



Questions and Answers about the 1997 Economic Census

This December, businesses across the nation will receive their 1997 Economic Census forms. The forms are due February 12, 1998.

Why does the government take the Economic Census?

Good public policy depends on accurate information. The Economic Census provides official measures of output for industries and geographic areas. Economic policy makers in Federal, state and local governments use Economic Census data to project trends, plan for development, and assess the impact of trade and corporate restructuring on particular industries. Economic Census data also help build the foundation for economic indicators and other statistics.

Why do we need an Economic Census when other surveys provide more timely figures?

The Economic Census provides comprehensive detail about the nation's economic activity for all geographic areas. Census data about industries, their inputs and outputs, and how they relate to each other, are available nowhere else.

Surveys like Monthly Retail Sales provide the timely information needed by markets and policy makers. Surveys request minimum detail and sample a fraction of the businesses contacted in a census. Census totals serve as benchmarks to keep surveys accurate.

The Economic Census also provides key elements to help update economic indicators like Gross Domestic Product and Producer Price Index.

Can businesses use Economic Census results?

Yes. Companies can use Economic Census data to study their industries, look for business markets, and evaluate investment opportunities. Economic Census data help businesses compare industries and locations and provide the official information that many investors expect in a business plan.

Should a business be concerned about sharing sensitive information with the Census Bureau?

Economic Census responses are seen only by Census employees who — under Title 13 — are sworn to secrecy under penalty of fines or imprisonment.

The Census Bureau does not cross-reference or share confidential information with regulatory or other agencies. Census forms are even exempt from the Freedom of Information Act. No business competitors can obtain the responses of another company.

What is the penalty for not responding?

Section 224 of the census law (Title 13, United States Code) provides for penalties of up to \$500 for failure to report and \$10,000 for intentionally providing false information.

How do businesses get picked for the Census?

Economic Census forms are sent to all but the smallest businesses in every industry and geographic area in the United States. Most businesses with five or more paid employees, and a sample of smaller ones, will receive a census form.

How are 1997 Economic Census forms easier to complete?

A toll-free "help line" (1-800-233-6136) will be available 12 hours a day to answer questions that recipients have about filling out the forms.

In many industries, businesses with multiple locations can report electronically using spreadsheet-like questionnaires on diskette.

Business people can check the Internet — www.census.gov/econ97 — to preview the forms they will receive in December.

What should a business person do if his or her business does not receive an Economic Census form?

Nothing.

To reduce the burden on American businesses, the Census Bureau does not send Economic Census forms to most very small firms. Forms go to all mid-sized and large businesses, but only to a sample of the smallest.

If a company has more than one location, all forms are sent to the company headquarters. If the headquarters has all the required figures, managers at individual offices may never see a census form.

A few industries are not covered by the Economic Census — farming, forestry, fisheries, and agricultural services; schools and colleges; and labor, political, and religious organizations.

What is this "NAICS" I keep hearing about?

NAICS (pronounced "nakes") is the new North American Industry Classification System. This new structure for classifying business activity identifies dozens of industries never before singled out in census data. NAICS replaces the old Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) system, provides first-ever comparability with industry data for Canada and Mexico, and provides a framework for the business statistics of the 21st century.

Will the conversion from SIC to NAICS make it harder for businesses to report?

No. The change from SIC to NAICS will not be obvious to most businesses filling out Economic Census forms. Most census forms look about the same as they did in the 1992 Economic Census — only a few categories on some forms have been adjusted to accommodate the new NAICS classifications.

Why do you call it the 1997 Economic Census when you don't collect the data until 1998?

We ask businesses to report data on their activity during calendar years 1997. That's why we wait until the start of 1998 to collect the data.

When and how will people see the results of the 1997 Economic Census?

The first census results will be available in early 1999, with an unprecedented early release of totals for all economic sectors right at the start. All results will be issued on the Internet and on CD-ROM over the following two years. Highlights will be published in printed reports.

What other information can I get on the Internet?

www.census.gov/econ97 contains:

- samples of every 1997 Economic Census form;
- complete details about NAICS and other topics;
- publication titles and release schedules; and
- geographic profiles and complete reports from the 1992 Economic Census.

How can I help?

Write articles for your publication in December and January to inform your business readers that Economic Census forms have been sent out. Write articles in February when the forms are due. Press releases are included in this kit and sample articles are available on our web site at www.census.gov/econ97.

Publish an editorial noting the value of the Economic Census for your industry or area and urging businesses to get their forms in on time. A sample editorial is included in this kit.

Ask your advertising manager to run our public service advertisements. Camera-ready ad slicks are enclosed. Color ads are available on the web site. We will provide new ads for your February and March issues. If you have special requirements, contact us at the address below.

Please send a copy of any issues of your periodical that feature advertising, stories, or editorials related to the 1997 Economic Census to:

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