

 News Release

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2014 Tax Season to Start Later Following Government Closure; IRS Sees Heavy Demand As Operations Resume

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WASHINGTON—The Internal Revenue Service today announced a delay of approximately one to two weeks to the start of the 2014 filing season to allow adequate time to program and test tax processing systems following the 16-day federal government closure.

The IRS is exploring options to shorten the expected delay and will announce a final decision on the start of the 2014 filing season in December, Acting IRS Commissioner Danny Werfel said. The original start date of the 2014 filing season was Jan. 21, and with a one- to two-week delay, the IRS would start accepting and processing 2013 individual tax returns no earlier than Jan. 28 and no later than Feb. 4.

The government closure came during the peak period for preparing IRS systems for the 2014 filing season. Programming, testing and deployment of more than 50 IRS systems is needed to handle processing of nearly 150 million tax returns. Updating these core systems is a complex, year-round process with the majority of the work beginning in the fall of each year.

About 90 percent of IRS operations were closed during the shutdown, with some major workstreams closed entirely during this period, putting the IRS nearly three weeks behind its tight timetable for being ready to start the 2014 filing season. There are additional training, programming and testing demands on IRS systems this year in order to provide additional refund fraud and identity theft detection and prevention.

“Readying our systems to handle the tax season is an intricate, detailed process, and we must take the time to get it right,” Werfel said. “The adjustment to the start of the filing season provides us the necessary time to program, test and validate our systems so that we can provide a smooth filing and refund process for the nation’s taxpayers. We want the public and tax professionals to know about the delay well in advance so they can prepare for a later start of the filing season.”

The IRS will not process paper tax returns before the start date, which will be announced in December. There is no advantage to filing on paper before the opening date, and taxpayers will receive their tax refunds much faster by using e-file with direct deposit. The April 15 tax deadline is set by statute and will remain in place. However, the IRS reminds taxpayers that anyone can request an automatic six-month extension to file their tax return. The request is easily done with Form 4868, which can be filed electronically or on paper.

IRS processes, applications and databases must be updated annually to reflect tax law updates, business process changes, and programming updates in time for the start of the filing season.

The IRS continues resuming and assessing operations following the 16-day closure. The IRS is seeing heavy demand on its toll-free telephone lines, walk-in sites and other services from taxpayers and tax practitioners.

During the closure, the IRS received 400,000 pieces of correspondence, on top of the 1 million items already being processed before the shutdown.

The IRS encourages taxpayers to wait to call or visit if their issue is not urgent, and to continue to use automated applications on IRS.gov whenever possible.

“In the days ahead, we will continue assessing the impact of the shutdown on IRS operations, and we will do everything we can to work through the backlog and pent-up demand,” Werfel said. “We greatly appreciate the patience of taxpayers and the tax professional community during this period.”