While some effects of the federal government shutdown are easy to see—national park closures, for example—other effects are less obvious. The federal government collects, analyzes and publishes a lot of data—particularly economic data—that is used by both the private and public sector to make significant decisions. But the flow of new critical data from agencies like the Department of Labor or the Department of Commerce has been abruptly halted by the shutdown.

Just one example is the monthly jobs report, a highly publicized and critical set of monthly economic indicators produced by the federal government that includes the unemployment rate.

The Department of Labor was scheduled to release the report Oct. 4. A statement released by the Labor Department last Thursday explains that, due to the shutdown, the report will not be released as scheduled and an alternative release date has not been set:

“Due to the lapse in funding, the Employment Situation release which provides data on employment during the month of September, compiled by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics, will not be issued as scheduled on Friday, October 4, 2013. An alternative release date has not been scheduled. The Employment Situation release includes the unemployment rate (from the household survey) and payroll employment (from the business establishment survey).”

In addition, the Labor Department produces the job openings and layoffs report, which was due out Oct. 8, and the import and export price indices, which were due out Oct. 10. Neither report will be available anytime soon.

The Department of Labor isn’t the only federal agency whose data is missing. Reports produced by the National Agriculture Statistics Services are critical to farmers and livestock producers to price crops and to determine what to grow and when they should sell.

An Associated Press report on the shutdown quotes Tim Peterson, a Kansas farmer, who said he can’t make important marketing decisions without access to the agricultural reports.

“We have no clue what is going on in the market,” said Peterson.

In some cases, archived federal data is also unavailable to the public.

Such is the case with the immense amount of information usually provided by the U.S. Census Bureau. The Census site shut down completely after the shutdown, cutting off access to new data, like
the U.S. trade deficit report that was due out Oct. 8, or to previously released data on everything from population to housing.

Even accurately understanding the impact of the shutdown itself—and taking steps to mitigate or respond to those impacts—is made more difficult without federal data. At a local business luncheon in Vermont this week, Eric Rosengren, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, explained that the lack of indicators makes it difficult to calculate the effects of the shutdown:

“It is to be much harder to get a gauge of what's happening with the economy if we don’t have at least government official statistics ... if we don't have good, reliable government statistics it will make it much harder to be able to take a gauge of what's going on,” he said.

Although private data is still flowing, if federal data collection and reporting doesn't return soon, it will become increasingly difficult for policymakers and those in the private sector to make evidence-based decisions that can only be determined using accurate data.

**Key Indicators Impacted by the Shutdown**

- Employment Report
- Construction Spending
- Factory Orders
- Trade Balance
- Wholesale, Retail and Business Inventories
- Retail Sales
- New Home Sales
- Housing Starts
- GDP
- Personal Income and Spending
- CPI
- PPI
- Import Prices
- Treasury Budget Balance


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