

STATE OF INDIANA

DEPARTMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE



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TO: County Assessors, Auditors and Vendors
FROM: Courtney Schaafsma, Director of Data Analysis *CLS*
SUBJECT: Updated Homestead Database Submission Procedures
DATE: November 9, 2010

The purpose of this memorandum is to inform all county assessors, auditors, and vendors about updates to the submission procedures of homestead verification information to the Homestead Database ("Database") maintained by the Indiana Department of Local Government Finance ("Department"). These updates include the addition of a data submission option that allows for data to be submitted in spreadsheet form for subsequent upload to the Database and the implementation of an Acknowledgement of Responsibility for each county or vendor involved in submitting data to the Database.

Updated Data Submission Options

Since the introduction of the Homestead Verification Form ("Form") and the Database, counties have had two options available for submission of homestead information to the Database. Counties have been able to manually enter information from each Form into the Database via the web. Other counties have engaged a third-party vendor to aggregate the data necessary for submission to the Database. While these two options will still remain as available options, the Department will also now allow for counties or the county's contracted third-party vendor to submit the county's data in spreadsheet format that can then be uploaded to the Database. This memo describes the process and requirements for using this submission option.

Responsibility for Information in the Database

IC 6-1.1-12-37(i) requires that the Department provide county auditors with secure access to a database that tracks the names and required identification numbers of taxpayers claiming a homestead deduction. As the Department's responsibility is strictly to maintain the Database, the Department does not review the information included in the Database for accuracy or validity. (Under the data submission options outlined below, the Department may verify the formatting of files received for upload. However, the Department does not verify the information contained in the file.) It is the responsibility of each county auditor to ensure that data entered into the Database is accurate and valid. To clarify these responsibilities, the Department has created an Acknowledgement of Responsibility, which is attached to this memo. This Acknowledgment of Responsibility should be completed by each county auditor and returned to the Department at the addresses provided. **This Acknowledgement of Responsibility must be received by the Department prior to the Department accepting files for upload from the county (or the county's selected vendor) as described below.**

In some instances, counties may utilize a third-party vendor to submit their homestead information to the Database. For these situations, the Department has created a separate Acknowledgement of Third-Party Responsibility. The Acknowledgement of Third-Party Responsibility should be returned to the Department prior to the Department accepting any submissions. **This Acknowledgment of Third-Party Responsibility must be received by the Department prior to the Department accepting files for upload from the third-party vendor.**

Counties that utilize a third-party vendor to prepare their submissions to the Database are reminded that the ultimate responsibility for the data submitted to the Database lies with the county auditor. As such, the county should ensure that any contracts with third-party vendors for homestead information submission clearly delineate the responsibilities of the county and the third-party vendor in submitting the information.

Process and Requirements for Upload Submissions

To ensure all files received are able to be easily uploaded to the Database, the Department has developed a standard file format and specifications for data that is submitted in spreadsheet format. The required file format is attached to this memo. In addition, a template of the approved file format can be found on the Department's website at <http://www.in.gov/dlgf/8455.htm>. Counties and vendors must use the file format specifications and template to ensure their data is able to be uploaded to the Database. Files should be named as follows: countyname_MMDDYYYY_submission number. An example of this file name would be Bartholomew_11012010_1. The second data submission would be named Bartholomew_11052010_2. Spreadsheets should be compressed (zipped) and password-protected in order to provide additional security. Counties or third-party vendors can email the Department at homestead@dlgf.in.gov to obtain a password for the homestead upload files.

Upon creation of a spreadsheet following this file format, counties or vendors should submit the spreadsheet file to the Department by sending it to homestead@dlgf.in.gov. The Department recommends that counties or vendors submit a spreadsheet once a month. For each submission, counties or vendors should start a new blank file that does not include any records previously submitted to and accepted by the Department. Inclusion of previously submitted and uploaded records will result in duplicates in the Database and will increase the administrative time necessary for the county to remove such duplicates after submission.

Once the Department has received a file from a county or a vendor, the Department will run the file through an error-checking program. This program is designed to check the file for compliance with the file format and to ensure the file can be easily uploaded to the Database. The error-checking program does not check for errors in the information provided by the taxpayer. The program simply checks for formatting issues that would present problems when trying to upload the submitted file into the Database. The items the error-checking program will be checking for are as follows:

- County Number – This field must contain two digits. If your county number is only one digit, please include a leading zero. Example: 02 for Allen County.
- SDF ID – While this field is not a required field, if it is completed, the information in this field must follow the format identified in the design specifications.

- Parcel Number – While this field is not a required field, if it is completed, the information in this field must follow the format identified in the design specifications for non-mobile home records. Records identified as mobile homes will not be run through this check.
- First Name – This field must contain information.
- Last Name – This field must contain information.
- SSN ID – While this field is not a required field, if it is completed, the information in this field must follow the format identified in the design specifications. Records with less than five digits will result in a rejection.
- License ID – While this field is not a required field, if it is completed, the information in this field must follow the format identified in the design specifications. Records with less than five digits will result in a rejection.
- License State ID – While this field is not a required field, if it is completed, the information in this field must follow the format identified in the design specifications. Records with less than two letters will result in a rejection.
- Spouse SSN ID – While this field is not a required field, if it is completed, the information in this field must follow the format identified in the design specifications. Records with less than five digits will result in a rejection.
- Spouse License ID – While this field is not a required field, if it is completed, the information in this field must follow the format identified in the design specifications. Records with less than five digits will result in a rejection.
- Spouse License State ID – While this field is not a required field, if it is completed, the information in this field must follow the format identified in the design specifications. Records with less than two letters will result in a rejection.
- Address1 – This field must contain information.
- City – This field must contain information.
- Zip – This field must contain information.
- Activity Type – This field must contain either “Homestead” or “Vacated_Hm”.
- Activity Date – This field must contain information in date/time format.
- Auditor Stamp – This field must contain either “Approved”, “Review” or “Rejected”.
- Auditor Approval Date – This field must contain information in date/time format. For records under review, Activity Date can be used.
- Approval User – This field must contain the name of the file in which the record is contained.
- Mobile Home – This field must contain either “TRUE” or “FALSE”.

Counties and vendors should pay close attention to the items listed above and check their completed files for these issues prior to sending to the Department. The Department will provide counties and vendors with a report from the error-checking program within two business days of submission of the upload file. If a submitted file passes the error-checking program with no identified issues, the Department will then upload the submitted file to the Database. However, if the submitted file contains any of the errors identified above, the Department will reject the entire file and will not upload any of the records to the Database. Upon notification of the rejection, the Department will provide to the county or vendor a report created by the error-checking program. This report will identify which errors have been identified in the file as well as how many of each error exists. The error report will not identify exactly which records have errors. It will be the

county's or vendor's responsibility to use the error checking report to identify the impacted records and fix these records.

After fixing any identified errors, the county or vendor can resubmit the file to the Department. The Department will follow the same procedure of running the resubmitted file through the error-checking program. However, if the file is found to still have errors in the second submission, the county or vendor will not be allowed to resubmit the data again in that particular month. **Counties and vendors are only allowed to submit the same dataset to the Department two times per month.** After the second rejection of the file, the county or vendor will need to fix the errors and include the rejected records in the county's submission for the next month. The county or vendor could also submit the records included in the rejected file through manual entry of the information into the Database.

The Department is hopeful that the data submission process outlined above provides counties with greater flexibility in working with the Database. If you have any questions or comments on any of the information contained above or on the submission of files for upload to the Database, please contact Courtney Schaafsma at cschaafsma@dlgf.in.gov or 317-232-3759. You may also submit questions to the Department through homestead@dlgf.in.gov.