USPS Vacancy Indicators

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) have entered into an agreement whereby the USPS provides HUD with addresses identified by the USPS as vacant or no-stat (see Definitions for an explanation of the no-stat category). In addition to the number of vacant addresses, other available indicators include the total number of addresses, the average days an address is vacant or no-stat, and the length of time an address is vacant or no-stat.

I. Definitions

Vacant addresses are those that the USPS delivery staff, on urban routes, has identified as vacant because the mail has not been collected for 90 days or longer.

There are many reasons why an address could be classified as no-stat. These reasons include the following: a rural route address is vacant for 90 days or longer; an address is under construction and not yet occupied; or a carrier identifies an address in an urban area as "not likely to be active for some time." (This tends to happen when a building is being demolished and replaced, and while this is happening the address is kept the same).

Below is a list of the USPS vacancy indicators that appear in NEO CANDO.

Total number of addresses: This represents all addresses (**residential and commercial**) that the USPS has in their database.

Total vacant addresses (number)

Total vacant addresses (percent): Calculated as total vacant addresses / total number of addresses x 100.

Average number of days that addresses are vacant

Number of addresses vacant
3 months or less
3 to 6 months
6 to 12 months
12 to 24 months
24 to 36 months
36 month or longer

Number of addresses that had a previous quarter vacancy that are currently in service

Number of addresses that had a previous quarter vacancy that are currently no-stat

Total no-stat addresses (number)

Total no-stat addresses (percent): Calculated as total no-stat addresses / total number of addresses x 100

Average number of days that addresses are no-stat

Number of addresses no-stat
    3 months or less
    3 to 6 months
    6 to 12 months
    12 to 24 months
    24 to 36 months
    36 month or longer

Number of addresses that had a previous quarter no-stat that are currently in service

Beginning in the 4th quarter of 2007, data are available for residential, business, and other categories separately.

II. Precautions and Information regarding use of data

In March 2010 USPS began implementation of new procedures to improve the accuracy of the vacant indicator. This changeover has led to an increase in vacancies across the nation, causing year-over-year vacancy comparisons and calculations spanning March 2010 to be problematic. The new USPS application allows for delivery unit/carrier to answer yes or no (an address is either vacant or not) which then updates database automatically (nightly). Along with the application are data provided to the carrier from other data sources including the USPS Change of Address and USPS Address Change Service. Census 2000 mailings were also used as a "one time" source for the application. This new application should improve data quality over time, but caution should be used in measuring change over time as the new procedures are fully implemented.

The starting point for the data set is November 18, 2005. This impacts how to interpret the indicators that provide information about how long an address has been on the vacant or no-stat list. For example, it will not be until November 2008 that addresses would have the opportunity to be on the vacant or no-stat list for 36 months or longer. Until that time, the value in NEO CANDO will be zero. The count of addresses either vacant or no-stat for 24 to 36 months will also be incomplete until the necessary amount of time has passed since November 2005.

The USPS supplies HUD with the data at the ZIP+4 level. HUD then takes the information and geocodes and aggregates it to the census tract. Not all of the records are able to be geocoded; about 1% of the records are excluded from the files made available to the public. However, with each new quarter of data, HUD tries to re-geocode the previous records that were not included in the public file. It is possible, then, that there will be some variation in the aggregate files from quarter to quarter. This should be kept in mind when looking at changes occurring between quarters.

High rates of vacancy will be in vacation/resort areas.

When interpreting the no-stat indicator, it will be helpful to keep the following in mind for urban areas:

Areas of high growth and areas of high decline will each have high rates of no-stat addresses. It will be important to be able to distinguish between the two scenarios.

It is likely that an increase in the total number of addresses, coupled with an increase in no-stat addresses is indicative of new construction.

Meanwhile, an increase in no-stat addresses combined with a stable or decreased number of total addresses most likely signifies long-term vacant addresses.

Consistent decreases in total addresses from quarter to quarter are likely an indicator of where demolitions are occurring, especially if the area is distressed. (Note: If a demolished building is going to be replaced, it is likely that the address is moved to no-stat and not removed from the total number of addresses.)

In urban areas, if an address is occupied but the mail for the address goes to a P.O. Box, the address is not counted as vacant or no-stat.

In rural areas, if there is an address where street delivery is available but the mail goes to a P.O. Box, the address is usually counted as no-stat.

Due to delays associated with separating business and residential addresses, the fourth quarter data for 2007 *ended in February 2008, not in December 2007.*

III. Data source and suggested citation

Source of USPS Data: The United States Postal Service (USPS) provides quarterly extracts to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD geocodes and aggregates the data, and posts it on its web site for others to download.

Update Schedule: Quarterly

Years Available: Earliest year available – March 2006

Geographic Coverage: 8 County Cleveland-Akron Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area (CMSA), which includes Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, Medina, Portage and Summit Counties, and the following counties: Ashland, Columbiana, Erie, Huron, Mahoning, Richland, Stark, Trumbull and Wayne Counties

Suggested Citation: NEO CANDO system, Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development, MSASS, Case Western Reserve University (http://neocando.case.edu)

IV. Links to related web sites

American Community Survey

Current Population Survey/Housing Vacancy Survey

HUD Aggregated USPS Administrative Data on Address Vacancies