

Frequently Asked Question (FAQs)

Effects of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma on the August 2017 New Residential Construction Data

How much do the areas that had the biggest impact from Hurricanes Harvey and Irma typically represent of the nation's total new residential construction?

The counties in Texas that were included in the FEMA Hurricane Harvey Individual Assistance disaster declarations accounted for about 4% of U.S. total housing units authorized by permits in 2016, and about 8% of housing units authorized in the South region (see table below). These counties accounted for about 30% of total 2016 authorizations in the state of Texas.

The counties in Florida that were included in the FEMA Hurricane Irma Individual Assistance disaster declarations* accounted for about 9% of U.S. total housing units authorized by permits in 2016, and about 18% of housing units authorized in the South region (see table). These counties accounted for about 91% of total 2016 authorizations in the state of Florida.

Together, the FEMA Individual Assistance counties in Texas and Florida accounted for about 13% of 2016 U.S. authorizations and 26% of authorizations in the South region.

	Total Units Authorized in 2016	Single-family Units Authorized in 2016	Percent of 2016 U.S. Total Units	Percent of 2016 U.S. Single-family Units	Percent of 2016 South Total Units	Percent of 2016 South Single-family Units	Percent of 2016 State Total Units	Percent of 2016 State Single-family Units
United States	1,206,642	750,796						
South Region	594,524	406,007						
State of Texas	165,853	106,511						
Harris County	22,661	15,511	1.9%	2.1%	3.8%	3.8%	13.7%	14.6%
Fort Bend County	10,279	9,777	0.9%	1.3%	1.7%	2.4%	6.2%	9.2%
Montgomery County	5,537	4,175	0.5%	0.6%	0.9%	1.0%	3.3%	3.9%
All other Texas FEMA Disaster Declaration Counties	10,792	9,920	0.9%	1.3%	1.8%	2.4%	6.5%	9.3%
Total of Texas FEMA Disaster Declaration Counties	49,269	39,383	4.1%	5.2%	8.3%	9.7%	29.7%	37.0%
State of Florida	116,240	75,148						
Orange County	11,952	6,156	1.0%	0.8%	2.0%	1.5%	10.3%	8.2%
Hillsborough County	10,662	6,308	0.9%	0.8%	1.8%	1.6%	9.2%	8.4%
Miami-Dade County	9,317	2,873	0.8%	0.4%	1.6%	0.7%	8.0%	3.8%
Duval County	5,751	2,908	0.5%	0.4%	1.0%	0.7%	4.9%	3.9%
Lee County	5,417	4,092	0.4%	0.5%	0.9%	1.0%	4.7%	5.4%
Palm Beach County	5,320	2,297	0.4%	0.3%	0.9%	0.6%	4.6%	3.1%
All other Florida FEMA Disaster Declaration Counties*	56,849	41,960	4.7%	5.6%	9.6%	10.3%	48.9%	55.8%
Total of Florida FEMA Disaster Declaration Counties*	105,268	66,594	8.7%	8.9%	17.7%	16.4%	90.6%	88.6%
Total of Texas and Florida FEMA Disaster Declaration Counties	154,537	105,977	12.8%	14.1%	26.0%	26.1%		

Source: U. S. Census Bureau, Building Permits Survey

*as of September 14, 2017, from FEMA.gov

Does the Census Bureau produce monthly estimates of New Residential Construction for the affected areas?

Yes, monthly state and local area estimates for August will be available for building permit authorizations on September 27, 2017, and September estimates will be released on October 26, 2017. Data on building permit authorizations are available by state, metropolitan area, county, and permit-issuing place. Monthly county and metropolitan area totals are the sum of the data for places requested to report monthly; for counties and metropolitan areas not fully covered by the monthly sample, monthly totals include only sampled places. Annual totals include all places.

Housing starts and completions are obtained from the Survey of Construction, a survey designed to make regional and U.S. estimates, not local estimates. Housing starts and completions are not available at the state or local level.

How was the collection and estimation of building permit data for August affected by the hurricanes?

If a local government in the monthly Building Permits Survey (BPS) sample does not report its permit activity to the Census Bureau, data for that jurisdiction are imputed based on the assumption that the ratio of authorizations for the current time period to the prior year total is the same for reporting and nonreporting jurisdictions in that Census Region.

Response for August from the jurisdictions affected by both hurricanes was not significantly lower than normal. Hurricane Harvey impacted construction activity in Texas only for the last week of the month and Hurricane Irma did not have an impact until September. The imputation was not adjusted to attempt to reduce the August estimates for any nonreporting jurisdictions.

How will the hurricanes affect building permit data for September?

When estimating units authorized in September 2017, for jurisdictions in counties included in the Texas and Florida Hurricane Harvey and Irma FEMA disaster declarations that do not report September data and cannot be contacted, we will assume that no permits for new residential units were issued.

How was the collection and estimation of data on housing starts and completions affected by the hurricanes?

Housing starts and completions are obtained from the Survey of Construction (SOC), a sample survey of new housing units from 900 permit jurisdictions and from a sample of land areas where permits are not required. Several areas in Texas and Florida that were impacted by Hurricanes Harvey and Irma are in the Survey of Construction sample. Permits issued in August were selected for the sample. However, for permits sampled in August and prior months, information on the start or completion status at the end of August was collected for only about 60% of cases in the Texas and Florida counties in the FEMA Individual Assistance disaster declarations. Typically, this information is collected from respondents or by observation for nearly 95% of cases sampled for SOC.

For projects in the Survey of Construction for which we do not receive information in August or September, we assume that there was no change and count the units in their previous status as not started or under construction. Newly issued permits are counted as not started if the start status cannot be determined.

Did the Census Bureau alter the procedures for developing seasonally adjusted estimates for New Residential Construction?

No.

Will completely rebuilt houses be counted as new residential construction?

Yes. 100% rebuilds will be counted if the permit is issued as new construction by the permit office. However, most damaged homes are not completely rebuilt, but are considered repairs, which are not included in these statistics.

Will manufactured homes placed in the area be counted as new residential construction?

Manufactured (mobile) homes inspected by HUD at the factory (“HUD-code” homes) are not counted as new residential construction because permits from the local jurisdictions are not required to inspect the construction of the units. Shipments of these units are counted separately in the Manufactured Housing Survey; data from that survey can be found at: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/mhs.html> . Modular homes without a HUD factory inspection require local building permits and are included in the new residential construction statistics.

Source: U. S. Census Bureau
Economic Indicators Division

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