

What is a Metropolitan Statistical Area and why are there so many types of MSA's?

MSA is an acronym for Metropolitan Statistical Area. Geographic entities like counties, cities and towns are grouped together, based on standards defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Each group is classified as either a Metropolitan Statistical Area or a Micropolitan Statistical Area. These areas are solely defined and used for statistical purposes.

An MSA is a group of urbanized areas, central counties and outlying counties that are defined as follows:

1. Each urbanized area with a population of at least 50,000 is defined as a **Metropolitan Statistical Area**. While an urban cluster with a population of at least 10,000 people but not more than 50,000 people, is defined to be a **Micropolitan Statistical Area**.
2. **Central counties** will have at least 50% of their population in different urban areas or within a single urban area. The urban area should have a minimum population of 10,000 people.
3. **Outlying counties** need to fulfill certain commuting requirements. Either 25% of the employed residents have to commute to work in the central county, or 25% of the employed reside in the central county.

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) using data from the Census Bureau, defines the Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas by meeting well defined standards that help provide nationally consistent definitions for the purposes of collecting and publishing statistics for specific geographic areas. OMB periodically revises the list of MSAs. The most recent revision was as of November, 2007. The complete list can be found at: <http://www.census.gov/population/www/metroareas/metrodef.html>

Some History: In the 1970s, the Census Bureau used designations known as Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSAs). The idea behind the SMSA was to capture large population centers –often multi-county areas that were significantly linked to each economically. In the 1980s, the Census Bureau and OMB began using MSAs instead of SMSAs. By the 1990s, the concept of the metropolitan area had become clouded with various classifications of MSAs such as Class C or D for smaller areas. A fundamental revision came before the 2000 Census with the new classification of MSAs and micropolitan areas.

In New Mexico, there are currently three MSAs which are described in Table 1 (see page 2).

MSA	Component Counties	FIPS Code	Population (2000 Census)	Population (2008 Estimate)
Albuquerque			729,649	845,754
	Bernalillo	35001	556,678	635,139
	Sandoval	35043	89,908	122,298
	Torrance	35057	16,911	16,269
	Valencia	35061	66,152	72,207
Las Cruces			174,682	201,603
	Dona Ana	35013	174,682	201,603
Santa Fe			129,292	143,937
	Santa Fe	35049	129,292	143,937
MSA total			1,033,623	1,191,294
New Mexico			1,819,046	1,984,356
MSAs as Percent of Total			56.8	60.0

Source: Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census Table 1: Annual Estimates of the Population for Counties of New Mexico: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2008 (CO-EST2008-01-35) March 19, 2009. Available at: <http://www.census.gov/popest/counties/CO-EST2008-01.html>

In New Mexico there are sixteen micropolitan statistical areas described in Table 2. The American Community Survey (see <http://www.factfinder.census.gov>) provides data on the social, economic, housing, and demographic characteristics of these areas. The ACS data for these areas is an average of three years (2005-2007) based on a small sample.

MSA	County	FIPS Code	Population (2005-2007 ACS)
Alamogordo	Otero	35035	63,087
Carlsbad-Artesia	Eddy	35015	50,629
Clovis	Curry	35009	45,602
Deming	Luna	35029	26,563
Espanola	Rio Arriba	35039	40,700
Farmington	San Juan	35045	122,056
Gallup	McKinley	35031	70,385
Grants	Cibola	35006	27,164
Hobbs	Lea	35025	56,998
Las Vegas	San Miguel	35047	28,846
Los Alamos	Los Alamos	35028	n.a.
Portales	Roosevelt	35041	n.a.
Roswell	Chaves	35005	60,913
Ruidoso	Lincoln	35027	20,768
Silver City	Grant	35017	29,459
Taos	Taos	35055	31,079

Last Updated: June 24, 2009
