



Pete Ricketts, Governor

July 2018

Dear Nebraska Cigarette Retailer,

The Nebraska Department of Revenue (Department) is responsible for monitoring compliance with Nebraska's cigarette and tobacco laws, including diligent enforcement as required by the Master Settlement Agreement pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. §§ 69-2702 to 69-2711, 77-2702 to 77-2720, and 77-4001 to 77-4024. The Department's diligent enforcement efforts include compliance checks of cigarette and tobacco retailers. This letter replaces the July 2017 letter and includes the standard as to what constitutes a complete readable tax stamp and a penalty schedule.

As part of the compliance checks, the Department inspects for contraband cigarettes. Contraband cigarettes include any:

- Cigarettes on point of sale displays or in your inventory that do not have a Nebraska cigarette tax stamp or are not properly stamped with a complete readable Nebraska tax stamp;
- Cigarettes and roll-your-own (RYO) tobacco that are not listed on the Nebraska Directory of Certified Tobacco Product Manufacturers and Brands (Directory). The Directory can be viewed on the Department's website at revenue.nebraska.gov by clicking on "Cigarettes/Other Tobacco Products," and "Nebraska Directory of Certified Tobacco Product Manufacturers and Brands;" and
- Single stick cigarettes.

A complete readable tax stamp is a stamp that can be identified as a Nebraska cigarette tax stamp, containing the legible 5-digit stamp number and/or two thirds (2/3) of the tax stamp. This standard does not apply if the tax stamps exhibit an intent to fraudulently evade tax. The 5-digit stamp number is legible if it can be read or recognized even where there is some flaking of the stamp on or around the 5-digit number. A complete readable tax stamp is required by Cigarette Tax Regulation 57-006.01.

Contraband cigarettes discovered during retail inspections will be confiscated under Neb. Rev. Stat. § 77-2620. Further, the retailer could be subject to civil and criminal penalties, and suspension or revocation of its local license to sell tobacco products.

**This guidance document is advisory in nature but is binding on the Nebraska Department of Revenue (Department) until amended. A guidance document does not include internal procedural documents that only affect the internal operations of the Department and does not impose additional requirements or penalties on regulated parties or include confidential information or rules and regulations made in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act. If you believe that this guidance document imposes additional requirements or penalties on regulated parties, you may request a review of the document.*

To ensure compliance with the cigarette and tobacco products tax laws of Nebraska, every retailer that sells cigarettes and RYO tobacco should implement as a best practice, the following steps:

- Inspect all cigarettes upon receipt to ensure that the cigarettes are properly stamped (see above) with a complete readable Nebraska cigarette tax stamp.
- Do not place any cigarettes on point of sale displays that do not contain a complete readable Nebraska tax stamp.
- Verify that all cigarettes and RYO tobacco products are listed on the Directory.
- Remove all cigarettes from point of sale displays that do not have a complete readable Nebraska cigarette tax stamp and/or are not listed on the Directory and return them to the wholesale dealer immediately.

The Department encourages you to work with your cigarette wholesale dealers to avoid issues with your cigarettes and RYO tobacco.

In conjunction with this letter, the Department will be using the following penalty schedule for stamping violations and non-directory sales of cigarettes and RYO tobacco products. Offenders are subject to the penalties described in the penalty schedule within a three-year time frame. **Penalties will only apply to packages of cigarettes with no tax stamp, an out-of state tax stamp, non-directory cigarettes, tax stamps that exhibit an intent to fraudulently evade tax, or where the facts of a particular incident rise to a level warranting a penalty.** This penalty schedule will also be posted on the Department’s website.

Cigarettes Seized Due to Tax Stamp Application*		Non-directory Product*	
Wholesalers	Retailers	Wholesalers	Retailers
1 st Incident: \$25 per package, capped at a total of \$500	1 st Incident: \$5 per package, capped at a total of \$100	1 st Incident: \$500 penalty	1 st Incident: \$500 penalty
2 nd and Subsequent Incidents: \$50 per package, capped at a total of \$1,000	2 nd Incident: \$10 per package, capped at a total of \$250	2 nd Incident: \$1,000 penalty	2 nd Incident: \$1,000 penalty
	3 rd Incident: \$10 per package, capped at a total of \$500	3 rd Incident: \$5,000 penalty	3 rd Incident: \$1,000 penalty

*The Department is not precluded from commencing revocation proceedings or recommending a case for criminal prosecution when the facts of any incident rise to a level warranting such action. Also, the retailer or wholesaler may attempt to resolve the penalty informally by filing a Request for Abatement of Penalty, Form 21.

The Department is in the process of developing an information guide that will contain more detailed information regarding your duties and responsibilities under the Nebraska cigarette tax laws. Once completed, the information guide will be posted on the Department's website. In the meantime, sign up for our free subscription service at revenue.nebraska.gov to get email updates on your topics of interest. Also, Department Regulations regarding the cigarette tax may be found by clicking on "Legal Information," then "Regulations," and "Title 316, Chapter 57 – Cigarette Tax."

If you have any follow-up questions, please contact Cliff Thomas at 402-471-5676 or cliff.thomas@nebraska.gov; or Jeanne Vrbka at 402-471-5781 or jeanne.vrbka@nebraska.gov.

For the Tax Commissioner

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Clifford W. Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'C'.

Clifford W. Thomas
Tax Specialist Senior

CWT:ct