

IRS Operations During A Government Shutdown

If the federal government shuts down, IRS operations will be severely limited. However, the underlying tax law remains in effect, and all taxpayers should continue to meet their tax obligations as normal.

Individuals should keep filing their tax returns with the IRS and are required to do so by April 18 unless they obtain a six-month extension. The IRS will be accepting all tax returns. Once they've been accepted, the IRS will generally process and issue refunds for electronically filed individual returns.

Individuals are urged to file electronically, because most of these returns are processed automatically and should not be delayed. Because of limited IRS staffing, paper returns will be accepted, but will not be processed in the event of a government shutdown and taxpayers who file paper returns will experience a delay in receiving their refunds. Limited telephone customer service functions will remain available, but IRS walk-in taxpayer assistance centers will be closed.

While the government is closed, people with appointments related to examinations (audits), collection, Appeals or Taxpayer Advocate cases should assume their meetings are cancelled. IRS personnel will reschedule those meetings at a later date.

Here are some basic steps for taxpayers to follow in case of a government shutdown:

How Does This Affect Me? What Do I Do?

- You should continue to file and pay taxes as normal.
- The April 18, 2011, tax deadline for filing the 1040 series of tax returns remains in effect.
- Individuals filing the 1040 series of returns can still request a six-month filing extension to Oct. 17 by filing Form 4868. Taxpayers who request a filing extension must still make their tax payments by April 18, 2011.
- The quarterly estimated tax payment due April 18 is unchanged.
- All other tax deadlines remain in effect, including those covering individuals, corporations, partnerships and employers. The regular payroll tax deadlines remain in effect as well.
- You can file your tax return electronically or on paper — although the processing of paper returns will be delayed until full government operations resume. Payments accompanying paper tax returns will still be accepted as the IRS receives them.
- Tax refunds for most electronically filed returns will continue to be issued. Because of limited IRS staffing, taxpayers who file paper returns will experience a delay in receiving their refunds.
- Tax software companies, tax practitioners and Free File remain available to assist with taxes.
- State tax deadlines are not impacted by the federal government shutdown.

What Will Happen At The IRS If The Government Shuts Down?

Only the most basic functions will remain operating in light of the critical April 18 filing deadline.

Operations Available During the Government Shutdown

Tax processing operations are continuing at this time for electronically filed 1040 series tax returns.

Tax refunds will be issued as returns are processed, so most tax refunds for electronically filed returns will be issued. Taxpayers should expect longer than normal delays for paper filed tax refunds. IRS e-file and Free File remain the best way of getting tax refunds quickly and are unaffected by the government shutdown.

Tax deposits and payments are being processed, both for electronic and paper tax returns. Taxpayers should continue to make these payments as normal.

The IRS will continue accepting all tax returns during this period. In addition to individual e-file, business e-file will remain open as well and refunds for business e-filers will continue.

For individual taxpayers seeking assistance, the regular 800-829-1040 telephone line remains open. However, this line will not accept calls unrelated to individual tax issues, and taxpayers should anticipate much longer wait times. As an alternative, taxpayers are strongly encouraged to use www.IRS.gov.

The IRS website, www.IRS.gov, will remain available, although some interactive features may not be available. "Where's My Refund" will remain available on the IRS website for people to check on the status of their tax refunds.

If people have already filed their return and the IRS has started processing their tax return, they generally will see no delays in their refunds being issued. The best source for information will be checking "Where's My Refund" at www.IRS.gov.

The IRS Free File partners will continue to accept and file tax returns.

Tax software companies will continue to accept and file tax returns.

The IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA) and the Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) Programs will remain open in many locations to offer free tax help for taxpayers who qualify. Many Low-Income Taxpayer Clinics will remain open.

Many automated IRS notices will continue to be mailed.

Operations Closed Or Unavailable During a Government Shutdown (Partial Listing)

Taxpayer Assistance Centers (TACs) where taxpayers walk-in for service will be closed. People with scheduled appointments during the government shutdown will have to reschedule.

While the government is closed, people with appointments related to examinations (audits), collection, Appeals or Taxpayer Advocate cases should assume their meetings are cancelled. IRS personnel will reschedule those meetings at a later date.

No live telephone assistance will be available for non-1040 series business taxpayers on the 800-829-4933 number.

No live telephone assistance will be available for exempt organizations, retirement plans administrators or governmental entities that use the 877-829-5500 number.

The phone number for victims of identity theft (800-908-4490) will not be available.

The IRS will not be working any paper correspondence during this period.

Most IRS legal counsel services will stop.

Information for Tax Practitioners

- The e-Help Desk will be available for e-file error reject code assistance only -- Monday through Friday from 6:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Central Time.

- The Practitioner Priority Service line will not be available.
- Quick Alerts will be issued as necessary via the normal e-mail process.