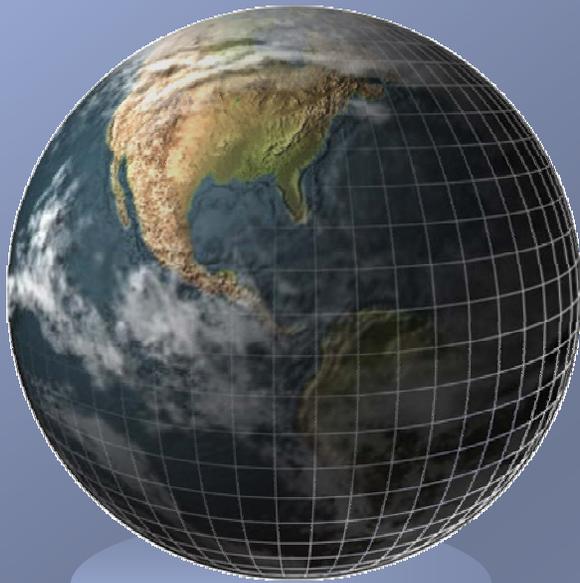# USPS Administrative Data on Address Vacancies

9th Annual Crime Mapping Conference

March 29th, 2007

Robert Renner
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Office of Policy Development & Research

Abandonment and Blight

"[Physical disorder] changes the calculus of prospective home buyers, real estate agents, insurance agents, and investors and shapes perceptions of residents who might be considering moving. Evidence of disorder also gives a running account of the effectiveness of residents seeking neighborhood improvement, and that record may encourage or discourage future activism. Physical and social disorder in public spaces are thus fundamental to a general understanding of urban neighborhoods" (Sampson and Raudenbush 1999: 604).

Why care about abandoned or blighted properties?

- Abandoned/blighted properties may
  - Serve as a magnet for crime
  - Lower market value of neighboring properties, affecting resale value and municipal tax revenue
  - Associated with reduced levels of social interaction and trust among neighbors
  - Pose a serious health risk to individuals living in inner city and suburban communities

When is a property considered abandoned or blighted?

- Financial indicators
  - Owner ceases to pay property taxes beyond a year and a half
  - The process of foreclosure begins
  - Owner loses title
- Physical indicators
  - Lack of use/disrepair
  - Vacant two years or more
  - Suspension of mail service, utility terminations and boarded up doors or windows

National Datasets for Measuring Abandonment/Blight

- U.S. Census data
  - Only a snapshot
  - Estimates vacancy status but difficult to differentiate vacancy from abandonment or blight

- American Housing Survey
  - Tracks length of vacancy and certain property characteristics
  - Samples only metropolitan areas on a rotating basis
  - Spatial unit is larger than census tract

USPS Administrative Data

- HUD receives quarterly extracts at the Zip+4 level on addresses identified by the USPS as having been "Vacant" or "No-Stat" in the previous quarter.

- Represents the universe of all addresses in the United States and are updated every three months.

- The main advantage of USPS data is their potential utility for tracking neighborhood change over time.

- Under the agreement with the USPS, HUD can make the data available publicly at the Census Tract level provided users agree to the terms and conditions of the sublicense.

Data Elements

- **Total Number of Addresses** - This reflects all addresses (residential and commercial) that USPS has recorded in their database.
- **Total Vacant Addresses** - These are addresses that delivery staff on urban routes have identified as being vacant (not collecting their mail) for 90 days or longer.
- **Total No-Stat Addresses** - There are many reasons an address can be classified as No-Stat, including:
  - Rural Route addresses vacant for 90 days or longer
  - Addresses for businesses or homes under construction and not yet occupied
  - Addresses in urban areas identified by a carrier as not likely to be active for some time

Data Elements (continued)

- USPS started counting days in each vacancy category from November 18, 2005
  - Average Days Address Vacant
  - *Median Number Days Address Vacant (not included in tract-level summary file)*
  - Vacant 3 months to less count
  - Vacant 3 months to 6 months count
  - Vacant 6 months to 12 months count
  - Vacant 12 months to 24 months count
  - Vacant 24 months to 36 months count
  - Vacant 36 months or longer count
  - Previous Quarter Vacant Currently in Service Count
  - Previous Quarter Vacant Currently No-Stat Count

Data Elements (continued)

- USPS started counting days in each "No-Stat" category from November 18, 2005
  - Average Days Address No-Stat
  - *Median Number Days Address No-Stat (not included in tract-level summary file)*
  - No-Stat 3 months to less count
  - No-Stat 3 months to 6 months count
  - No-Stat 6 months to 12 months count
  - No-Stat 12 months to 24 months count
  - No-Stat 24 months to 36 months count
  - No-Stat 36 months or longer count
  - Previous Quarter No-Stat Currently in Service Count

What have we learned so far?

- Vacation/Resort areas have very high rates of vacant addresses.
- Areas with high growth have high rates of No-Stat addresses as do areas of significant decline.
  - An increase in total addresses with a similar increase in No-Stat addresses likely reflects new construction/additions.
  - No-Stats with a stable or reduced number of addresses probably reflect long-term vacant addresses.
- In distressed areas, a reduction in total AMS addresses from quarter-to-quarter appears to be a strong indicator of where demolition is occurring.
  - Note that if a building is demolished to be replaced by another building, the address will likely be moved to No-Stat status and not be removed from the total number of addresses.

Feedback

HUD is very interested in what other researchers/practitioners learn from using these data.

http://www.huduser.org/datasets/usps.html

Robert_N._Renner@hud.gov