



Media Release

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Statistics on Washington's housing market and other useful information are available on WCRER's Web site: www.cbe.wsu.edu/~wcrer. For other information on real estate markets around the State of Washington, or general information about the real estate industry in the state (excluding legal questions), readers can reach the WCRER at 1-800-835-9683.

Mobile Households

Americans are characterized as a very mobile society, and most of us can see that in our own families. Surprisingly, mobility rates during the early years of the 21st century have been lower than during the last years of the 20th century. Since the year 2000, an average of 14 percent of Americans have moved each year down two percent from the mid- to late-1990s. Roughly 43 million people moved throughout the United States in 1994, but only 40 million moved during 2003. When you factor in population growth during the decade, the move rate was much lower.

Moves, of course, come in many forms. Most people move locally, defined as within a single county. Even that can be misleading since county sizes differ from place to place. Washington has 39 counties, ranging in size from 175 square miles in San Juan County to 5,268 square miles in Okanogan County. By way of comparison, the nearest state in terms of geographic size is Missouri, with 2,342 more square miles than Washington, but 76 more counties. Moving within a county keeps one closer to home by definition in Missouri than it does in Washington.

Young adults are the persons most likely to move. Thirty percent of householders aged 20-24 moved in 2003, followed by 28.1 percent of those 25-29 years of age. Third were children aged 1-4 (presumably moving with their 20-something parents). By contrast, 4.0 percent or fewer of each age group over age 70 moved in the last year.

Renters are more mobile than home owners, and more likely to move away from the area where they currently reside. While only 7.4 percent of owners moved in 2003, 30.7 percent of renters did so. Moves to a different state were made by 5.8 percent of renters and 1.4 percent of owners. However, this works out to 18.9 percent of the movers in each case—remarkably consistent.

The poor, especially households living in poverty, had much higher move rates than more affluent households. Education did not significantly influence move rates, but when the more highly educated moved, they tended to move much further. Households over age 55 were more likely to move further.

Reasons for moving are critical in linking behavior to real estate markets. Housing-related reasons (home purchase, better home/apartment, better neighborhoods, and occasionally cheaper housing) accounted for roughly half the moves. Family reasons, especially marriage or divorce, or the birth of children represented another quarter. Surprisingly, job reasons were a factor in only 15 percent of the moves, with other reasons, including climate and health concerns, a distant fourth.

Anytime an article of this type is prepared, WCRER is asked about localized data. Unfortunately, this data has not even been tabulated for the four Census regions, let alone individual states or local areas. Perhaps as federal statistics incorporate greater reliance on the American Community Survey, similar data will become available for more detailed geography.