

## ELECTRONIC METHODS POPULAR FOR TAX HELP

WASHINGTON -- With the April 15 tax filing deadline a little more than a month away, the Internal Revenue Service expects its Web site and TaxFax services -- already handling more than twice as much traffic as last year -- to become even busier.

"It's the age of electronic information, and taxpayers appreciate the electronic services we offer," said IRS Commissioner Charles O. Rossotti. "Whether it's a form, a publication, or an answer to a question, taxpayers are getting it by computer, by fax or by phone."

The IRS Web site -- *www.irs.ustreas.gov* -- features special sections for individuals, businesses and even tax professionals. The site has received more than 166 million hits in 1998, nearly triple the 57 million hits at this time last year. Through February, it had more than five million downloads, more than double last year's 2.4 million in the same period.

Among the site's features are interactive "Tax Trails," which help taxpayers see how tax issues apply to them through a series of yes-or-no prompts. There are also nearly 200 Frequently Asked Tax Questions, conveniently grouped in more than a dozen subject categories. Audit technique guides and training materials on worker classification let businesses know what records or issues might be relevant for the IRS. Users may download the IRS forms or publications they need to do their tax returns.

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Tax professionals may use the Web site to download the weekly *Internal Revenue Bulletin* or even get technical items in advance of their publication in the *Bulletin*. They may also e-mail comments on proposed regulations or research the Internal Revenue Manual, the Code, or tax regulations.

IRS TaxFax is a fax-on-demand service, available 24 hours a day. From a fax machine, call 703-368-9694 and use the keypad to request a specific item by return fax. Users can find lists and order numbers of the 144 forms and instructions available, as well as the 147 tax information topics, in the tax instruction booklet. Or they can have the system fax an index of available products. TaxFax completed more than 500,000 faxes the first two months of 1998, nearly double this period last year.

Another service is TeleTax, with tax information messages at 1-800-829-4477. The tax instructions list the code numbers for available TeleTax subjects. Callers can also use the system's voice prompts to select a topic. The texts of the TeleTax messages are also available through IRS TaxFax and the IRS Web site.

TeleTax also offers an automated feature not found elsewhere -- tax refund information. Taxpayers should wait at least four weeks after filing -- three weeks for those who filed electronically -- before calling about a refund. They must provide the social security number, filing status and expected refund amount from the tax return. If the return has been processed, the system tells when the refund is scheduled to be sent. Refund information is updated each weekend. More than 15 million of TeleTax's 20 million calls so far this year have been for refund information.

## 1998 FILING SEASON STATISTICS

Cumulative through the week ending 3/7/97 and 3/6/98

|   | <u>1997</u>      | <u>1998</u>      | <u>% Change</u> |
|---|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Individual Income Tax Returns</b>                          |                  |                  |                 |
| Total Receipts  | 45,219,000       | 45,045,000       | - 0.4           |
| Total Processed   | 31,210,000       | 34,110,000       | 9.3             |
| <b>E-filing -- Total Receipts:</b>                            |                  |                  |                 |
| Standard E-file   | 10,921,000       | 13,305,000       | 21.8            |
| TeleFile  | 3,495,000        | 4,375,000        | 25.2            |
| <b>Refunds Certified by the Martinsburg Computing Center:</b> |                  |                  |                 |
| Number  | 28,535,000       | 31,051,000       | 8.8             |
| Amount of principal   | \$40.464 billion | \$45.022 billion | 11.3            |
| Average refund  | \$1418           | \$1450           | 2.2             |