

UNDELIVERED TAX REFUNDS TOP \$67 MILLION; IRS LOOKS FOR OWNERS

WASHINGTON – The Internal Revenue Service issued a nationwide alert Monday for more than 90,000 taxpayers who still haven't received tax refund checks worth \$67.4 million.

An annual review shows 91,823 federal tax refunds were returned to the IRS, a drop from 102,840 the previous year. The new tally includes tax refunds from 1999 and prior tax years.

The total amount of returned refunds fell \$4.6 million from a year ago when they totaled \$72 million. This year's average per-check amount of \$734 compares with \$700 last year.

"There's a ton of refund money sitting around," said IRS Commissioner Charles O. Rossotti. "We want to get these checks back to where they belong."

If you think the IRS owes you money, call the toll-free assistance line at 1-800-829-1040.

This year, the IRS is seeing the biggest number of undeliverable refunds in California (14,648), New York (8,519), Florida (8,208) and Texas (8,046).

The average undelivered refund amount for Florida is \$1,017, the highest in the nation and well above the national average. Minnesota, with an average of \$997, is a close second followed by New York with \$940, Nevada with \$868 and Illinois with \$808.

"We want to find the owners of these checks," Rossotti said. "This is one case where we're more than happy to pass the buck."

There are many reasons why refund checks might not reach taxpayers. Most frequently, people move and the tax refunds come back to the IRS. For example, college students might file a return while at school and move before the refund arrives.

"Life gets busy, and some people can overlook or forget about a refund check," Rossotti said.

Other undelivered refunds can occur because taxpayers provide an incorrect address when they mail their return. Taxpayers should take extra care when providing a return address. Often, numbers are transposed or information is incomplete.

A death or marriage may also result in a returned check. Estate executors should explore whether a refund check might be involved. Newly married taxpayers are urged to notify the IRS promptly if there is a change of name or address.

What if you don't realize you have a refund? The IRS will keep the information on file and forward the full amount to the taxpayer as soon as a valid address is known. For many taxpayers owed refunds, the money will be forwarded automatically the next time a tax return is filed. There is no statute of limitations for claiming these refunds.

There is an easy way to ensure your refund won't be lost. Choosing to have a tax refund deposited directly to a bank account is the best way to guard against loss or theft. Nearly 30 million taxpayers elected to use the direct deposit option during the 2000 filing season, up from 23.5 million a year ago.

"The drop in undeliverable refunds can be traced directly to more taxpayers using direct deposit," Rossotti said. "There's an added bonus for using direct deposit because taxpayers get refunds quicker than through the mail."

Filing a change of address card with the post office is not enough to guarantee delivery of a refund check. Taxpayers who have moved since filing their last tax return are urged to file a Form 8822, "Change of Address," with the IRS. The form can be obtained by calling 1-800-829-3676 or by downloading it from the IRS Web Site at www.irs.gov.

"Although our goal is to have no checks returned, the number of undeliverable refunds is small when compared to the total number of refunds issued," Rossotti said.

The IRS has received 128 million individual tax returns in 2000 and issued 91 million refunds.

Local media looking for details on unclaimed refunds in their area should contact their local IRS Media Relations office. National media inquiries can be directed to (202) 622-4000.

Undelivered Refunds by State

State	Unclaimed Refunds	Total Unclaimed Refund Amount	Average Refund Amount
Alabama	812	\$478,321	\$589
Alaska	342	\$175,690	\$514
Arizona	2,624	\$1,729,195	\$659
Arkansas	786	\$462,381	\$588
California	14,648	\$11,235,984	\$767
Colorado	1,786	\$1,370,274	\$767
Connecticut	830	\$550,232	\$663
Delaware	202	\$114,702	\$568
District of Columbia	294	\$195,893	\$666
Florida	8,208	\$8,344,265	\$1,017
Georgia	3,245	\$2,105,262	\$649
Hawaii	500	\$424,053	\$848
Idaho	371	\$185,723	\$500
Illinois	3,355	\$2,710,697	\$808
Indiana	1,022	\$719,542	\$704
Iowa	492	\$275,787	\$572
Kansas	736	\$487,758	\$663
Kentucky	605	\$344,886	\$570
Louisiana	812	\$596,993	\$735
Maryland	1,327	\$905,915	\$683
Maine	243	\$167,086	\$688
Massachusetts	1,823	\$1,235,037	\$677
Michigan	1,685	\$1,209,790	\$718
Minnesota	1,146	\$1,142,731	\$997
Mississippi	647	\$318,713	\$493
Missouri	1,203	\$638,304	\$531
Montana	228	\$121,509	\$533
Nebraska	385	\$190,921	\$496
Nevada	1,184	\$1,028,031	\$868
New Hampshire	250	\$141,808	\$567
New Jersey	3,384	\$2,642,576	\$781
New Mexico	673	\$435,375	\$647
New York	8,519	\$8,005,219	\$940
North Carolina	2,903	\$1,851,500	\$638
North Dakota	140	\$66,389	\$474
Ohio	1,704	\$907,755	\$532
Oklahoma	1,171	\$689,483	\$589
Oregon	1,316	\$657,359	\$500
Pennsylvania	2,170	\$1,463,382	\$674
Rhode Island	272	\$215,061	\$791
South Carolina	1,294	\$774,389	\$598

State	Unclaimed Refunds	Total Unclaimed Refund Amount	Average Refund Amount
South Dakota	145	\$85,322	\$588
Tennessee	1,430	\$949,165	\$664
Texas	8,046	\$5,279,989	\$674
Utah	923	\$395,665	\$429
Virginia	1,947	\$1,408,110	\$723
Vermont	128	\$60,147	\$470
Washington	2,643	\$1,805,090	\$683
West Virginia	164	\$105,693	\$645
Wisconsin	924	\$529,448	\$573
Wyoming	136	\$78,776	\$579
TOTALS	91,823	\$67,413,376	\$734