

Letter of Findings: 65-20221633
Indiana Overweight Proposed Assessment
For The Year 2022

NOTICE: [IC 6-8.1-3-3.5](#) and [IC 4-22-7-7](#) require the publication of this document in the Indiana Register. This document provides the general public with information about the Indiana Department of Revenue's official position concerning a specific set of facts and issues. This document is effective on its date of publication and remains in effect until the date it is superseded or deleted by the publication of another document in the Indiana Register. The "Holding" section of this document is provided for the convenience of the reader and is not part of the analysis contained in this Letter of Findings.

HOLDING

Motor Carrier provided sufficient evidence that the civil penalty should be reduced.

ISSUE

I. Motor Vehicles - Overweight Penalty.

Authority: [IC 6-8.1-5-1](#); [IC 6-8.1-1-1](#); [IC 9-20-1-1](#); [IC 9-20-1-2](#); [IC 9-20-4-1](#); [IC 9-20-18-14.5](#); *Dept. of State Revenue v. Caterpillar, Inc.*, 15 N.E.3d 579 (Ind. 2014); *Indiana Dept. of State Revenue v. Rent-A-Center East, Inc.*, 963 N.E.2d 463 (Ind. 2012); *Lafayette Square Amoco, Inc. v. Indiana Dept. of State Revenue*, 867 N.E.2d 289 (Ind. Tax Ct. 2007).

Taxpayer protests the assessment of an overweight civil penalty.

STATEMENT OF FACTS

Taxpayer is an Illinois based trucking company. On June 21, 2022, the Indiana State Police ("ISP") cited Taxpayer's commercial motor vehicle for an overweight violation for being overweight on an axle. As a result, the Indiana Department of Revenue ("Department") issued Taxpayer a proposed assessment for an overweight violation under [IC 9-20-18-14.5\(d\)](#) in the form of a "No Permit Available Civil Penalty."

Taxpayer protested the assessment. An administrative hearing was held. This Letter of Findings results. Additional facts will be provided as necessary.

I. Motor Vehicles - Overweight Penalty.

DISCUSSION

Taxpayer protests the imposition of a civil penalty for an overweight violation of one of its trucks. Taxpayer argued that the driver was not aware of being overweight at the time of the inspection and there was no Taxpayer control over loading. Taxpayer provided a copy of the bill of lading.

As a threshold issue, it is Taxpayer's responsibility to establish that the existing proposed assessment is incorrect. As stated in [IC 6-8.1-5-1\(c\)](#), "[t]he notice of proposed assessment is prima facie evidence that the [D]epartment's claim for the unpaid tax is valid, including during an action appealed to the tax court under this chapter. The burden of proving that the proposed assessment is wrong rests with the person against whom the proposed assessment is made." See also *Indiana Dept. of State Revenue v. Rent-A-Center East, Inc.*, 963 N.E.2d 463, 466 (Ind. 2012); *Lafayette Square Amoco, Inc. v. Indiana Dept. of State Revenue*, 867 N.E.2d 289, 292 (Ind. Tax Ct. 2007).

The Department notes that, "when [courts] examine a statute that an agency is 'charged with enforcing. . . [courts] defer to the agency's reasonable interpretation of [the] statute even over an equally reasonable interpretation by another party.'" *Dept. of State Revenue v. Caterpillar, Inc.*, 15 N.E.3d 579, 583 (Ind. 2014). Thus, all interpretations of Indiana tax law contained within this decision shall be entitled to deference.

According to [IC 9-20-1-1](#), "[e]xcept as otherwise provided in [IC Art. 9-20], a person, including a transport operator, may not operate or move upon a highway a vehicle or combination of vehicles of a size or weight

exceeding the limitations provided in [IC Art. 9-20]."

According to [IC 9-20-1-2](#), the owner of a vehicle "may not cause or knowingly permit to be operated or moved upon a highway [in Indiana] a vehicle or combination of vehicles of a size or weight exceeding the limitations provided in [IC Art. 9-20]."

[IC 9-20-18-14.5](#) authorizes the Department to impose civil penalties against motor carriers that obtain a permit under IC Art. 9-20 and violate IC Art. 9-20 ("Permit Violation Civil Penalty") or are required, but fail, to obtain a permit under IC Art. 9-20 ("No Permit Civil Penalty").

[IC 6-8.1-1-1](#) states that fees and penalties stemming from IC Art. 9-20 violations are a "listed tax." Under [IC 9-20-18-14.5\(a\)](#) these listed taxes are in addition to and separate from any settlement or agreement made with a local court or political subdivision regarding the traffic stop.

ISP cited Taxpayer's vehicle for being 2,020 pounds overweight on an axle in violation of [IC 9-20-4-1](#). The Department imposed a "No Permit Available Civil Penalty" in accordance with [IC 9-20-18-14.5\(d\)](#) because Taxpayer was in excess of the legal per axle weight, and no permit is available for instances where axles are overweight.

In support of its protest, Taxpayer provided the bill of lading as well as explanations of the relevant facts. Taxpayer argues that its reliance on the bill of lading and the loading by the loader should reduce the Taxpayer's civil. Taxpayer stated that it would have been impossible under the circumstance to know the weight per axle because of the loading conditions. Taxpayer asserts that loading is done by another party and Taxpayer is not allowed to review or exit the vehicle during loading. Taxpayer also provided a bill of lading which it relied on showing the load at 41,472 pounds, which would put the weight under the gross weight allowed. Taxpayer does not try to argue that there was any mistake in the weighing or that the load could have been under the allowable axle weight. It remains that, although Taxpayer was not in control of the loading, the axle violation was 2,020 pounds over the allowable weight.

[IC 9-20-18-14.5](#) provides "not more than" language for the Department to consider when generating a proposed assessment amount. Considering Taxpayer's history of compliance at the time of this inspection and information provided by the Taxpayer during the protest process, the Department will generate a proposed assessment with a reduced amount as authorized by its statutory discretion and this Letter of Findings.

FINDING

Taxpayer's protest is sustained in part and denied to the extent that Taxpayer did not prove the entire penalty should be removed.

January 18, 2023

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