DEPARTMENT OF STATE REVENUE

LETTER OF FINDINGS NUMBER: 05-0341
Cigarette Tax
For Tax Years 2004 and 2005

NOTICE: Under IC 4-22-7-7, this document is required to be published in the Indiana Register and is effective on its date of publication. It shall remain in effect until the date it is superseded or deleted by the publication of a new document in the Indiana Register. The publication of this document will provide the general public with information about the Department's official position concerning a specific issue.

I. Cigarette Tax--Imposition

Authority: 15 U.S.C. §§ 375-378; IC 6-7-1-1; IC 6-8.1-5-1; 45 IAC 15-5-3

Taxpayer protests the imposition of cigarette tax.

II. Use Tax--Imposition

Authority: IC 6-2.5-3-2; IC 6-2.5-3-7; IC 6-8.1-5-1; 45 IAC 2.2-3-4

Taxpayer protests the imposition of use tax.

III. Tax Administration—Negligence Penalty and Interest

Authority: IC 6-8.1-10-1; IC 6-8.1-10-2.1; 45 IAC 15-11-2

Taxpayer protests the imposition of a ten percent negligence penalty and interest.

STATEMENT OF FACTS

Taxpayer is an individual. As the result of an investigation, the Indiana Department of Revenue determined that taxpayer owed cigarette tax, use tax, and penalty on cigarettes ordered via the internet and delivered in Indiana. Taxpayer protests that she does not owe these taxes. Further facts will be supplied as required.

I. Cigarette Tax--Imposition

DISCUSSION

Before examining the taxpayer's protest, it should be noted that the *taxpayer* bears the burden of proof. IC 6-8.1-5-1(b) states in pertinent part:

> The notice of proposed assessment is prima facie evidence that the department's claim for the unpaid tax is valid. The burden of proving that the proposed assessment is wrong rests with the person against whom the proposed assessment is made.

The Indiana Administrative Code also states "[t]he burden of proving that a proposed assessment is incorrect rests with the taxpayer…." 45 IAC 15-5-3(b).

Taxpayer protests the imposition of cigarette tax. Taxpayer argues that she does not owe cigarette tax. Taxpayer states that she believes the vendor paid tax prior to her purchase.

The cigarette tax is found at IC 6-7-1-1, which states:

> It is the intent and purpose of this chapter to levy a tax on all cigarettes sold, used, consumed, handled, or distributed within this state, and to collect the tax from the person who first sells, uses, consumes, handles, or distributes the cigarettes. It is further the intent and purpose of this chapter that whenever any cigarettes are given for advertising or any purpose whatsoever, they shall be taxed in the same manner as if they were sold, used, consumed, handled, or distributed in this state. Notwithstanding any other provisions contained in this chapter, the liability for the excise taxes imposed by this chapter shall be conclusively presumed to be on the retail purchaser or ultimate consumer, precollected for convenience and facility only. When such taxes are paid by any other person, such payment shall be considered as an advance payment and shall be added to the price of the cigarettes and recovered from the ultimate consumer or user. Distributors, wholesalers, or retailers may state the amount of the tax separately from the price of such cigarettes on all price display signs, sales or delivery slips, bills, and statements which advertise or indicate the price of such cigarettes.

As this statute makes clear, this tax applies to all purchases of cigarettes. It does not make a difference if the purchase is over the counter, via the internet, telephone or in any other manner. Just as every person who purchases cigarettes in a store owes cigarette tax, so does the person who purchases cigarettes from an internet vendor.

The Department was informed that taxpayer had purchased cigarettes due to the provisions of the Jenkins Act, 15 U.S.C. §§ 375-378, which is an enforcement mechanism for states to prevent evasion of state cigarette taxes. The Jenkins Act states in relevant part:

> (a) Contents. Any person who sells or transfers for profit cigarettes in interstate commerce, whereby such cigarettes are shipped into a State taxing the sale or use of cigarettes to other than a distributor licensed by or located in such State, or who advertises or offers cigarettes for such sale or transfer and shipment, shall--
>
> (1) first file with the tobacco tax administrator of the State into which such shipment is made or in which such advertisement or offer is disseminated a statement setting forth his name and trade name (if any), and the address of his principal place of business and of any other place of business; and

> (2) not later than the 10th day of each calendar month, file with the tobacco tax administrator of the State into which such shipment is made, a memorandum or a copy of the invoice covering each and every shipment of cigarettes made during the previous calendar month into such State; the memorandum or invoice in each case to include the name and address of the person to whom the shipment was made, the brand, and the quantity thereof.
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> (b) Presumptive evidence. The fact that any person ships or delivers for shipment any cigarettes shall, if such shipment is into a State in which such person has filed a statement with the tobacco tax administrator under subsection (a) (1) of this section, be presumptive evidence (1) that such cigarettes were sold, or transferred for profit, by such person, and (2) that such sale or transfer was to other than a distributor licensed by or located in such State.
> 15 U.S.C. § 376

Also of relevance, a distributor is defined by 15 U.S.C. § 375(3) as:

> (A) in the case of any State which by State statute or regulation authorizes the distribution of cigarettes at wholesale or retail, any person so authorized, or
> (B) in the case of any other State, any person located in such State who distributes cigarettes at wholesale or retail;
> but such term in no case includes a person who acquires cigarettes for purposes other than resale.

15 U.S.C. § 376 provides that a seller of cigarettes that sells cigarettes from one state to consumers for delivery in another state must provide the tobacco tax administrator of the state into which the cigarettes are distributed certain information. This information includes the name of the person to whom the cigarettes were sold, the brand of cigarettes sold, and the quantity of cigarettes sold. The Department's current assessment was based on information received pursuant to the Jenkins Act. The internet distributor was required by law to provide the names, brands, and quantities of all Indiana purchasers of its cigarettes. The internet distributor provided those names, and the Department sought to collect the tax from the persons to whom the distributor shipped its cigarettes.

In conclusion, the Department received information under the Jenkins Act which named taxpayer as the purchaser of cigarettes in Indiana. The cigarette tax is imposed on all purchases of cigarettes in Indiana, including those purchases which are delivered into Indiana, as provided by IC 6-7-1-1. The burden of proving the assessment wrong rests with the taxpayer, as provided in IC 6-8.1-5-1(b). Taxpayer has not met this burden.

FINDING

Taxpayer's protest is denied.

II. Use Tax--Imposition

DISCUSSION

Taxpayer protests the imposition of use tax on its purchase of cigarettes ordered via the internet and delivered in Indiana. Taxpayer offers the same arguments as in Issue I. The use tax is complementary to the sales tax and is found at IC 6-2.5-3-2(a), which states:

> An excise tax, known as the use tax, is imposed on the storage, use, or consumption of tangible personal property in Indiana if the property was acquired in a retail transaction, regardless of the location of that transaction or of the retail merchant making that transaction.

Also of relevance is 45 IAC 2.2-3-4, which states:

> Tangible personal property, purchased in Indiana, or elsewhere in a retail transaction, and stored, used, or otherwise consumed in Indiana is subject to Indiana use tax for such property, unless the Indiana state gross retail tax has been collected at the point of purchase.

This means that Indiana use tax is due when Indiana sales tax is not collected. The Department has received no documentation to indicate, let alone establish, that sales tax was collected on the purchase of the cigarettes at issue.

As explained in Issue I, under IC 6-8.1-5-1(b) the burden of proving the assessment wrong rests with the taxpayer. Beyond this general burden is IC 6-2.5-3-7(a), which states:

> A person who acquires tangible personal property from a retail merchant for delivery in Indiana is presumed to have acquired the property for storage, use, or consumption in Indiana, unless the person or the retail merchant can produce evidence to rebut that presumption.

Taxpayer has not produced sufficient evidence to rebut the presumption that the cigarettes were acquired for storage, use or consumption in Indiana. Since Indiana sales tax was not collected on the purchase of the cigarettes, under IC 6-2.5-3-2(a) and 45 IAC 2.2-3-4, Indiana use tax is due on the purchase of the cigarettes. Taxpayer has not met the burden of proving the proposed assessment wrong, as explained under IC 6-8.1-5-1(b).

FINDING

Taxpayer's protest is denied.

III. Tax Administration—Negligence Penalty and Interest

DISCUSSION

The Department issued proposed assessments and the ten percent negligence penalty and interest for the tax years in question. Taxpayer protests the imposition of penalty and interest. With regard to interest, the Department refers to IC 6-8.1-10-1, which states in relevant part:

> (a) If a person fails to file a return for any of the listed taxes, fails to pay the full amount of tax shown on his return by the due date for the return or the payment, or incurs a deficiency upon a determination by the department, the person is subject to interest on the nonpayment.
> …
> (e) The department may not waive the interest imposed under this section.

Since taxpayer incurred a deficiency upon a determination by the Department, as explained in Issues I and II, the Department may not waive interest under IC 6-8.1-10-1.

With regard to the penalty, the Department refers to IC 6-8.1-10-2.1(a), which states in relevant part:

> If a person:
> …
> (3) incurs, upon examination by the department, a deficiency that is due to negligence;
> …
> the person is subject to a penalty.

The Department refers to 45 IAC 15-11-2(b), which states:

> Negligence, on behalf of a taxpayer is defined as the failure to use such reasonable care, caution, or diligence as would be expected of an ordinary reasonable taxpayer. Negligence would result from a taxpayer's carelessness, thoughtlessness, disregard or inattention to duties placed upon the taxpayer by the Indiana Code or department regulations. Ignorance of the listed tax laws, rules and/or regulations is treated as negligence. Further, failure to read and follow instructions provided by the department is treated as negligence. Negligence shall be determined on a case by case basis according to the facts and circumstances of each taxpayer.

45 IAC 15-11-2(c) provides in pertinent part:

> The department shall waive the negligence penalty imposed under IC 6-8.1-10-1 if the taxpayer affirmatively establishes that the failure to file a return, pay the full amount of tax due, timely remit tax held in trust, or pay a deficiency was due to reasonable cause and not due to negligence. In order to establish reasonable cause, the taxpayer must demonstrate that it exercised ordinary business care and prudence in carrying out or failing to carry out a duty giving rise to the penalty imposed under this section.

In this case, taxpayer incurred a deficiency which the Department determined was due to negligence under 45 IAC 15-11-2(b), and so was subject to a penalty under IC 6-8.1-10-2.1(a). Taxpayer has affirmatively established that her failure to pay the deficiency was due to reasonable cause and not due to negligence, as required by 45 IAC 15-11-2(c). The Department cannot waive interest, under IC 6-8.1-10-1. The negligence penalty shall be waived.

FINDING

Taxpayer's protest is sustained regarding penalty and denied regarding interest.

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