

The Gwinnett County Storage Unit Report

How Much Are North Atlanta Homeowners Paying to Store Things They Should Probably Just Get Rid Of?

Prepared by Veteran's Junk Removal LLC | Dacula, Georgia Veteran-Owned Junk Removal Serving Gwinnett County
Since 2024 Expert Commentary: Denell Criss, Owner, Veteran's Junk Removal LLC

Data Sources: SpareFoot Storage Beat 2026 | Yardi Matrix January 2026 | Self Storage Association Industry Statistics 2025 | WifiTalents
Self-Storage Statistics 2026 | U.S. Census Bureau ACS Gwinnett County 2024

~40,300	\$61.9M	14.5 mos	27%
est. Gwinnett households renting storage right now	est. annual Gwinnett storage spend at \$128/mo avg	average rental duration — usually started 'temporarily'	of renters keep their unit more than 2 years

BOTTOM LINE: Approximately 40,300 Gwinnett County households are estimated to be paying for self-storage right now — most of them for belongings they haven't touched in months or years. At \$128 to \$180 or more per month, that adds up to an estimated \$61.9 million leaving Gwinnett County annually to store things that, in most cases, are worth a fraction of what it costs to keep them. The average renter pays for 14.5 months. More than 1 in 4 pays for more than two years. Only 1 in 4 visits their unit more than once a month. The self-storage industry is built on auto-pay and avoidance — and this report documents what North Atlanta homeowners are actually spending to store things they should probably just get rid of.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Somewhere in Gwinnett County right now, approximately 40,300 households are paying a monthly bill for a storage unit. Most of them started the rental as a temporary solution — a house move, a divorce, a death in the family, a downsizing that needed more time than expected. Most of them intended to deal with it soon. And most of them are still paying, because auto-pay hits the card every month and the unit sits in a facility they haven't visited since whenever. That is exactly how the self-storage industry — a \$39 billion annual business with more U.S. locations than all Subway restaurants, Dollar General stores, and CVS pharmacies combined — is designed to work.

The numbers behind this report are not abstract. Applying the national 1-in-10 household storage rental rate to Gwinnett County's 403,000 households produces an estimate of roughly 40,300 households currently paying for storage. At the national average of \$128 per month for a standard 10x10 unit — or \$153 for climate-controlled — that is an estimated \$61.9 million leaving Gwinnett County annually to pay for square footage holding things most renters haven't looked at in months. For the 27% of renters who hold units more than two years, the cumulative spend exceeds \$3,000 at minimum and climbs steeply with annual rate increases and larger unit sizes.

This report documents the scale of that spending, the behavioral patterns that sustain it, and what a veteran-owned junk removal company based in Dacula has observed firsthand when the storage unit door finally rolls up — and a North Atlanta homeowner confronts, often for the first time in years, what their monthly payments have actually been buying.

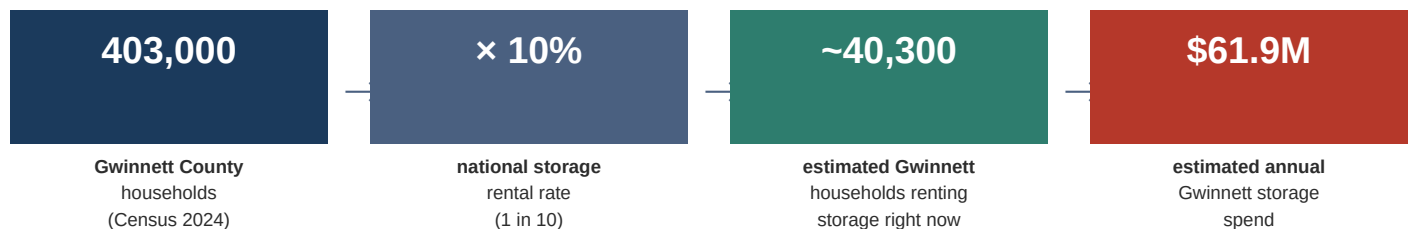
Finding 1

An Estimated 40,300 Gwinnett Households Are Paying Monthly for Storage — Most of Them for Things They Haven't Touched in a Year

~40,300 Gwinnett households

Applying the Self Storage Association's documented 1-in-10 household storage rental rate to Gwinnett County's 403,000 households produces an estimate of approximately 40,300 Gwinnett households currently paying for self-storage. This is a conservative estimate — Gwinnett County's population density, high household mobility, and large proportion of apartment dwellers and transitional residents may push the actual rate above the national average. The estimated annual spend of \$61.9 million (at \$128/month average) represents money leaving Gwinnett County households that, in most cases, is paying to store items that have not been accessed in months or years. The national data supports this: only 25% of self-storage renters visit their unit more than once a month, and 38% of customers report using storage for items they don't use daily — the definition of a payment without return. The industry itself describes its business model with unusual candor: storage facilities are designed to be 'out of sight, out of mind,' relying on auto-pay to sustain tenancies that customers might cancel if they thought about them more consciously.

Estimating Gwinnett County's Storage Spend Problem



Gwinnett household count: U.S. Census Bureau ACS 2024. 10% rental rate: SSA / SpareFoot 2026. Annual spend calculated at \$128/month national average. All figures are estimates.

Gwinnett County household count from U.S. Census Bureau ACS 2024. 10% national storage rental rate from Self Storage Association and SpareFoot 2026. Annual spend calculated at \$128/month national average per Yardi Matrix January 2026. All local figures are estimates derived from published national rates.

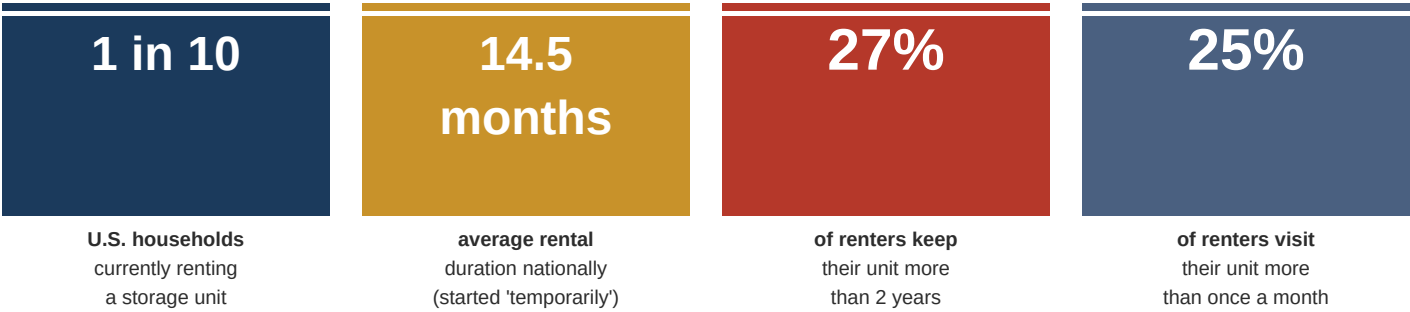
Finding 2

The Average Renter Meant to Store Things 'Temporarily' — and Is Still Paying 14.5 Months Later

14.5 months avg. stay

The national average self-storage rental duration is 14.5 months — approximately one year and three months for a solution that most customers describe at move-in as 'temporary.' This gap between intention and reality is the defining characteristic of the self-storage business model. At \$128 per month for a standard 10x10 unit, a 14.5-month stay costs approximately \$1,856. For climate-controlled units averaging \$153 per month, the same duration costs \$2,219. The distribution matters: 27% of renters hold units for more than two years (minimum \$3,072 at standard rates), and a meaningful subset maintains units for five, ten, or even more years as annual rate increases compound the original cost. Self-storage operators routinely implement annual rent increases of 5-15% after the initial lease period, which is typically month-to-month. A customer who began paying \$100 per month in 2016 for a climate-controlled unit may be paying \$160-180 per month by 2026 on the same unit — without consciously agreeing to any of those increases. The '4 D's' that drive initial storage decisions (Death, Divorce, Dislocation, Downsizing) produce urgency that makes careful cost analysis feel impossible at the time. The monthly auto-pay does the rest.

Who Is Renting Self-Storage — and How Long Are They Really Keeping It?



Sources: SpareFoot Storage Beat 2026; WifiTalents Self-Storage Statistics 2026; SSA (Self Storage Association) industry data 2025.

Average rental duration and visit frequency from WifiTalents Self-Storage Statistics 2026 and SSA industry data 2025. '27% rent 2+ years' from SpareFoot Storage Beat 2026. '25% visit more than once a month' from published consumer behavior research.

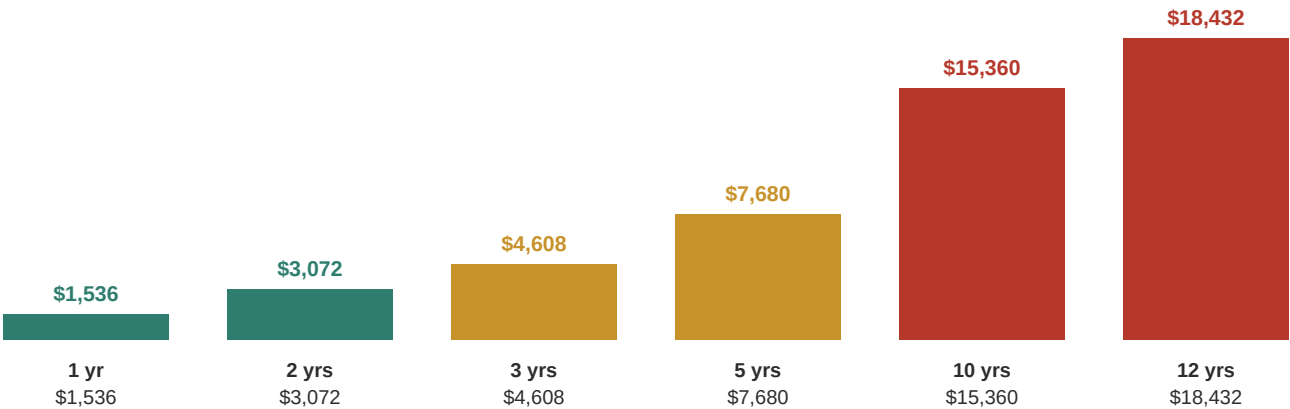
Finding 3

The Math Nobody Runs Until We Show Up: What Years of Storage Payments Actually Cost

\$128/mo \$1,536/yr cumulative

At the national average of \$128 per month for a standard 10x10 unit, the cumulative cost of self-storage becomes significant quickly and becomes devastating over longer periods. One year of storage costs \$1,536. Three years costs \$4,608. Five years costs \$7,680. Ten years costs \$15,360. For climate-controlled units — which most Gwinnett County residents choose for furniture, electronics, and clothing — the numbers are higher: one year at \$153/month totals \$1,836, and a decade of climate-controlled storage costs \$18,360 before annual rate increases. These figures do not include the lock replacement fees, insurance requirements, late payment penalties, or the lien sale costs that facilities charge when tenants fall behind. They also don't account for the actual condition of the contents — cardboard boxes collapse over years, fabric items absorb moisture, particle-board furniture degrades, and electronics become obsolete. The economic calculation that self-storage renters rarely make in advance is this: what is the replacement cost of everything in the unit compared to the total cost of storing it? For most residential storage units, that comparison does not favor continued payment — but the inertia of auto-pay makes the comparison easy to avoid.

Cumulative Storage Cost at \$128/Month (National Average) — How Long Are You Paying?



Based on national average 10x10 standard unit rate of \$128/month (Yardi Matrix 2026). Climate-controlled units average \$153/month — costs are higher. Annual rate increases add further.

Cumulative cost calculations based on \$128/month national average for standard 10x10 non-climate-controlled unit (Yardi Matrix January 2026). Climate-controlled average \$153/month. Annual rate increases common among major operators (5-15%/year) not included — actual long-term costs are typically higher.

Finding 4

What We See When the Door Rolls Up: \$8,000 to Store \$400 Worth of Stuff

20-25% of jobs are storage units

Veteran's Junk Removal LLC, a veteran-owned junk removal company based in Dacula serving Gwinnett County, estimates that 20 to 25 percent of all cleanout calls involve storage units. This proportion — one in four to one in five jobs — reflects a consistent pattern the company has observed across hundreds of Gwinnett County cleanouts: the storage unit that was rented 'temporarily' after a life transition has become a fixed monthly expense that the customer had to reach a breaking point to address. The breaking point is almost always financial: a customer who calculates on-site how much they have spent on a unit containing furniture worth a fraction of the payments. The company reports a consistent and specific behavioral pattern: customers perform the mental math in real time as items are removed, and the phrase heard most frequently is a version of 'I could have bought all of this brand new for less than I paid to store it.' The Gwinnett County storage unit cleanout is not primarily a logistical event — it is an emotional and financial reckoning that most customers describe as a significant relief once complete.

"I'd say a solid 20% to 25% of our storage unit cleanout calls come from people who are just completely fed up with writing that check every single month. When we get out there and start pulling things out into the light, almost every single client does the mental math right in front of us. They start calculating \$150 or \$200 a month over three, five, or sometimes ten years. When they realize they've spent \$8,000 to \$12,000 to store maybe \$400 worth of old particle-board furniture, holiday decorations, and clothes that don't fit anymore, you can just see the look of pure regret on their faces. The phrase I hear more than anything else is: 'I could have bought all of this brand new three times over for what I paid to let it sit here and collect dust.' It's a massive wake-up call for them."

— Denell Criss, Owner, Veteran's Junk Removal LLC — Dacula, Georgia

A GWINNETT COUNTY CASE STUDY: \$25,000 SPENT. 80% OF IT RUINED.

Among the Gwinnett County storage units Veteran's Junk Removal has cleared, one tells the story better than any statistic. A client near Lawrenceville had been paying on a large 10x20 climate-controlled unit for just over twelve years. The unit started as a 'temporary' solution after a house move. The payments kept coming out automatically. By the time the call came in, she had paid an estimated \$25,000 or more into that unit — the equivalent of a down payment on a house. What was inside when the door rolled up tells the rest of the story.

“There’s one that instantly comes to mind. We got called out to a facility over near Lawrenceville/Suwanee. The customer had been paying on a large 10x20 climate-controlled unit for just over 12 years. She had moved out of a house, put everything in there ‘temporarily,’ moved into an apartment, and just kept paying the bill. Between the base rent and the annual rate hikes, she had easily sunk over \$25,000 into this single unit. When we cut the lock and rolled up the door, it was packed wall-to-wall, ceiling-to-floor. But here’s the kicker: about 80% of it was completely ruined. Cardboard boxes had collapsed under their own weight over a decade, and bugs had gotten into almost everything. We dug out a couple of old family photo albums that were luckily salvageable, which felt great to hand back to her, but the rest of the unit was just a graveyard of outdated tube TVs, broken matching bedroom sets from the 90s, and bags of clothes that smelled like ancient dust. Watching her realize she spent a down payment on a house to store literal trash was tough, but the sense of relief she had when we finally swept that unit clean and she could cancel the account was massive.”

— Denell Criss, Owner, Veteran's Junk Removal LLC — Dacula, Georgia

THE DATA: SELF-STORAGE COST AND RENTER BEHAVIOR REFERENCE (2026)

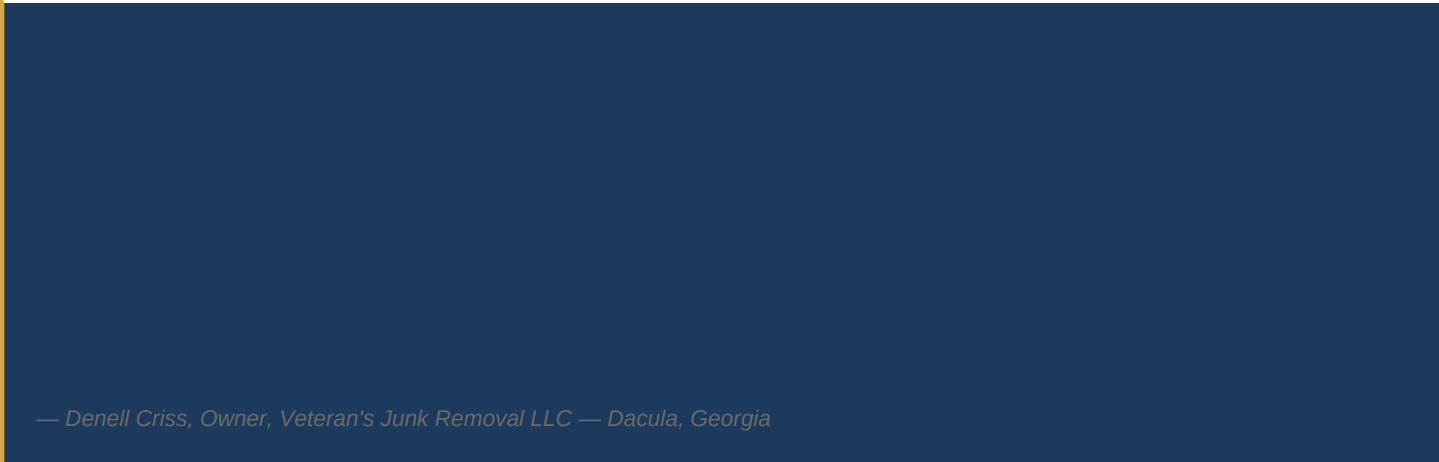
Metric	Figure	Source
U.S. households renting storage	1 in 10 (~11%)	SSA / SpareFoot 2026
Est. Gwinnett County storage renters	~40,300 households	Calculated: Census + SSA rate
Est. annual Gwinnett storage spend	~\$61.9 million	Calculated: 40,300 x \$128/mo x 12
Avg. monthly cost — 10x10 standard	\$128/month	Yardi Matrix January 2026
Avg. monthly cost — 10x10 climate-controlled	\$153/month	Yardi Matrix / SpareFoot 2026
Avg. monthly cost — 10x20 climate-controlled	~\$180-220/month	SpareFoot / StorageCafe 2026
Average rental duration	14.5 months	SSA / WifiTalents 2026
Renters staying 2+ years	27%	SpareFoot Storage Beat 2026
Renters visiting more than once/month	25%	SSA consumer behavior data
Renters storing items not used daily	38%	SSA consumer behavior data
Cumulative cost — 1 year (\$128/mo)	\$1,536	Calculated
Cumulative cost — 3 years (\$128/mo)	\$4,608	Calculated
Cumulative cost — 5 years (\$128/mo)	\$7,680	Calculated
Cumulative cost — 10 years (\$128/mo)	\$15,360	Calculated
Cumulative cost — 12 years (\$128/mo)	\$18,432	Calculated
US self-storage industry annual revenue	\$39-44 billion	SSA / IBISWorld 2024
US self-storage facilities	50,000+	SSA 2026
VJR storage unit jobs (% of total calls)	20-25%	Veteran's Junk Removal LLC 2026
Lawrenceville case study — unit type	10x20 climate-controlled, 12 years	Veteran's Junk Removal LLC

Lawrenceville case study — est. total paid	\$25,000+	Veteran's Junk Removal LLC
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Highlighted green rows indicate primary research data from Veteran's Junk Removal LLC. Highlighted red row indicates the Lawrenceville case study. All other data from published national sources cited in the Methodology section.

THE STRAIGHT-SHOOTER ADVICE: WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE A STORAGE UNIT RIGHT NOW

When Gwinnett County residents ask the owner of Veteran's Junk Removal what to do about their storage unit, he gives the same answer he gives his own friends and family — no sugarcoating:



FOUR THINGS GWINNETT COUNTY STORAGE RENTERS SHOULD KNOW BEFORE PAYING ANOTHER MONTH

- 1

If you haven't missed it in 12 months, you probably don't need it — and you've been paying to pretend otherwise.

The 14.5-month average storage rental duration means most people who intend to 'temporarily' store belongings end up paying for more than a year before making a final decision. Research on memory and attachment to possessions consistently shows that if an item has been inaccessible for 12 months and has not been needed, the probability of future need is low. The storage industry benefits from the cognitive phenomenon of loss aversion — the discomfort of discarding an item feels greater than the ongoing cost of retaining it. Doing the monthly cost math explicitly is the first step toward a different decision.
- 2

What's in the unit is almost certainly worth less than you've spent storing it.

The scenario Veteran's Junk Removal describes — spending \$8,000 to \$12,000 to store \$400 worth of items — is not unusual. Standard residential storage unit contents frequently include particle-board furniture (which does not survive long-term storage intact), outdated electronics (which depreciate to near zero), seasonal items (which are available at retail for modest cost), and clothing (which cannot be resold at meaningful value after years in storage). Performing a realistic valuation of unit contents — not what they cost originally, but what they could be sold for today — against the cumulative storage cost already paid is a clarifying exercise most renters have not done.

3 Your storage bill is almost certainly higher than when you started — and it keeps going up.

Self-storage operators commonly implement annual rent increases of 5-15% after the initial lease period. A customer who began paying \$100 per month in 2016 may be paying significantly more per month today on the same unit without having made a conscious decision to accept those increases. Month-to-month leases make these increases easy to implement and difficult to contest without vacating the unit. The true 10-year cost of a storage unit with annual increases is substantially higher than \$128/month times 120 months — the calculation that most renters don't perform.

4 One afternoon and one phone call is all it takes — and the monthly payment stops forever.

One reason storage renters delay clearing their units is the logistical challenge of deciding what to do with each item. A junk removal company that donates usable items to local organizations, recycles materials that can be recycled, and handles the full loading, hauling, and disposal process removes the primary logistical barrier. For a Gwinnett County household spending \$150+ per month on storage, the cost of a single professional cleanout is typically less than two to three months of storage rent — and it ends the monthly payment permanently.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: STORAGE UNITS AND JUNK REMOVAL

Q: How much does storage cost in Gwinnett County per month?

A: Based on national averages from Yardi Matrix (January 2026), a standard 10x10 non-climate-controlled unit averages \$128/month nationally. Climate-controlled units average approximately \$153/month. Gwinnett County's market may vary from these averages based on local competition and demand. A 10x20 climate-controlled unit — large enough for a full household's contents — typically runs \$180-220/month or more in the North Atlanta market.

Q: How much will I spend on storage over 5 or 10 years?

A: At \$128/month (standard unit, national average): 5 years = \$7,680. 10 years = \$15,360. At \$153/month (climate-controlled average): 5 years = \$9,180. 10 years = \$18,360. These are baseline calculations — annual rent increases of 5-15% are common among storage operators, meaning actual long-term costs are typically higher than these figures. A \$150/month unit with a 7% annual increase reaches nearly \$295/month by year 10.

Q: What happens to contents stored for many years?

A: Cardboard boxes compress and collapse over time under their own weight. Fabric items absorb humidity and can develop odors or mildew even in climate-controlled units. Particle-board furniture — the most common furniture type in residential storage units — does not survive decade-long storage intact. Electronics become obsolete and lose value to near zero. As Veteran's Junk Removal has observed, approximately 80% of items in a long-term storage unit (10+ years) are typically unsalvageable by the time the unit is cleared.

Q: How much does it cost to have a storage unit cleared?

A: Junk removal pricing for a storage unit cleanout depends on the volume of material removed. Veteran's Junk Removal provides free estimates for all Gwinnett County storage unit cleanouts. For most residential storage units, the cost of a single professional cleanout is typically less than two to three months of the monthly storage rent — ending the expense permanently rather than continuing to pay monthly.

Q: What happens to items after a storage unit cleanout?

A: Veteran's Junk Removal prioritizes donation of usable items to local Gwinnett County organizations and recycling of materials that can be diverted from landfill. Items with sentimental value — photo albums, family documents, heirlooms — are identified and returned to the client before any other items are removed. The remaining material is hauled, sorted, and disposed of responsibly.

About Veteran's Junk Removal LLC

Veteran's Junk Removal LLC is a veteran-owned and operated full-service junk removal company based in Dacula, Georgia, serving Gwinnett County and surrounding North Atlanta communities. We specialize in storage unit cleanouts, estate cleanouts, furniture removal, appliance removal, and debris removal. We carry the same values we carried in uniform — reliability, integrity, and getting the job done right. Storage unit cleanouts represent a significant part of our work in Gwinnett County, and we approach every one of them with the understanding that this is not just a logistics job: it's the moment a customer finally closes a chapter and reclaims their monthly budget. Free estimates for all Gwinnett County storage unit cleanouts.

Serving Dacula, Suwanee, Duluth, Lawrenceville, Buford, Johns Creek, Cumming, Alpharetta, Gainesville & all of Gwinnett County

veteransjunkremoval.net | 762-390-6063

METHODOLOGY & SOURCES

Gwinnett County household count from U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 2024 estimates. The 1-in-10 household storage rental rate is from the Self Storage Association (SSA) and corroborated by SpareFoot Storage Beat 2026. Average monthly rental rates from Yardi Matrix January 2026 as reported by SpareFoot. Average rental duration (14.5 months), percentage of 2+ year renters (27%), monthly visit frequency (25%), and 'items not used daily' figure (38%) from WifiTalents Self-Storage Statistics 2026 and SSA consumer behavior research. U.S. industry revenue figures from SSA 2025 and IBISWorld 2024. All local Gwinnett County figures are estimates derived by applying published national rates to local Census data. Expert commentary throughout this report is from a structured interview with the owner of Veteran's Junk Removal LLC, covering storage unit cleanout patterns in Gwinnett County, the financial math observed at cleanout jobs, a notable Lawrenceville case study, and practical advice for current storage renters. This report does not constitute financial or legal advice.

SpareFoot Storage Beat. U.S. Self-Storage Industry Statistics [Updated 2026]. National 10x10 average \$119/month non-climate; \$134 climate-controlled. Q4 2025 move-in rate \$96.44. 50,000+ facilities nationwide.

sparefoot.com/blog/self-storage-industry-statistics

Yardi Matrix. Average Monthly Rental Rates for Self-Storage Units, January 2026. 10x10 standard national average \$128/month as cited by multiple industry sources.

yardimatrix.com

WifiTalents. Self Storage Statistics 2026. Published February 12, 2026. 1 in 10 households; average rental 14.5 months; 27% rent 2+ years; 25% visit more than once a month; 38% store items not used daily.

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Self Storage Association (SSA). Industry Statistics and Trends 2025. 70% of demand driven by 'Four D's': Death, Divorce, Dislocation, Downsizing. Industry size, facilities count, and consumer behavior data.

selfstorage.org

ConsumerAffairs. Self-Storage Unit Industry Statistics 2026. US construction spending \$7B in 2023; 50,000 facilities; market resilience data.

consumeraffairs.com/movers/self-storage-industry-statistics.html

U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey (ACS). Gwinnett County, Georgia Housing and Household Data 2024. Gwinnett County household count: approximately 403,000.

census.gov

Denell Criss, Owner, Veteran's Junk Removal LLC. Expert interview responses, July 2026. Three structured questions covering Gwinnett County storage unit cleanout patterns, financial observations, the Lawrenceville case study, and practical advice for storage renters.

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