

[WSJ.com](#) [MarketWatch.com](#) [Barrons.com](#) [All Things Digital](#) [More](#)



Get to the next level of investment research

Enter Symbol(s) or Keyword(s)

Welcome, please [sign in](#).
[My Portfolio](#) • [Community](#) • [VSE](#) • [Alerts](#)

FRONT PAGE **PERSONAL FINANCE**

[Auto](#) [Life & Money](#) [Real Estate](#) [Retirement](#) [Taxes](#) [Tools](#) [Advisers](#)

REAL ESTATE WEEKLY

This week's Real Estate stories

By MarketWatch

Last update: 2:59 p.m. EDT April 18, 2008

Real-estate companies may be struggling as the volume of home sales has decreased. But for companies that sell home warranties, business is looking a bit better.

Some providers of home service contracts saw nearly a 10% increase in sales last year, according to the Service Contract Industry Council. This came at a time when total home sales dropped more than 15% nationwide, according to the council's news release.

It's a logical trend, as brokers and home sellers are looking for incentives to encourage quick sales and "reduce downward negotiation on pricing," said Timothy Meenan, executive director of SCIC.

"The availability of a home service contract, which typically costs in the \$300 to \$500 range and covers a home's major systems, can make the decisive difference," he said. Contracts generally protect against breakdowns caused by normal wear and tear of home systems including plumbing, heating and cooling, and electrical.

Read more housing news in this week's real estate pages, including a look at how the wealthiest Americans view current housing conditions as a signal to buy and a Capitol Report about how lawmakers looking to be reelected soon are likely to push for expanding the reach of the Federal Housing Administration. Also, listen to an audio report on how renters may finally be gaining the upper hand over landlords.

For sellers, home warranties are an easy incentive to offer buyers. But buyers, take note: If a warranty comes with the house, make sure you're completely familiar with the terms of the contract. Once you move in, make sure you fulfill all the contract requirements, such as changing filters on heating and cooling systems, the SCIC said.

[Amy Hoak](#), real estate writer

America's wealthy see buying opportunities in sluggish real-estate market

Is now a good time to buy real estate? The size of your paycheck likely will play a big part in how you answer that question.

[See full story.](#)

Foreclosures spike 57% in last year

Foreclosures have jumped 57% since last March, led by Nevada, California and Florida. Rick Sharga at RealtyTrac tells John Wordock the crisis will linger and we could see record foreclosure levels this fall. As Sharga said, it's a good time to be in the lock business.

[Listen to Audio Report.](#)

FHA is cornerstone of housing rescue

While the White House wants to avoid moves it sees as bailing out irresponsible mortgage borrowers, observers say it's likely that lawmakers looking to be reelected this year will expand the reach of the Federal Housing Administration to keep more borrowers in their homes.

[See Capitol Report.](#)

Renters are finally getting the upper hand

The tables have turned. Renters are finally getting the upper hand over landlords. So says John Hannigan, a principal at commercial real estate brokerage Choyce Peterson. He tells Steve Orr the economic slowdown is now hurting landlords as rents flatten out.

[Listen to Audio Report.](#)

Pulse of home builders still 'pretty darn weak'

The pulse of the home building sector is "still pretty darn weak." That's how David Seiders, chief economist at the National Association of Home Builders, sums up the climate after the latest reading of builder confidence. He tells John Wordock home builders were enjoying increased foot traffic at their open houses earlier this year. But that traffic has gone flat. Despite the gloom and doom, Seiders is still hoping for a turnaround next year.

[Listen to Audio Report.](#)

Fannie, Freddie regulator sees perilous road ahead

Washington is counting on Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to help bring the housing sector back to life but their federal regulator said Tuesday that the two firms have some significant weaknesses of their own to work out.

[See full story.](#)

Housing starts plunge to a 17-year low

After two months of relative stability, housing starts plunged in March to the lowest level in 17 years, reinforcing gloom about the state of the housing market. Home starts by U.S. home builders plunged 11.9% to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 947,000 in March, the Commerce Department reported Wednesday.

[See Economic Report.](#)

Housing recovery still a way off

Following today's housing starts report, Stuart Hoffman of PNC Financial Services tells Nancy Lyons that there are just too many unsold homes out there and until builders work that inventory down they won't be digging any new holes in the ground. He thinks the downward trend still has a few levels to go before hitting bottom. He says construction will hit its low point in the second half of the year, while new home sales may not recover until next year. He also says the latest numbers on what consumers are paying will have the market breathing a sigh of relief, not because they're so great, but because they could have been much worse.

[Listen to Audio Report.](#)

Mortgage applications rose 2.5% last week: MBA

Applications filed for mortgages were up a seasonally adjusted 2.5% last week, while mortgage interest rates declined, the Mortgage Bankers Association said on Wednesday.

[See full story.](#)

Wachovia cuts unused home equity lines of credit

Wachovia Corp. said on Monday that it's limiting homeowners' ability to tap home equity lines of credit that they haven't used yet as the giant bank tries to cut its exposure to the broadening housing crisis. Other mortgage lenders, including Washington Mutual, Countrywide Financial and Indymac Bancorp have also been cutting home equity lines aggressively, Fred Cannon, an analyst at Keefe, Bruyette & Woods, wrote.

[See full story.](#)

Home builders discouraged by actual sales

U.S. home builders remain discouraged about their industry, but attitudes didn't worsen in April, according to the monthly sentiment index released Tuesday by their trade group.

[See Economic Report.](#)

Why lenders are leery of short sales

As more people fall behind on their mortgages, lenders have been slow to take advantage of a longstanding alternative to foreclosure -- a so-called short sale.

[See full story.](#)

Selling a home 'as is' isn't so simple

I am selling my house "as is" in a short sale, and have an offer that the bank approved. The buyers' inspection came up with \$1,000 in wood rot that I paid to fix. An inspection turned up mold, which will cost \$1,300 to clean up, and the outdoor air-conditioning unit got struck by lightning, which is going to cost \$900 more to fix. I have already paid \$1,000 more than I have. Must I pay for this? My real estate agent says so, without even seeing if the bank or buyer would chip in. Is this the sign of an agent who doesn't have my best interests in mind?

[See House Talk.](#)

Fixed-rate mortgages hold steady, ARMs drop

Interest rates for fixed-rate mortgages held relatively steady for the second week in a row while rates on adjustable-rate mortgages declined, Freddie Mac reported Thursday.

[See Mortgages.](#)

What's the best way to find a decent lender and get prequalified

I hope to move from Seattle to Sacramento in the coming months. I am currently renting, but hope to buy a home in California. What is the best way to find a decent bank or mortgage broker to begin to get prequalified for a home loan? I hear all kinds of ads on the Seattle radio stations for cheap financing, but don't believe or trust the ads.

[See Realty Q&A.](#)

Second-home buyers go condo

The second-home market is in a slump. But one type of vacation property is still showing signs of life: condos.

[See full story.](#) ■

[Site Index](#) | [Topics](#) | [Archive](#) | [Help](#) | [Feedback](#) | [Media Archive](#) | [Premium Products](#) | [Mobile](#) | [RSS](#) | [Podcasts](#) | [Company Info](#) | [Advertising Media Kit](#) | [DJ Client Solutions](#)

The Wall Street Journal Digital Network:
[WSJ.com](#) | [Barron's Online](#) | [BigCharts](#) | [Virtual Stock Exchange](#) | [All Things Digital](#) | [MarketWatch Community](#)
[RealEstateJournal.com](#) | [Financial News Online](#) | [WSJ.com Small Business](#)

MarketWatch

Copyright © 2008 MarketWatch, Inc. All rights reserved.
By using this site, you agree to the [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy](#) .
Real Estate Weekly: Home warranty sales on the rise - MarketWatch

Intraday data provided by [Interactive Data Real Time Services](#), a division of Interactive Data Corp. and subject to [terms of use](#). Historical and current end-of-day data provided by [Interactive Data Pricing and Reference Data](#). More information on [NASDAQ traded symbols](#) and their current financial status. Intraday data delayed 15 minutes for Nasdaq, and 20 minutes for other exchanges. Dow Jones Indexes(SM) from Dow Jones & Company, Inc. SEHK intraday data is provided by Comstock and is at least 60-minutes delayed. All quotes are in local exchange time.