

Tell me about the National Compensation Survey...

The National Compensation Survey (COMP2000): The New Wage Survey



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Bureau of Labor Statistics

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Answers to some often asked questions

WHAT is the National Compensation Survey?

The National Compensation Survey (NCS) program produces information on wages by occupation for many metropolitan areas and also for the Nation as a whole. Wage rates for different work levels within occupation groups also are published. Data are broken down for private industry, State and local governments, full-time workers, part-time workers, and other workforce characteristics.

Information on employer costs for compensation and benefit plan provisions is planned for the future.

WHO runs the National Compensation Survey?

The survey is conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Labor. In addition to NCS, BLS produces a wide variety of labor-related statistics such as the national unemployment rate, the Consumer Price Index, and the Employment Cost Index.

WHEN is the survey conducted?

BLS selects a sample of establishments in both the private sector and State and local governments in over 150 metropolitan areas and non-metropolitan counties throughout the United States. Data are collected from all establishments in a specified area over a period of a few months. No establishment is asked to provide data more than once in any year. In subsequent years, some establishments are contacted via mail and telephone for the required data.

WHERE does the survey information come from?

Each establishment is initially visited by a BLS field economist. Data for the survey come from payroll reports and job descriptions. The field economist asks for general information about the number of employees in the establishment and the type of work performed there. Detailed data for some of the occupations in the establishment are also requested. (The number of occupations for which data are requested varies with the size of the establishment.) For each selected occupation, information on job duties, skills and education required for the job, hours worked, and pay rates are among the items requested.

WHY are these statistics needed?

NCS data are used by both private companies and government agencies to help set pay and to compare their costs with those of other firms. They are valuable for firms considering relocation. The data are a major component of the setting of wage rates for Federal Government employees. Economic and academic researchers also are interested in the findings.

CAN the survey be accurate when it is based on only a sample?

Each establishment's chance of being included in the sample depends on its employment size—the larger the establishment, the greater the chance of selection. The same is true for the selection of occupations within an establishment. Data are weighted to represent similar establishments (based on size and industry) and occupations in the survey area. Use of these scientific sampling techniques ensures that the survey produces representative, unbiased estimates.