

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is the Quarter 4 Ending December 31, 2005 file missing the rest of the vacancy and no-stat categories?

The starting point for counting the number of days that an address is in no-stat or vacancy status is November 18, 2005. Therefore, all the no-stat and vacancy counts in the December, 2005 tract-level summary file fit into the 0 to 3 month no-stat and vacant categories. Because the USPS started counting in November there is no data for the remaining vacancy and no-stat categories in the December, 2005 file.

How do I find my community in the national tract-level file?

The GEOID field in each tract-level file contains the concatenation of the state FIPS code, the county FIPS code and the Census tract code. By querying this field you can pick out states, counties, or specific tracts within a county. If you are unsure what your county or state FIPS code is, go to FIPS County Lookup page on the U.S. Census Bureau's website at <http://www.census.gov/geo/www/fips/fips65/>. So for example, if you would like to select the census tracts in Bergen County, NJ you would construct a query that selects all the records where GEOID begins with '34003' because the FIPS code for New Jersey is '34' and the county code for Bergen is '003'.

How do I read the tract-level summary files?

The tract-level summary files are downloaded as zipped DBF files. Once you've unzipped them, you can use a variety of programs to read the files. Excel is the most popular reader for DBF files, but we highly recommend that you DO NOT use Microsoft Excel to read these files. Microsoft Excel 2003 has a maximum row limit 65,536, although I have heard that the limit has been increased in Microsoft Excel 2007. There are 65,688 records in each tract summary file, so by opening the file in Excel you risk losing some of the data. There are many other software packages that read DBF files, such as SPSS, SAS, or Access. Most GIS software will also read in DBF files. We are considering providing an option to download the tract summary files in text format.

Why am I getting a Microsoft Jet database engine error when I try to import the DBF file into Access?

For some reason, Access only recognizes a DBF file if the name of the file is 8 characters or less. If you want import the DBF files into Access, then rename them using 8 characters or less.

Can I obtain the non-aggregated version of the data or a level of aggregation finer than Census tract?

No. The ability to provide vacancy and no-stat information to HUD was thoroughly reviewed by the USPS Privacy and Legal departments in coordination with Address

Management. This review determined that the information could be provided only if use was aggregate to a Census tract level. Aggregates at a Census tract level virtually eliminate the chance of informational disclosure of individual addresses and their occupancy status.

Are P.O. Boxes counted as addresses?

No. P.O. Boxes are not counted as addresses. Generally speaking, in urban areas, physical addresses that are occupied, but receive mail at a P.O. Box., are counted in the total number of addresses as NOT vacant or no-stat. In rural areas, however, those physical addresses where street delivery is available, but a P.O. Box is used instead, the address is usually counted as no-stat.

Am I able to distinguish between residential and non-residential?

Not yet. HUD is currently negotiating with USPS to obtain the same data but with the residential/non-residential distinction. If things go well, we should be able to provide these classifications in the quarterly aggregate Census tract summary files.

What should I do with the no-stat categories?

The no-stat category can be confusing because it can signify growth or decline depending on what AMS is doing. For example if AMS is growing and you see a similar growth in the no-state 0 to 3 month category, HUD and USPS agree that this may be a good proxy for new construction. But if AMS is holding steady or declining and you see increase in no-stat, then that could be a sign of a neighborhood in trouble. A straight up decline in AMS may be a good proxy for demolition. Those are the general hypotheses that we're working on right now and they only apply to urban areas.