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## Existing Home Sales Fell in April

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The housing slump, which has weighed on nearly every corner of the nation's economy, showed no signs of easing in April.

Sales of previously owned homes, which make up the bulk of the housing market, dipped 1 percent last month to an annual rate of 4.89 million. That figure, which was slightly more than expected, represents yet another record low, although the report, put out by the private [National Association of Realtors](#), only dates to 1999.

The biggest decline came in sales of apartments and condominiums, which plunged 5.2 percent after two months of rising sales. Demand for single-family homes dropped 0.5 percent in April, the Realtors said on Friday.

The major stock indexes, down for much of the morning, climbed back slightly after the release of the report, which came in slightly ahead of economists' expectations. The Dow industrials was off about 115 points by 10:30 a.m.

The median value of a previously owned home was \$202,300 in April, down 8 percent from a year ago.

Inventories also ticked up: at the current sales rate, it would take nearly a year to clear out the current backlog of unsold homes.

Homeowners have watched their property values plunge for months, although the slump comes after several years of a remarkable run-up in home prices. Still, economists believe the declines have discouraged purchases, as would-be buyers hold out for prices to fall further.

"The sharp increase in inventories will continue to keep potential buyers out of the market and depress overall prices further," Joseph Brusuelas, chief economist at Merk Investments, wrote in a research note.

A loss of confidence among lenders has also put a damper on sales, as even Americans who are eager to buy a home find themselves unable to procure mortgages from lenders who have tightened their standards.

Analysts fear that an increase in foreclosures will only add to the inventory overhang, pushing prices down further. Any substantial recovery in the housing market is not expected until at least the latter half of 2008.

The report divides sales figures into four general regions of the country. According to the Realtors, April sales dropped 6 percent in the Midwest and 4.4 percent in the Northeast, but rose 6.4 percent in the West. Sales stayed steady in the South.

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