# Forecast shows slight increase in holiday sales

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NEW YORK — ShopperTrak, a retail research firm, predicted Tuesday that total holiday sales will rise 1.6 percent compared with a year ago, which would be good news for retailers compared with last year's steep decline.

The research firm also expects a 4.2 percent decline in foot traffic from last year's holidays.

Last year, holiday sales fell 5.9 percent while foot traffic dropped 15.4 percent, according to ShopperTrak estimates. The research firm tracks customer traffic at more than 45,000 stores.

The holiday sales estimate is a bit rosier than other forecasts offered over the past few weeks, which have been at best no better than unchanged from last year's debacle. The holiday 2008 season saw the biggest sales decline in at least several decades.

The National Retail Federation, usually bullish about holiday sales, predicts a 1 percent decline in total sales to $437.6 billion for November and December combined.

"The consumer is just tired" of all the bad news, said Bill Martin, co-founder of ShopperTrak, based in Chicago. He added that shoppers have pulled back from buying sweaters and other purchases over the past year and are looking to refill their closets, though spending will be tempered.

ShopperTrak's figures exclude sales from grocery stores, restaurants, auto dealers, gas stations and drug stores.