-December 1983.

²The ranges shown for the retail trade total are based on sales estimates adjusted for seasonal variations, holiday, and trading-day differences for the 12-month period, March 1984-February 1985. The ranges for all other totals and kinds of business are based on the 12-month period December 1983-November 1984.

Note: See appendix B, Reliability of Data, in the Monthly Retail Trade Report for a discussion on the measures of sampling variability.

