



The New York State Tax Audit — Your Rights and Responsibilities

The Department of Taxation and Finance's purpose in conducting an audit is to verify that you paid the correct tax. During the audit, you may be required to provide the auditor with whatever records are necessary to verify the information you provided on your return. Depending on the type of return being audited, this may entail a review of your income, receipts, expenses, credits, and other business records.

Professional audit standards

The examination must be conducted in accordance with professional auditing standards by an auditor who is familiar with generally accepted accounting procedures and auditing techniques.

To avoid any conflicts of interest, the auditor cannot have any personal relationships with the taxpayer, the taxpayer's family, or the taxpayer's employees (in the case of a business audit). Additionally, the auditor may not have any personal or financial interest in a business being audited.

Throughout the course of an audit, you are entitled to receive fair, courteous, and professional treatment. If at any time during the course of an audit you feel these standards or any other of your rights are being violated, you should immediately contact the auditor's supervisor.

Statute of limitations

New York State Tax Law generally places a three-year statute of limitations on tax audits, beyond which the Tax Department may not audit without your written consent. The statute of limitations does not apply, however, for any period during which a taxpayer failed to file a return, failed to report federal changes, or filed a false or fraudulent return to evade tax.

Privacy/confidentiality

You have the right to know why we are requesting certain information, how we will use such information, and the consequences of your failure to submit the information. The Tax Law prohibits the disclosure of information obtained from a tax return, or during the course of an audit, to any unauthorized person. The Tax Law, however, does permit us to share your tax information with the Internal Revenue Service and other tax agencies, under defined standards of secrecy and reciprocity.

Representation

You may retain representation at any time during the audit, and have the right to suspend a meeting or interview at any time in order to retain such representation. Any person representing you must have the proper written authorization (power of attorney) to act on your behalf in your absence.

Audio recording

Upon reasonable advance notice to the Tax Department, you are permitted to make an audio recording of any in-person interview. You must make the recording at your own expense and with your own equipment. The Tax Department also reserves the right to record any in-person interview which the taxpayer has requested permission to record.

The field audit

We schedule field audits in advance to give you enough time to assemble the required records. When we select you for a field audit, an auditor will usually contact you by letter, although you may be contacted by phone to set up the initial appointment. We will then send you a letter confirming the appointment and describing the books and records you must make available. For a business audit, most appointments will be at your place of business.

If you need a longer period of time to gather the necessary records, you can usually request an extension of up to 30 days; for delays longer than 30 days, you must make a written request that explains your reason for the request.

Preliminary conference

At your initial meeting (called the *preliminary conference*), the auditor will explain the audit approach and procedures, describe the audit process, and outline your protest rights and appeal procedures. You should use this meeting to ask any questions you might have about your rights and responsibilities during the audit.

Audit techniques

There are several different techniques used for conducting audits. The method an auditor chooses will depend on a number of variables, such as the type of tax, the accuracy and availability of records, and the size and complexity of a business.

We may conduct a detailed audit, an audit involving the test period method, or, in some instances, an audit involving a statistical sampling method. In addition, the scope of an audit may be expanded and completed as a multi-tax audit.

If preliminary audit findings result in a material effect on the reporting of another tax, the findings may be referred to another tax specialty at any time during the audit process. Audit adjustments of one tax specialty may be used as a basis for recalculation of tax in another, depending on the facts and circumstances of the case.

Audit duration

An audit generally covers a three-year period, and can take anywhere from several days to several months to complete. The duration of the audit will depend on the complexity of the returns being audited and on the timely availability, completeness, and accuracy of your records.

Audit findings

If there are no changes recommended by the auditor, you will be sent a letter acknowledging this and thanking you for your cooperation.

If there are changes, the auditor will meet with you to explain the findings, and to present copies of audit workpapers and schedules. The auditor will explain the audit findings, as well as the audit methods and procedures, in simple, nontechnical terms. Findings may include recommended changes in recordkeeping practices to correct accounting errors found during the audit, an explanation of the proper interpretation of the Tax Law in areas where errors were made, a notice of additional taxes due, or a notice of a refund due.

We then give you a reasonable period of time to disprove any of the audit findings. The auditor will then analyze any additional information submitted and, if appropriate, revise and resubmit the workpapers with a *Statement of Proposed Audit Changes*.

If the audit results in a refund, the auditor will provide any assistance you may require.

If you agree . . .

If you agree with the audit findings, you will be asked to acknowledge your consent by signing the *Statement of Proposed Audit Changes*. If you owe money but cannot pay in full at this time, you can usually make a down payment and work out an installment payment agreement for the rest. You should be aware, though, that interest (and possible penalties) will continue to accrue on the unpaid balance.

If you disagree . . .

If you do not agree with the audit findings, you should indicate your disagreement on the *Statement of Proposed Audit Changes* and return

the form to the auditor. Supervisory personnel review all audit reports carefully, so you may hold additional conferences with the auditor's supervisors to discuss any disagreements with the audit findings.

If you still disagree with the audit findings, we will send you a *Notice of Determination* or *Notice of Deficiency* for the taxes due. At this point, you may formally appeal the audit findings through either the Tax Department's Bureau of Conciliation and Mediation Services or through the independent Division of Tax Appeals. Estate tax cases must be appealed to the county surrogate's court (see Publication 130-E, *The New York State Tax Audit - Your Rights and Responsibilities - Estate Tax*). Generally, you must file your appeal within 90 days of the date the notice was issued. **To determine your time limit, refer to the Notice you received.** You must submit a written appeal even if you have previously written to the department and objected to the position taken in the *Statement of Proposed Audit Changes*.

Penalties and interest

The three most common reasons for tax penalties are (1) late filing, (2) overdue taxes, and (3) underpayment of estimated tax. You can avoid penalties and interest by filing your tax returns and paying the correct amount of taxes on time.

Penalties for late filing and delinquent taxes are generally based on the amount of tax that is overdue. However, there are various penalties for late filing whether or not you owe any taxes.

Whether you agree or disagree with the tax, interest, or penalties, both interest and penalties continue to be added to the amount due until we receive payment.

Claims for refund

Most taxpayers normally associate refunds of tax with an overpayment of withholding or estimated tax. However, after filing an original return, a taxpayer may discover the omission of a credit, deduction, or exemption. Generally, you may claim refunds by filing an amended return or by completing an application for refund form.

If your refund is adjusted or denied in full, we will send you an explanation of the changes or a letter of disallowance. If you disagree with the adjustment of your refund, you should submit additional information to substantiate your position. If you still disagree with the adjusted refund or letter of disallowance, you may file a petition with the Bureau of Conciliation and Mediation Services or the Division of Tax Appeals.

The refund claim form or return you must use will depend on the type of claim you are making. For information and copies of the appropriate form, refer to the *Need help?* section.

Notification of your right to protest an action taken by the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance

If you disagree with an action taken by the Tax Department (the issuance of a tax deficiency/determination, the denial of a refund claim, or the denial or revocation of a license, registration, or exemption certificate), you may protest by filing a *Request for Conciliation Conference* or by filing a *Petition* for a tax appeals hearing. If the disputed amount is within certain monetary limits, you may elect to have your hearing held in the Small Claims Unit.

You **must** file the request or petition within a certain period from the date the Tax Department mailed you notice of its action. **Please refer to the notice you received to determine your time limit.** These time limits are established by the Tax Law and cannot be extended. We recommend you use certified or registered mail.

You may appear on your own behalf or you may have an authorized representative present your case for review. An authorized representative must have a power of attorney from you.

There are no formal prepayment hearing rights where tax, interest, or penalty is owed because of (1) mathematical or clerical errors on a return, (2) changes made to the taxpayer's federal return by the IRS or other competent federal authority (federal changes), or

(3) failure of the taxpayer to pay all or part of the amount of tax due that is shown as due on the taxpayer's return.

Conciliation conference

A conciliation conference is a rapid and inexpensive way to resolve protests without a formal hearing. The conference is conducted informally by a conciliation conferee, who will review all of the evidence presented to determine a fair result. After the conference, the conferee will issue a conciliation order. This order will be binding **unless** you file a petition for a hearing within 90 days after the conciliation order is issued.

Conferences are not available to distributors, importing transporters, terminal operators, or petroleum businesses where the issue is an increase in the amount of a bond or other security. These situations may be handled by the Tax Appeals Division only.

Tax appeals hearing

The tax appeals hearing procedure begins when you file a petition with the Division of Tax Appeals. You must indicate in writing the specific actions of the Tax Department you are protesting.

The hearing is an adversary proceeding before an impartial administrative law judge. The hearing will be stenographically reported. After the hearing, the administrative law judge will issue a determination which will finally decide the matter(s) in dispute **unless** you or the Tax Department request a review of the decision made by the Tax Appeals Tribunal. If such a review is requested, the record of the hearing and any additional oral or written arguments will be considered. After this review, the Tribunal will issue a decision affirming, reversing, or modifying the administrative law judge's determination, or referring the matter back to the administrative law judge for further hearing.

Court review: If you do not agree with the Tax Appeals Tribunal's decision, you may seek court review. You must file an application for court review within the specified time limits. For some taxes, you must pay the tax, interest, and penalty, or post a bond for this amount, plus court costs, when you file an application for court review.

Small claims option: You may elect to have your hearing held in the Small Claims Unit if the amount in dispute is within the dollar limits set by the *Rules of Practice and Procedure of the Tax Appeals Tribunal* (a copy is included with the petition forms). The hearing is conducted as informally as possible by an impartial presiding officer. The presiding officer's determination is conclusive and is not subject to review by any other unit in the Division of Tax Appeals, the Tax Appeals Tribunal, or by any court in the state.

You may request petition forms and the *Rules of Practice and Procedure of the Tax Appeals Tribunal* by writing to:

DIVISION OF TAX APPEALS
RIVERFRONT PROFESSIONAL TOWER
500 FEDERAL STREET
TROY NY 12180-2894

A request for petition forms and the rules is **not** considered the filing of a petition for hearing for purposes of the time limits, and does not extend the time limits for filing a petition.

Need help?



Internet access: www.nystax.gov
(for information, forms, and publications)



Fax-on-demand forms: 1 800 748-3676



To order forms and publications: 1 800 462-8100

Business Tax Information Center: 1 800 972-1233

From areas outside the U.S. and
outside Canada: (518) 485-6800



Hearing and speech impaired
(telecommunications device for the
deaf (TDD) callers only): 1 800 634-2110

New York State Department of Taxation and Finance
Barbara G. Billet, Acting Commissioner