

Snohomish County Assessor

Press Release

For Immediate Release

Date: Feb. 19, 2007

ASSESSOR FINDS ERROR THAT WILL RESULT IN A REFUND OR CREDIT OF PROPERTY TAXES

Everett – The Snohomish County Assessor’s office announced today that due to an error in posting one account for personal property, all property owners in Snohomish County will either receive a refund or credit to their property taxes. Refunds or credits will range from approximately \$1.88 in most areas of the county and up to an estimated \$32.77 for City of Everett residents with a home valued at \$350,000. The exact amounts won’t be available until the taxes due per parcel are recalculated.

Many property owners will have their taxes paid by their mortgage company and the corrected amounts will be available to mortgage companies and all taxpayers before the first half taxes are due April 30th of this year. For the remaining taxpayers, the Treasurer’s office is deciding if it is feasible to send revised tax statements in a timely manner or whether to accept overpayments then issue refunds or credits, according to the Treasurer’s office.

The Assessor’s office is responsible for assessing and certifying values to the Treasurer’s office and is also responsible for calculating levy rates, which both occurred a month ago.

County Assessor Cindy Portmann said, “First and foremost, we have to do the right thing for tax payers in Snohomish County by correcting this error. The reason the error occurred has been identified and measures have been taken to assure that it won’t happen again.”

“I apologize for any confusion and inconvenience this will cause taxpayers.” Portmann said. It will obviously make some property owners happy that they are being treated fairly and receiving a credit or refund and others will be upset that the error occurred in the first place. I assure you that the error will not happen again.”

The error occurred when a single personal property account valued at \$150,308,732 for business machinery and equipment for an industrial property was not “certified” in the Assessor’s office and included in the total taxable assessed value for the county. As a result, the correct levy amounts were calculated for all taxing districts, but because of the absence of this one account a portion of the total tax burden amounting to \$1,597,471 of the total amount to be collected of \$833,585,949 (0.19% or nineteen hundredths of one percent) wasn’t distributed properly to all taxpayers.

When the Assessor's office discovered the error they consulted with the State of Washington Dept. of Revenue Property Tax Division, which oversees all Assessors offices in the state regarding the remedy. The Dept. of Revenue advised her office that a credit or refund was appropriate.

The office is currently conducting an internal audit and investigation regarding why there were 4 smaller accounts that were also not certified. The total amount of the 4 accounts in question may not be enough in value to change the tax distribution a fraction of a penny; however the audit and investigation are not complete yet. The office is responsible for assessing approximately 14,000 personal property accounts and approximately 260,000 real property accounts annually.

The State Auditors office and the State of Washington Dept. of Revenue audit all assessors' offices each year. Portmann said, "I can only recall one minor finding by the Dept. of Revenue since 1994 when I was appointed Chief Deputy for the previous assessor Gail Rauch."

The more the taxable assessed value in a district, the lower the levy rate is for all taxpayers. Correcting this error will result in lower levy rates for the districts involved and lower taxes for taxpayers.

Portmann is working cooperatively with the County Treasurer's office staff to make sure property owners pay the correct amount of taxes for this year. Assessor's staff will first have to recalculate the levy rates for the taxing districts involved, which include the: City of Everett, Everett EMS, Everett Senior Housing Bonds, Everett School District M&O and Bonds, State School Port of Everett, County Regular and County Conservation.

The Treasurer's office is responsible for mailing the tax statements and collecting the property taxes. Portmann said, "I know this will adversely affect the Treasurer's office staff who will have to deal with the fallout of this error that they clearly had no part in and I sincerely apologize.