



IRS Collecting \$8 Billion from Offshore Tax Compliance Push

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BY MICHAEL COHN

The Internal Revenue Service said Friday it has collected more than \$8 billion from its Offshore Voluntary Disclosure Programs as more than 54,000 taxpayers have come forward to tell the IRS about previously hidden foreign assets.



John Koskinen

The Offshore Voluntary Disclosure Program, or OVDP, and the streamlined procedures both enable taxpayers to correct prior omissions and meet their federal tax obligations while mitigating the potential penalties of continued non-compliance. There are also separate procedures for those who have paid their income taxes but omitted certain other information returns.

"The groundbreaking effort around automatic reporting of foreign accounts has given us a much stronger hand in fighting tax evasion," said IRS Commissioner John Koskinen in a statement. "People with undisclosed foreign accounts should carefully consider their options and use available avenues, including the offshore program and streamlined procedures, to come back into full compliance with their tax obligations."

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The IRS noted that under the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act, or FATCA for short, and the network of intergovernmental agreements, or IGAs, between the U.S. and partner jurisdictions, automatic third-party account reporting began this year, making it less likely that offshore financial accounts will go unnoticed by the IRS.

In addition to FATCA and reporting through IGAs, the Department of Justice's Swiss Bank Program continues to reach non-prosecution agreements with Swiss financial institutions that facilitated past non-compliance. As part of these agreements, banks provide information on potential non-compliance by U.S. taxpayers. Potential civil penalties increase substantially if U.S. taxpayers associated with participating banks wait to apply to OVDP to resolve their tax obligations.

The OVDP offers taxpayers with undisclosed income from offshore accounts an opportunity to get current with their tax returns and information reporting obligations. The program encourages taxpayers to voluntarily disclose foreign accounts now rather than risk detection by the IRS at a later date and face more severe penalties and possible criminal prosecution.

Since the OVDP began in 2009, there have been more than 54,000 disclosures, and the IRS has collected more than \$8 billion from this initiative.

The streamlined procedures, initiated in 2012, were developed to accommodate a wider group of U.S. taxpayers who have unreported foreign financial accounts but whose circumstances substantially differed from those taxpayers for whom the OVDP requirements were designed. More than 30,000 taxpayers have used streamlined procedures to come back into compliance with U.S. tax laws. Two-thirds of these have used the procedures since the IRS expanded the eligibility criteria in June 2014.

Separately, based on information obtained from investigations and under the terms of settlements with foreign financial institutions, the IRS said it has conducted thousands of offshore-related civil audits that have produced tens of millions of dollars. The IRS has also pursued criminal charges leading to billions of dollars in criminal fines and restitutions.

The IRS stressed that it remains committed to stopping offshore tax evasion wherever it occurs, and even though the agency has faced several years of budget reductions, the IRS continues to pursue cases throughout the world.

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