

IRS TAX TIP 2004-71

REFUNDS — HOW LONG SHOULD THEY TAKE?

Are you expecting a tax refund from the Internal Revenue Service this year? If you file a complete and accurate paper tax return, your refund should be issued in about six to eight weeks from the date IRS receives your return, according to the IRS. If you file your return electronically, your refund should be issued in about half the time it would take if you filed a paper return — even faster when you choose direct deposit.

You can have a refund check mailed to you, or you may be able to have your refund electronically deposited directly into your bank account. Direct deposit into a bank account is more secure because there is no check to get lost. And it takes the U.S. Treasury less time than issuing a paper check. If you prepare a paper return, fill in the direct deposit information in the “Refund” section of the tax form, making sure that the routing and account numbers are accurate. Incorrect numbers can cause your refund to be misdirected or delayed. Direct deposit is also available if you electronically file your return.

A word of caution — some financial institutions do not allow a joint refund to be deposited into an individual account. Check with your bank or other financial institution to make sure your direct deposit will be accepted.

You may not receive your refund as quickly as you expected. Refund delays may be caused by a variety of reasons. For example, a name and Social Security number listed on the tax return may not match the IRS records. You may have failed to sign the return or to include a necessary attachment, such as Form W-2, “Wage and Tax Statement.” Or you may have made math errors that require extra time for the IRS to correct.

To check the status of a refund you are expecting, use “Where’s My Refund,” an Internet-based service available on the IRS Web site, www.irs.gov. With “Where’s My Refund?” you can get the information you need quickly, efficiently and safely.

Simple online instructions guide you through a process that checks the status of your refund after you provide identifying information from your tax return. Once the information is processed, results can include one of several responses, including:

- That a return was received and is in processing;
- The mailing date or direct deposit date of the refund; or
- Whether a refund has been returned to the IRS because it could not be delivered.

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Another option is the IRS Refund Hotline. This service is available to Form 1040-type individual and joint filers who need to check the status of their current year refund. It offers Automated Refund Self-Service Interactive Applications. The toll-free hotline number is 1-800-829-1954.

If it has been at least four weeks since you filed your return, you can check on the status of your refund by calling the toll-free IRS TeleTax System at 1-800-829-4477. When you call, you will need to provide the first Social Security number shown on the return, your filing status and the amount of the refund. If the IRS has processed your return, the system will tell you the date your refund will be sent. TeleTax's refund information is updated each weekend. If you do not get a date for your refund, please wait until the next week before calling back.

The IRS assists taxpayers in obtaining replacement checks for refunds that are verified as lost or stolen. Form 3911, "Taxpayer Statement Regarding Refund," may be required to start the replacement check process.

For more information on how long it may take the IRS to process your federal tax refund, visit Tax Topic 152 – Refunds or Frequently Asked Questions on the IRS Web site at www.irs.gov.

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