

Office of Personnel Management

§ 591.220

SURVEY AND DATA COLLECTION AREAS—  
Continued

COLA areas & reference areas	Survey area
Washington, DC-VA.	Arlington County, Fairfax County, Prince William County, City of Alexandria, City of Fairfax, City of Falls Church, City of Manassas, and City of Manassas Park.

(b) *Rest of the State of Alaska COLA area.* OPM may collect survey data on-site, use alternative indicators of relative living costs (e.g., price and cost information published by the University of Alaska), or both. If the use of alternative indicators would result in a COLA rate reduction, OPM will conduct onsite surveys in one or more locations in the Rest of the State of Alaska COLA area, before making a reduction, to ensure that the reduction is warranted.

(c) *Determining Survey Coverage.* To aid OPM in determining survey coverage, OPM may from time to time conduct surveys of Federal employees in the COLA areas and/or the Washington, DC, area to determine where employees shop and what they spend on certain goods or services and to collect other information related to the price surveys and the calculation of price indexes.

**§ 591.216 How does OPM combine survey data for the DC area and for COLA areas with multiple survey areas?**

(a) *Washington, DC, area.* For each survey item except shelter, OPM averages separately the prices collected in each of the DC survey areas identified in § 591.215(a) and then averages these average prices together using equal weights to compute an overall average by item for the DC area.

(b) *COLA areas with multiple survey areas.* OPM computes weighted average indexes at the PEG, MEG, and overall level by using the corresponding indexes and Federal employment weights from each survey area within the COLA area.

**§ 591.217 In which outlets does OPM collect prices?**

OPM collects prices in popular outlets in each survey area. OPM selects these outlets based on their proximity to the housing data collection areas, accessibility by road, physical size, advertising, and other characteristics that reflect sales volume. To the extent practical, OPM prices like items in the same types of outlets in the COLA areas and the Washington, DC, area. As warranted, OPM also may conduct point-of-purchase surveys and select outlets based on the results of those surveys.

**§ 591.218 How does OPM compute price indexes?**

Except for shelter and energy utilities, OPM averages by item the prices collected in each survey area. For the Washington, DC, area, OPM computes a simple average for each item based on the average prices from each DC survey area. On an item-by-item basis, OPM divides the COLA survey area average price by the DC average price and produces a price index.

**§ 591.219 How does OPM compute shelter price indexes?**

(a) In addition to rental and rental equivalence prices and/or estimates, OPM obtains for each unit surveyed information about the important characteristics of the unit, such as size, number of bathrooms, and other amenities that reflect the quality of the unit.

(b) OPM then uses these characteristics and rental prices and/or estimates in hedonic regressions (a type of multiple regression) to compute for each COLA area the price index for rental and/or rental equivalent units of comparable quality and size between the COLA survey area and the Washington, DC, area.

**§ 591.220 How does OPM calculate energy utility cost indexes?**

(a) OPM calculates energy utility cost indexes based on the relative cost of maintaining a standard size dwelling in each area at a given ambient temperature and the cost of other energy uses. Although the dwelling size may vary from one COLA survey area to another, OPM compares the utility cost