

### **1. Why did the IRS issue internal guidance regarding offshore activities now?**

The IRS has had a voluntary disclosure practice in its Criminal Manual for many years. Once IRS Criminal Investigation has determined preliminary acceptance into the voluntary disclosure program, the case is referred to the civil side of IRS for examination and resolution of taxes and penalties. Recent IRS enforcement efforts in the offshore area have led to an increased number of voluntary disclosures. Additional taxpayers are considering making voluntary disclosures but are reportedly reluctant to come forward because of uncertainty about the amount of their liability for potentially onerous civil penalties. In order to resolve these cases in an organized, coordinated manner and to make exposure to civil penalties more predictable, the IRS has decided to centralize the civil processing of offshore voluntary disclosures and to offer a uniform penalty structure for taxpayers who voluntarily come forward. These steps were taken to ensure that taxpayers are treated consistently and predictably.

### **2. What is the objective of these steps?**

The objective is to bring taxpayers that have used undisclosed foreign accounts and undisclosed foreign entities to avoid or evade tax into compliance with United States tax laws. Additionally, the information gathered from taxpayers making voluntary disclosures under this practice will be used to further the IRS's understanding of how foreign accounts and foreign entities are promoted to United States taxpayers as ways to avoid or evade tax. Data gathered will be used in developing additional strategies to inhibit promoters and facilitators from soliciting new clients.

### **3. Why should I make a voluntary disclosure?**

Taxpayers with undisclosed foreign accounts or entities should make a voluntary disclosure because it enables them to become compliant, avoid substantial civil penalties and generally eliminate the risk of criminal prosecution. Making a voluntary disclosure also provides the opportunity to calculate, with a reasonable degree of certainty, the total cost of resolving all offshore tax issues. Taxpayers who do not submit a voluntary disclosure run the risk of detection by the IRS and the imposition of substantial penalties, including the fraud penalty and foreign information return penalties, and an increased risk of criminal prosecution.

### **4. What is the IRS's Voluntary Disclosure Practice?**

The Voluntary Disclosure Practice is a longstanding practice of IRS Criminal Investigation of taking timely, accurate, and complete voluntary disclosures into account in deciding whether to recommend to the Department of Justice that a taxpayer be criminally prosecuted. It enables noncompliant taxpayers to resolve their tax liabilities and minimize their chances of criminal prosecution. When a

taxpayer truthfully, timely, and completely complies with all provisions of the voluntary disclosure practice, the IRS will not recommend criminal prosecution to the Department of Justice.

**5. How do I make a voluntary disclosure and where should I submit my voluntary disclosure?**

A voluntary disclosure is made by following the procedures described in [I.R.M. 9.5.11.9](#). Tax professionals or individuals who want to initiate a voluntary disclosure, should call their local CI office. For a list of CI offices, visit: <http://www.irs.gov/compliance/enforcement/article/0,,id=205909,00.html>

Taxpayers with questions may call the IRS Voluntary Disclosure Hotline at (215)516-4777, visit [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov), or contact their nearest CI office.

**6. What form should my voluntary disclosure take?**

You should send a letter to the nearest Special Agent in Charge, IRS Criminal Investigation, stating that you wish to make a voluntary disclosure. Ideally, the letter should contain all your identifying information, including name, address, Social Security Number or other Taxpayer Identification Number, passport number and date of birth, and should also include an explanation of any previously unreported or underreported income or incorrectly claimed deductions or credits related to undisclosed foreign accounts or undisclosed foreign entities, including the reason(s) for the error or omission. It should also include a power of attorney (Form 2848), if you are represented, and daytime contact information for you or your representative. If you have already completed the amended or delinquent returns, those should be submitted with the letter, but it is not necessary to include them with the initial submission if you are unable to do so. At a minimum, however, the initial submission must include the taxpayer's name and identifying information described above. IRS Criminal Investigation will follow up on the facts and circumstances to assess the timeliness, completeness, and truthfulness of the voluntary disclosure.

**7. I'm currently under examination. Can I come in under voluntary disclosure?**

No. If the IRS has initiated a civil examination, regardless of whether it relates to undisclosed foreign accounts or undisclosed foreign entities, the taxpayer will not be eligible to come in under the IRS's Voluntary Disclosure Practice.

**8. I have an offshore merchant account upon which I have not reported all of the income. Can I come in under the IRS's voluntary disclosure practice?**

Yes. Taxpayers with unreported income from an offshore merchant account can make a voluntary disclosure.

**9. I have properly reported all my taxable income but I only recently learned that I should have been filing FBARs in prior years to report my personal foreign bank account or to report the fact that I have signature authority over bank accounts owned by my employer. May I come forward under the voluntary disclosure practice to correct this?**

The purpose for the voluntary disclosure practice is to provide a way for taxpayers who did not report taxable income in the past to voluntarily come forward and resolve their tax matters. Thus, If you reported and paid tax on all taxable income but did not file FBARs, do not use the voluntary disclosure process.

For taxpayers who reported and paid tax on all their taxable income for prior years but did not file FBARs, you should file the delinquent FBAR reports according to the instructions and attach a statement explaining why the reports are filed late. Send copies of the delinquent FBARs, together with copies of tax returns for all relevant years, by September 23, 2009, to the Philadelphia Offshore Identification Unit at:

Internal Revenue Service  
11501 Roosevelt Blvd.  
South Bldg., Room 2002  
Philadelphia, PA 19154  
Attn: Charlie Judge, Offshore Unit, DP S-611

The IRS will not impose a penalty for the failure to file the FBARs.

**10. What if the taxpayer has already filed amended returns reporting the additional unreported income, without making a voluntary disclosure (i.e., quiet disclosure)?**

The IRS is aware that some taxpayers have attempted so-called “quiet” disclosures by filing amended returns and paying any related tax and interest for previously unreported offshore income without otherwise notifying the IRS. Taxpayers who have already made “quiet” disclosures may take advantage of the penalty framework applicable to voluntary disclosure requests regarding unreported offshore accounts and entities. Those taxpayers must send previously submitted documents, including copies of amended returns, to their local CI office by September 23, 2009. (See FAQ 5).

Taxpayers are strongly encouraged to come forward under the Voluntary Disclosure Practice to make timely, accurate, and complete disclosures. Those

taxpayers making “quiet” disclosures should be aware of the risk of being examined and potentially criminally prosecuted for all applicable years.

The IRS has identified, and will continue to identify, amended tax returns reporting increases in income. The IRS will be closely reviewing these returns to determine whether enforcement action is appropriate.

**11. Is a taxpayer who sought relief under the IRS’s Voluntary Disclosure Practice before this internal guidance was issued, eligible for the terms described in this internal guidance?**

Yes. If a taxpayer sought relief under the IRS’s Voluntary Disclosure Practice before this internal guidance was issued he or she may be eligible, as long as the voluntary disclosure has not yet resulted in an assessment.

**12. How does the penalty framework work? Can you give us an example?**

Assume the taxpayer has the following amounts in a foreign account over a period of six years. Although the amount on deposit may have been in the account for many years, it is assumed for purposes of the example that it is not unreported income in 2003.

Year	Amount on Deposit	Interest Income	Account Balance
2003	\$ 1,000,000	\$ 50,000	\$ 1,050,000
2004		\$ 50,000	\$ 1,100,000
2005		\$ 50,000	\$ 1,150,000
2006		\$ 50,000	\$ 1,200,000
2007		\$ 50,000	\$ 1,250,000
2008		\$ 50,000	\$ 1,300,000

(NOTE: This example does not provide for compounded interest, and assumes the taxpayer is in the 35-percent tax bracket, files a return but does not include the foreign account or the interest income on the return, and the maximum applicable penalties are imposed.)

**If the taxpayer comes forward and has their voluntary disclosure accepted by the IRS, they face this potential scenario:**

They would pay \$386,000 plus interest. This includes:

- Tax of \$105,000 (six years at \$17,500) plus interest,
- An accuracy-related penalty of \$21,000 (i.e., \$105,000 x 20%), and
- An additional penalty, in lieu of the FBAR and other potential penalties that may apply, of \$260,000 (i.e., \$1,300,000 x 20%).

**If the taxpayer didn't come forward and the IRS discovered their offshore activities, they face up to \$2,306,000 in tax, accuracy-related penalty, and FBAR penalty. The taxpayer would also be liable for interest and possibly additional penalties, and an examination could lead to criminal prosecution.**

The civil liabilities potentially include:

- The tax and accuracy-related penalty, plus interest, as described above,
- FBAR penalties totaling up to \$2,175,000 for willful failures to file complete and correct FBARs (2003- \$100,000, 2004 - \$100,000, 2005 - \$100,000, 2006 - \$600,000, 2007 - \$625,000 and 2008 - \$650,000),
- The potential of having the fraud penalty (75 percent) apply, and
- The potential of substantial additional information return penalties if the foreign account or assets is held through a foreign entity such as a trust or corporation and required information returns were not filed.

Note that if the foreign activity started more than six years ago, the Service may also have the right to examine additional years.

### **13. What years are included in the 6-year period?**

A taxpayer is expected to file correct delinquent or amended tax returns for tax year 2008 back to 2003.

### **14. What are some of the criminal charges I might face if I don't come in under voluntary disclosure and the IRS finds me?**

Possible criminal charges related to tax returns include tax evasion (26 U.S.C. § 7201), filing a false return (26 U.S.C. § 7206(1)) and failure to file an income tax return (26 U.S.C. § 7203). The failure to file an FBAR and the filing of a false FBAR are both violations that are subject to criminal penalties under 31 U.S.C. § 5322.

A person convicted of tax evasion is subject to a prison term of up to five years and a fine of up to \$250,000. Filing a false return subjects a person to a prison term of up to three years and a fine of up to \$250,000. A person who fails to file a tax return is subject to a prison term of up to one year and a fine of up to \$100,000. Failing to file an FBAR subjects a person to a prison term of up to ten years and criminal penalties of up to \$500,000.

**15. What are some of the civil penalties that might apply if I don't come in under voluntary disclosure and the IRS finds me? How do they work?**

The following is a summary of potential reporting requirements and civil penalties that could apply to a taxpayer, depending on his or her particular facts and circumstances.

- A penalty for failing to file the Form TD F 90-22.1 (Report of Foreign Bank and Financial Accounts, commonly known as an "FBAR"). United States citizens, residents and certain other persons must annually report their direct or indirect financial interest in, or signature authority (or other authority that is comparable to signature authority) over, a financial account that is maintained with a financial institution located in a foreign country if, for any calendar year, the aggregate value of all foreign accounts exceeded \$10,000 at any time during the year. Generally, the civil penalty for willfully failing to file an FBAR can be as high as the greater of \$100,000 or 50 percent of the total balance of the foreign account. See 31 U.S.C. § 5321(a)(5). Nonwillful violations are subject to a civil penalty of not more than \$10,000.
- A penalty for failing to file Form 3520, Annual Return to Report Transactions With Foreign Trusts and Receipt of Certain Foreign Gifts. Taxpayers must also report various transactions involving foreign trusts, including creation of a foreign trust by a United States person, transfers of property from a United States person to a foreign trust and receipt of distributions from foreign trusts under section 6048. This return also reports the receipt of gifts from foreign entities under section 6039F. The penalty for failing to file each one of these information returns, or for filing an incomplete return, is 35 percent of the gross reportable amount, except for returns reporting gifts, where the penalty is five percent of the gift per month, up to a maximum penalty of 25 percent of the gift.
- A penalty for failing to file Form 3520-A, Information Return of Foreign Trust With a U.S. Owner. Taxpayers must also report ownership interests in foreign trusts, by United States persons with various interests in and powers over those trusts under section 6048(b). The penalty for failing to file each one of these information returns or for filing an incomplete return, is five percent of the gross value of trust assets determined to be owned by the United States person.

- A penalty for failing to file Form 5471, Information Return of U.S. Person with Respect to Certain Foreign Corporations. Certain United States persons who are officers, directors or shareholders in certain foreign corporations (including International Business Corporations) are required to report information under sections 6035, 6038 and 6046. The penalty for failing to file each one of these information returns is \$10,000, with an additional \$10,000 added for each month the failure continues beginning 90 days after the taxpayer is notified of the delinquency, up to a maximum of \$50,000 per return.
- A penalty for failing to file Form 5472, Information Return of a 25% Foreign-Owned U.S. Corporation or a Foreign Corporation Engaged in a U.S. Trade or Business. Taxpayers may be required to report transactions between a 25 percent foreign-owned domestic corporation or a foreign corporation engaged in a trade or business in the United States and a related party as required by sections 6038A and 6038C. The penalty for failing to file each one of these information returns, or to keep certain records regarding reportable transactions, is \$10,000, with an additional \$10,000 added for each month the failure continues beginning 90 days after the taxpayer is notified of the delinquency, up to a maximum of \$50,000 per return.
- A penalty for failing to file Form 926, Return by a U.S. Transferor of Property to a Foreign Corporation. Taxpayers are required to report transfers of property to foreign corporations and other information under section 6038B. The penalty for failing to file each one of these information returns is ten percent of the value of the property transferred, up to a maximum of \$100,000 per return, with no limit if the failure to report the transfer was intentional.
- A penalty for failing to file Form 8865, Return of U.S. Persons With Respect to Certain Foreign Partnerships. United States persons with certain interests in foreign partnerships use this form to report interests in and transactions of the foreign partnerships, transfers of property to the foreign partnerships, and acquisitions, dispositions and changes in foreign partnership interests under sections 6038, 6038B, and 6046A. Penalties include \$10,000 for failure to file each return, with an additional \$10,000 added for each month the failure continues beginning 90 days after the taxpayer is notified of the delinquency, up to a maximum of \$50,000 per return, and ten percent of the value of any transferred property that is not reported, subject to a \$100,000 limit.
- Fraud penalties imposed under sections 6651(f) or 6663. Where an underpayment of tax, or a failure to file a tax return, is due to fraud, the taxpayer is liable for penalties that, although calculated differently, essentially amount to 75 percent of the unpaid tax.

- A penalty for failing to file a tax return imposed under section 6651(a)(1). Generally, taxpayers are required to file income tax returns. If a taxpayer fails to do so, a penalty of 5 percent of the balance due, plus an additional 5 percent for each month or fraction thereof during which the failure continues may be imposed. The penalty shall not exceed 25 percent.
- A penalty for failing to pay the amount of tax shown on the return under section 6651(a)(2). If a taxpayer fails to pay the amount of tax shown on the return, he or she may be liable for a penalty of .5 percent of the amount of tax shown on the return, plus an additional .5 percent for each additional month or fraction thereof that the amount remains unpaid, not exceeding 25 percent.
- An accuracy-related penalty on underpayments imposed under section 6662. Depending upon which component of the accuracy-related penalty is applicable, a taxpayer may be liable for a 20 percent or 40 percent penalty.

#### **16. Why did the IRS pick 6 months?**

The March 23, 2009 memorandum communicating the approved penalty framework for resolving the civil side of offshore voluntary disclosures is effective for 6 months because the Service intends to re-evaluate the framework at that time. Six months is a reasonable time to close out a number of voluntary disclosures, evaluate our experience and the feedback from the practitioner community, and decide whether or how to continue the practice going forward.

#### **17. What happens at the end of 6 months? Will I get a better deal if I wait to see what the IRS does at the end of 6 months?**

Taxpayers should not wait until the end of the 6-month period to make their voluntary disclosures as there is no guarantee that the taxpayer will still be eligible or that the current penalty terms will be available after 6 months.

Taxpayers who wait until the end of the 6-month period run the risk that they will be disqualified from the Voluntary Disclosure Practice. The IRS has stepped up its enforcement efforts, including the use of John Doe summonses, to identify taxpayers using offshore accounts and entities to avoid tax. In addition, the IRS continues to receive information from whistleblowers and other taxpayers making voluntary disclosures. If the IRS receives specific information about a taxpayer's noncompliance before the taxpayer attempts to make a voluntary disclosure, the disclosure will not be timely and the taxpayer will not be eligible for the criminal and civil penalty relief available under the voluntary disclosure practice. Finally, taxpayers run a substantial risk that the uniform penalty structure described in the internal guidance will not be available past the 6-month deadline or that the terms will be less beneficial to taxpayers.

**18. What should I do if I am having difficulty obtaining my records from overseas?**

Our experience with offshore cases in recent years is that taxpayers are successful in retrieving copies of statements and other records from foreign banks when they genuinely attempt to do so. If assistance is needed, the agent assigned to a case will work with the taxpayer in preparing a request that should be acceptable to the foreign bank. The penalty framework described in the March 23 memorandum will apply to all voluntary disclosures in process within the 6-month timeframe, so difficulty in completing a voluntary disclosure started during that period will not disqualify a cooperative taxpayer from the penalty relief. The key is to notify the Service of your intent to make a voluntary disclosure as soon as possible, and in any event, by September 23, 2009.

**19. Are entities, such as corporations, partnerships and trusts eligible to make voluntary disclosures?**

Yes, entities are eligible to participate in the IRS's Voluntary Disclosure Practice.

**20. Does the twenty percent penalty apply to entities? Does the twenty percent penalty apply only to cash and securities held in foreign accounts or entities or to tangible and intangible assets as well?**

The twenty percent penalty applies to entities. The twenty percent penalty applies to all assets (or at least the taxpayer's share) held by foreign entities (e.g., trusts and corporations) for which the taxpayer was required to file information returns, as well as all foreign assets (e.g., financial accounts, tangible assets such as real estate or art, and intangible assets such as patents or stock or other interests in a U.S. business) held or controlled by the taxpayer.

**21. Are taxpayers required to complete a questionnaire as part of the voluntary disclosure practice?**

There is no specific questionnaire for taxpayers to complete.

**22. Is there a list of questions taxpayers are expected to answer as part of the voluntary disclosure process?**

There is no standard list of questions for these cases. The Service may require an interview with the taxpayer making a voluntary disclosure, depending on the facts of each case.

**23. When determining the highest amount in each undisclosed foreign account for each year or the highest asset balance of all undisclosed foreign entities for each year, what exchange rate should be used?**

Convert foreign currency by using the foreign currency exchange rate at the end of the year. In valuing currency of a country that uses multiple exchange rates, use the rate that would apply if the currency in the account were converted into United States dollars at the close of the calendar year. Each account is to be valued separately.

**24. Will I have to file or amend my old tax returns?**

Yes. Any tax return not filed during the previous 6-year period that was otherwise required to be filed by law, must be filed by the taxpayer. In addition, any inaccurate returns for any of the 6 years must be amended by the taxpayer.

**25. Besides federal income tax returns, what forms or other returns must be filed?**

- Copies of original and amended federal income tax returns for tax periods covered by the voluntary disclosure;
- Complete and accurate amended federal income tax returns (or original returns, if not previously filed) of the taxpayer for all tax years covered by the voluntary disclosure;
- An explanation of previously unreported or underreported income or incorrectly claimed deductions or credits related to undisclosed foreign accounts or undisclosed foreign entities, including the reason(s) for the error or omission;
- If the taxpayer is a decedent's estate, or is an individual who participated in the failure to report the foreign account or foreign entity in a required gift or estate tax return, either as executor or advisor, complete and accurate amended estate or gift tax returns (original returns, if not previously filed) necessary to correct the underreporting of assets held in or transferred through undisclosed foreign accounts or foreign entities;
- Complete and accurate amended information returns required to be filed by the taxpayer, including, but not limited to, Forms 3520, 3520-A, 5471, 5472, 926 and 8865 (or originals, if not previously filed) for all tax years covered by the voluntary disclosure, for which the taxpayer requests relief; and
- Complete and accurate Form TD F 90.22-1, *Report of Foreign Bank and Financial Accounts*, for foreign accounts maintained during calendar years covered by the voluntary disclosure.

**26. If I had an FBAR reporting obligation for years covered by the voluntary disclosure, what version of the Form TD F 90-22.1 should I use to report my interests in foreign accounts?**

Taxpayers should use the current version of Form TD F 90-22.1, (revised in October 2008), to file delinquent FBARs to report foreign accounts maintained in prior years. The taxpayer may, however, rely on the instructions for the prior version of the form (revised in July 2000) for purposes of determining who must file to report foreign accounts maintained in 2007 and prior calendar years. Under both versions of the form, citizens and residents must file.

**27. If I don't have the ability to full pay can I still participate in the IRS's Voluntary Disclosure Practice?**

Yes. The March 23, 2009 guidance requires the taxpayer to fully pay all taxes and interest for all years covered, and the Voluntary Disclosure penalty, as well as all other unpaid, previously assessed liabilities, when the signed closing agreement is returned to the Service. However, it is possible for a taxpayer who is unable to make full payment at that time to submit a request that includes other payment arrangements acceptable to the IRS.

The burden will be on the taxpayer to establish inability to pay, to the satisfaction of the IRS, based on full disclosure of all assets and income sources, domestic and offshore, under the taxpayer's control. Assuming that the IRS determines that the inability to fully pay is genuine, the taxpayer must work out other financial arrangements, acceptable to the IRS, to resolve all outstanding liabilities, in order to be entitled to the penalty relief set forth in the March 23, 2009 guidance.

**28. If the taxpayer and the IRS cannot agree to the terms of the closing agreement, will mediation with Appeals be an option with respect to the terms of the closing agreement?**

No. The penalty framework and the agreement to limit tax exposure to the most recent 6 years are package terms. If any part of the penalty framework is unacceptable to the taxpayer, the case will be examined and all applicable penalties may be imposed. Any tax and penalties imposed by the Service on examination may be appealed, but not the Service's decision on the terms of the closing agreement applying the penalty framework.

**29. I have a client who may be eligible to make a voluntary disclosure. What are my responsibilities to my client under Circular 230?**

The IRS expects taxpayers to seek qualified legal advice and representation in connection with considering and making a voluntary disclosure. If a taxpayer seeks the advice of a tax practitioner but nonetheless decides not to make a voluntary disclosure despite the taxpayer's noncompliance with United States tax laws, Circular 230, section 10.21, requires the practitioner to advise the client of the fact of the client's noncompliance and the consequences of the client's noncompliance as provided under the Code and regulations.

**30. Can I talk to the IRS without revealing my client's identity?**

Hypothetical situations present a potential for misunderstanding that exists when there is no assurance that the hypothetical contains all relevant facts. In addition, tax practitioners should be aware that posing a situation as a hypothetical does not satisfy the requirements of making a voluntary disclosure. If the IRS receives information relating specifically to the taxpayer's undisclosed foreign accounts or undisclosed foreign entities while the hypothetical question is pending, the taxpayer may become ineligible to make a voluntary disclosure.

If practitioners have questions about the terms of the voluntary disclosure program, they should contact the IRS Voluntary Disclosure Hotline at (215) 516-4777, visit [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov), or contact their nearest CI office with questions. For a list of CI offices, visit:

<http://www.irs.gov/compliance/enforcement/article/0,,id=205909,00.html>