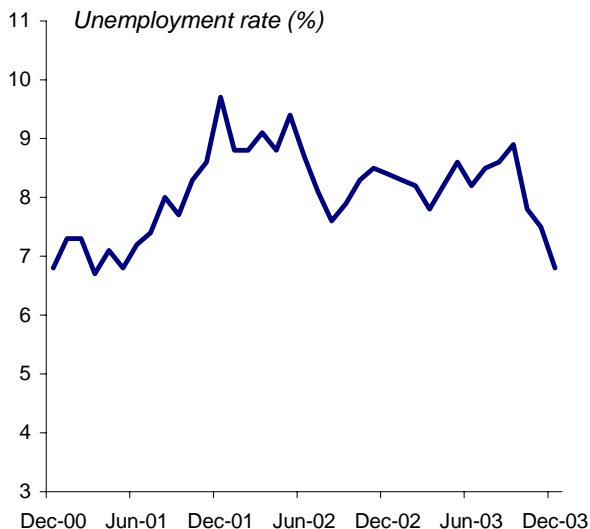


## Current Statistics ♦ January 2004

- **British Columbia's unemployment rate plunged 0.8 percentage points, falling to 6.8% (seasonally adjusted) in December, its lowest level in more than two-and-a-half years.** The drop in the jobless rate was largely due to strong job growth (23,600 people, +1.2%), which was more than enough to absorb the entry of an additional 5,700 (+0.3%) people into the labour force. For the first time since the spring of 2001, the province's unemployment rate was below the national average (7.4%).

*Data Source: Statistics Canada*

Unemployment rate drops to its lowest level in more than two-and-a-half years.



- **The number of British Columbians receiving regular Employment Insurance (EI) benefits fell 4.2% (to 65,090, seasonally adjusted) between October and November 2003.** Nationally, there were 1.4% fewer EI beneficiaries in November than in the previous month.

*Data Source: Statistics Canada*

- **British Columbia's all-items Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased 2.1% in 2003, marginally less than in 2002, when the inflation rate was 2.3%.** Rising energy prices were a major inflationary factor during 2003. The cost of energy

jumped 6.6% last year, its biggest advance since 2000. Prices for other goods and services advanced a more modest 1.8%.

*Data Source: Statistics Canada*

- **In December, consumer prices rose 1.8% (relative to the same month of 2002).**

*Data Source: Statistics Canada*

- **Sales by retailers in the province edged up 0.2% (seasonally adjusted) in November, following a stronger gain (+0.4%) in the previous month.**

*Data Source: Statistics Canada*

- **Wholesale sales in the province slipped (-0.5%, seasonally adjusted) in November, falling for the first time in five months.**

*Data Source: Statistics Canada*

- **The number of non-residents entering BC from the US and overseas fell in November (-1.1%, seasonally adjusted), marking the third straight monthly decline.** A three-month-long downturn in entries from the US (-1.8%) was the main reason for the decline. The number of same-day trips from the US to BC fell sharply (-3.6%), and there were 1.1% fewer overnight entries from the US.

Entries from overseas sources increased 2.2% in November, but Asian entries edged down (-0.2%).

*Data Source: Statistics Canada & BC Stats*

- **Total spending on research and development (R&D) activities in the province increased 3.8% in 2001, to \$1.7 billion.** About half (\$866 million) of these R&D expenditures were funded by business enterprises. The federal government (\$278 million), institutes of higher education (\$262 million) and foreign organizations (\$151 million) were other important sources of funding for R&D activities in BC.

*Data Source: SC, Catalogue 88F0006X1E*

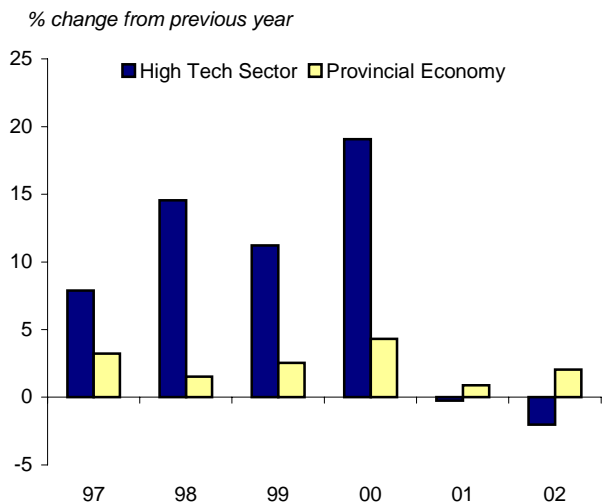
- **British Columbia's high tech sector shrank 2.0% in 2002, with real GDP falling to \$3.4 billion, just under 3% of the provincial total.**

High-tech manufacturers continued to struggle (-15.6%), but service industries expanded 4.8%.

The number of people working in BC's high-tech sector fell 1.9% in 2002, to 44,690.

Data Source: BC Stats

High tech sector GDP declines in 2002, after strong growth in the 1990s.



- **Radium Hot Springs (+8.1%), Pemberton (+7.3%) and Tofino (+6.2%) were the fastest-growing municipalities in the province in 2003.** Other municipalities that saw population growth of at least five percent were Courtenay (+5.7%), Slokan (+5.6%) and Harrison Hot Springs (+5.4%). Chetwynd (-4.8%) and Port Alice (-4.6%) experienced the biggest population declines.

Overall, BC's population grew 0.8%, increasing by 31,599 in 2003.

Data Source: BC Stats

- **The cost of new housing in BC's two largest metropolitan areas continued to rise in November.** In Victoria, new housing prices were 9.8% higher than in November 2002, while in the Vancouver area prices were 3.8% higher.

Data Source: Statistics Canada

- **The number of housing starts in the province advanced 1.5% (seasonally adjusted) in December, as new building activity resumed following a slump (-17.0%) in the previous month.**

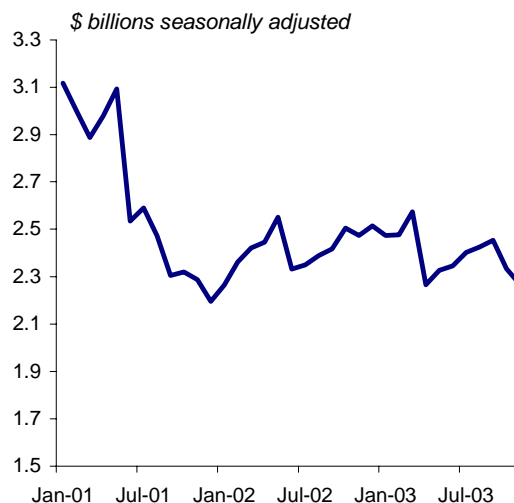
For the year as a whole, housing starts were up 20.7% in 2003.

Data Source: CMHC

- **Spending on non-residential buildings in BC was \$2.3 billion in 2003, falling (-4.6%) for the fifth time in the last six years.** A 28.3% drop in the institutional sector was the main reason for the decline. Despite weakness at the end of the year, investment in industrial (+11.5%) and commercial (+7.4%) projects was up strongly from 2002 levels. Both Vancouver (-1.3%) and Abbotsford (-30.0%) posted declines, but spending increased (+11.5%) in Victoria. Nationally, investment rose by a solid 5.7%.

Data Source: Statistics Canada

Exports continue to slump in November



- **Exports of BC products continued to slump in November, declining 2.8% (seasonally adjusted) from the October level.** US exports were flat (-0.2%), but the value of goods shipped to other international destinations was off 8.2%, falling for the third month in a row.

Exports dropped below October levels in most categories, with autos and machinery & equipment (-5.5%) and energy (-5.0%) products posting the biggest declines. International shipments of forest products (-2.6%) and industrial and consumer goods (-0.8%) were also weak. However, producers of agriculture and fish products saw shipments rise 1.6% in November, largely due to growth in US markets.

Data Source: Statistics Canada & BC Stats