



STATE OF CALIFORNIA

**STATE BOARD OF EQUALIZATION**

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AUGUST 8, 1996

TO INTERESTED PARTIES: &  
TO COUNTY ASSESSORS:

No. 96/48

**NOTICE OF PROPOSED REGULATORY ACTION  
BY THE  
STATE BOARD OF EQUALIZATION**

**PROPERTY TAX RULE 135  
HOMEOWNERS' PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION**

**PUBLIC HEARING: WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 1996 AT 1:30 P.M.**

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN:**

The State Board of Equalization, pursuant to the authority vested in the Board by Section 15606(c) of the Government Code proposes to amend Regulation 135, Homeowners' Property Tax Exemption, in Title 18, Division 1 of the California Code of Regulations. A public hearing relevant to this action will be held in Room 121, 450 N Street, Sacramento, at 1:30 p.m., or as soon thereafter as the matter may be heard on, Wednesday, September 25, 1996. Any person interested may present statements or arguments orally at that time and place. Written statements or arguments will be considered by the Board if received by September 25, 1996.

**INFORMATIVE DIGEST/PLAIN ENGLISH OVERVIEW**

The State Board of Equalization proposes to adopt amendments to Property Tax Rule 135 (18 California Code of Regulations, Section 135). Homeowners' Property Tax Exemption. The amendments, requested by several California counties, recognize modern technology by permitting records of homeowners' exemption claims to be stored on optical disk storage on CD-ROM (Compact Disk Read-Only Memory). The Homeowners' exemption records include active and inactive claim files, as well as related documents.

Under existing law, the original document or a photostatic copy is required to be kept in an order that permits ready retrieval. The assessor is required to maintain such records for seven years, but may destroy the originals after three years when such documents have been microfilmed

The proposed amendments permit the assessor to store active and inactive claim files for the homeowners' exemption and related documents on CD-ROM, in lieu of, or in addition to maintaining records with the original claim documents or a photostatic copy thereof. The amendments also provide that the assessor who wants to destroy the actual claims and relevant documents after three years, has the option of storing such documents on CD-ROM, microfilm or keeping a photostatic record thereof. The amendments make it clear that documents stored on CD-ROM must be available in a format that permits ready retrieval upon audit, which adheres to the current requirement when original claims or photostatic copies of active and inactive claims are stored. The amendments define CD-ROM as a read-only access system of microphotography or optical disk that does not permit additions, deletions, or changes to the original document. Reproductions from CD-ROM shall be considered true copies of the original documents and associated records because the read-only access system required by the proposed amendments does not permit any changes to the documents

By law, records of claims are accessible only to homeowners and to state agencies for audit purposes. Those assessor's offices that elect to store homeowners' exemption claim records and related documents on CD-ROM will be able to retrieve and reproduce such documents more efficiently, provide greater accessibility and more efficient management of the documents, and store them in a fraction of the storage space required for original claims or photostatic copies

#### COST TO LOCAL AGENCIES AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS

The State Board of Equalization has determined that the proposed amendments do not impose a mandate on local agencies or school districts. Further, the Board has determined that the amendments will result in no additional direct or indirect cost or savings to any State agency, any local agency or school district that is required to be reimbursed under Part 7 (commencing with Section 17500) of Division 4 of Title 2 of the Government Code, and that there are no other nondiscretionary costs or savings imposed on local agencies, or cost or savings in Federal funding to the State of California.

#### EFFECT ON BUSINESS

Pursuant to Government Code Section 11346 53(c), the Board of Equalization finds that the adoption of the amendments to Rule 135 will have no significant adverse economic impact on business

The adoption of the proposed amendments will not be detrimental to California businesses in competing with businesses in other states.

The regulation as proposed will neither create nor eliminate jobs in the State of California nor result in the elimination of existing businesses nor create or expand business in the State of California

The proposed amendments will not affect small business because the Homeowners' property tax exemption claim records are not a business related program

#### ADVERSE ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE PERSONS/BUSINESSES

No impact

#### FEDERAL REGULATIONS

There are no comparable federal regulations.

#### PLAIN ENGLISH STATEMENT

Preparation of the proposed amendments included consideration of the plain English requirement and technical terms are defined in more simple language

#### AUTHORITY

Section 15606, Government Code.

#### REFERENCE

Sections 218, 218.5, 229, 253.5, 255, 255.1, 255.2, 255.3, 255.6, 255.7, 255.8, 275, 408, 531.1, 531.6, 2190, 2615.5, Revenue and Taxation Code.

#### CONTACT

Questions regarding the content of the regulation should be directed to Mr. Larry Augusta, Assistant Chief Counsel, at P.O. Box 942879, 450 N Street, MIC:82, Sacramento, CA 94279-0082. Telephone: (916) 445-6493 FAX (916) 323-3387.

Written comments for the Board's consideration or requests to present testimony and bring witnesses to the public hearing should be directed to Ms. Mary Ann Stumpf, Regulations Coordinator, (916) 322-9569, and at P.O. Box 942879, 450 N Street, MIC:80, Sacramento, CA 94279-0080.

#### ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The Board must determine that no alternative considered would be more effective in carrying out the purpose for which this action is proposed or be as effective and less burdensome to affected private persons than the proposed action.

#### AVAILABILITY OF STATEMENT OF REASONS AND TEXT OF PROPOSED REGULATIONS

The Board has prepared a statement of reasons and a strike-out and underscore version (express terms) of the proposed regulation.

Both of the documents and all information on which the proposed amendment to the regulation is based are available to the public upon request. The rulemaking file is available for public inspection at 450 N Street, Sacramento, California. Requests for copies should be addressed to Ms. Mary Ann Stumpf, Regulations Coordinator, (916) 322-9569, at P.O. Box 942879, 450 N Street, MIC:80, Sacramento, CA 94279-0080.

#### ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Following the hearing, the State Board of Equalization may adopt the proposed regulation if the text remains substantially the same as described in the text originally made available to the public. The text of any modified regulation will be mailed to those interested parties who commented orally or in writing or who asked to be informed of such changes. The modified regulation will be available to

the public from Ms Stumpf The Board will consider written comments on the modified regulation until such time as the regulation is adopted

Date: July 12, 1996

STATE BOARD OF EQUALIZATION



E. L. Sorensen, Jr.  
Executive Director

Rules135.notice

**Rule 135. HOMEOWNERS' PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION.**

**(a) EXEMPTION CLAIMS.**

(1) **DISTRIBUTING FORMS.** In addition to mailing forms to persons acquiring title and recording their ownership of their eligible dwellings, the assessor of each county shall make available to homeowners during the twelve months preceding the lien date for the next succeeding fiscal year, and the nine months succeeding such lien date, to and including December 10, of the fiscal year, forms on which to claim the exemption for that fiscal year (1) by providing blank forms at the assessor's office, (2) by distributing supplies of blank forms to places throughout the county to which residents of the county have easy access, or (3) by a combination of these methods. The assessor need not send a new claim form upon transfer of ownership in a property in any instance in which either spouse retains an ownership interest and otherwise continues to qualify for exemption.

(2) **WHEN CLAIMS ARE DUE** A claim is timely filed if, on or before the April 15 immediately preceding the start of the fiscal year, it is delivered to the assessor's office or is properly addressed and mailed with postage prepaid. A post office cancellation mark of April 15 or earlier is conclusive evidence of timely filing by mail. The assessor may accept other proof which satisfies him/her that a claim was mailed on or before April 15, provided such proof is offered on or before April 15 of the following year.

A claim is filed late and an exemption of the lesser of five thousand six hundred dollars (\$5,600) or 80 percent of the taxable value of the dwelling shall be granted if the claim is delivered to the assessor's office or is properly addressed and mailed with postage prepaid between April 16 and December 10, inclusive, of the calendar year in which the claim was due. In determining when a claim is filed, Section 166 of the Revenue and Taxation Code may be applicable in some instances. Section 166 provides that a filing shall be deemed to be timely if it is sent by United States mail, properly addressed with postage prepaid, and is post marked on or before the required date, or if other proof satisfactory to the assessor establishes that the mailing occurred on or before the required date.

A veteran including a disabled veteran who is filing for the veterans' exemption or disabled veterans' exemption on his/her principal place of residence for the first time or who was granted a veterans' exemption or disabled veterans' exemption on his/her principal place of residence in the immediately preceding year, may make a timely filing for the homeowners' exemption within 15 days after the assessor finds him/her ineligible for the veterans' exemption or disabled veterans' exemption and notifies him/her thereof. Those veterans not notified shall have until the next lien date to make a timely filing.

(3) **SIGNATURE OF CLAIMANT** The signature of one spouse who is a co-owning occupant is valid for the other co-owning occupant spouse for the year of filing and for subsequent years. The signature of one co-owning occupant (non-spouse) is valid for other co-owning occupants for the year of filing and for subsequent years. The assessor may require the re-filing of the claim by the other spouse if the spouse who signed the active claim has died.

or has established a principal place of residence elsewhere, but the assessor shall require the refiling of the claim by the other co-owner who has occupied the dwelling continuously if the co-owner (non-spouse) who signed the active claim has died or has established a principal place of residence elsewhere

If a timely filed claim lacks a signature or any required information, the assessor may, for good cause, grant the claimant a single period of measurable length within which to cure the defect. Such period shall not extend beyond October 15 unless the defect is found the claimant is notified thereof after July 15, in which event it shall not extend beyond three months of such notification. If a claim is filed late, the assessor may allow the claimant up to six months, or three months after the claimant is notified, whichever is later, to cure the defect.

(4) **PROCESSING CLAIMS** When a claim for exemption is received, the assessor shall note thereon the fiscal year to which the initial filing relates and the date of filing. He/she shall ascertain

- (A) Whether the claim was filed within the period prescribed by law,
- (B) Whether the claimant was,

1 an owner of record, an owner whose title had not yet been recorded, or a purchaser under a contract of sale of the dwelling identified in the claim, or

- 2 an owner of shares or a membership interest in a cooperative housing corporation,
- (C) Whether more than one claim has been filed on the same dwelling

If the assessor finds the claimant eligible for the exemption for the initial fiscal year claimed, he/she shall enroll it, provided that he/she cannot then allow a veterans' or another homeowners' exemption against an assessment that relates, in its entirety or in part, to the same dwelling. He/she shall, however, allow the disabled veterans' exemption on the dwelling in place of the homeowners' exemption. If he/she finds that the claimant is not eligible for the initial year claimed, but is or will be eligible for a subsequent year, he/she shall treat the claim as if it had been filed initially for the subsequent year.

(5) **NOTICE OF UNAPPROVED CLAIMS** After determining that an application for exemption is not approved, the assessor shall notify the claimant of the reason or reasons for nonapproval. Failure to receive such notice shall not entitle the claimant to the exemption.

**(b) NOTICE OF CIRCUMSTANCES OF INELIGIBILITY.**

(1) **MAILING FORMS** The Notice of Circumstances of Ineligibility required by Section 2615.5 of the Revenue and Taxation Code and the Advice of Termination reply form are mailed annually by the county with the tax bill or copy thereof.

(2) **WHEN ADVICE OF TERMINATION IS DUE** The assessor shall accept a signed Advice of Termination reply form or any signed statement of the claimant, co-owning spouse, or other co-owner adequately describing the property for which the exemption was previously claimed, indicating that the property no longer qualifies for the exemption. The statement should state the lien date as of which the claimant no longer claims the exemption, but if it does not, the assessor, if otherwise unable to ascertain this information from the claimant, shall treat the statement as first applying to the lien date to which the next succeeding fiscal year from the date of filing the statement relates. Such a statement to the assessor shall be known as an "Advice of Termination", which satisfies the duty of the claimant to inform the assessor of ineligibility for the exemption.

An Advice of Termination is timely filed if, on or before December 10 of the fiscal year for which the exemption is to be first terminated, it is delivered to the assessor's office or is placed in the mail properly addressed with postage prepaid. A post office cancellation mark of December 10 or earlier is conclusive evidence of timely filing by mail. The assessor may accept other proof which satisfies him/her that an Advice of Termination was mailed on or before December 10, provided such proof is offered on or before December 10 of the following year.

(3) **PROCESSING ADVICES OF TERMINATION.** When an Advice of Termination is received, the assessor shall ascertain the fiscal year for which it is first effective. The assessor shall determine that the person signing the advice is the claimant or co-owning spouse, claimant co-owner or other co-owner, or is otherwise authorized to sign the notice as guardian, administrator, or other legal representative.

(4) **TERMINATION** After determining that the Advice of Termination is valid, the assessor shall terminate the exemption and, if the Advice of Termination has not been filed by December 10, make an escape assessment including a penalty of 25 percent of the escape value.

(5) **ERRONEOUSLY FILED ADVICE OF TERMINATION.** If an Advice of Termination is filed in error, the assessor shall accept the written request of the person filing it or of an owner or co-owner that it be withdrawn and reinstate the exemption provided the request is received on or before March 1 of the next succeeding calendar year following the erroneous filing.

**(c) VERIFICATION OF ELIGIBILITY.**

When either the Franchise Tax Board or the State Board of Equalization notifies an assessor that a claimant whose principal place of residence has qualified as of March 1 of any year for an exemption has received the credit for qualified renters under the provisions of the Personal Income Tax Law for the taxable year embracing March 1 of the same year, the assessor shall investigate and, if appropriate, terminate the exemption and make an escape assessment under Section 531.6 of the Revenue and Taxation Code. If the claimant failed to file the Advice of Termination by December 10, a penalty of 25 percent of the escape value shall be added to the assessment.

**(d) ENTRY ON THE ROLL--IDENTITY OF CLAIMANT.** The assessor shall identify the name of each claimant receiving the exemption on the roll or on a subsidiary public record arranged in parcel number order, or in another order, to which the public has access for the purpose of verifying the name of the claimant

**(e) MAINTAINING ASSESSOR'S RECORDS.**

(1) **ACTIVE CLAIM FILE** The active claim file, which is composed of the claims or a record thereof of properties that received the exemption as of the last preceding lien date, shall be kept in current parcel number order or in another order that permits ready retrieval of a claim or production of a true copy thereof, including a photostatic copy or copy from optical disk storage on CD-ROM, upon audit of the records. Information from a subsequent investigation pursuant to subsections (c) or (f) of this section shall be indicated on the claim or in other records

The assessor shall compare each copy of a document transferring ownership to real property, received pursuant to Section 255 7 of the Revenue and Taxation Code, with the active claim file. When this comparison discloses the transfer of an eligible dwelling, the assessor shall

**(A)** Retain the reference to the property in the active claim file where the new owner was also a previous co-owning occupant spouse who did not sign the claim but continues to be an owner or where a co-owning occupant who filed a separate claim continues to be an owner, or

**(B)** Delete the reference to the property from the active claim file and mail a homeowners' exemption claim form to the new owner, as required by Section 255 3 of the Revenue and Taxation Code.

(2) **INACTIVE CLAIM FILE** The inactive claims, ~~or~~ a photostatic record thereof, or optical disk storage of inactive claims on CD-ROM shall be kept according to the last year the claim was allowed and arranged within a year's group in parcel number order, or in another order that permits ready retrieval of information or the production of a true copy respecting a claim upon audit of the records. Documents such as the Advice of Termination and information from a subsequent investigation pursuant to Subsection (c) or (f) of this section shall be attached to the claim or shall be kept in another order that permits ready retrieval upon audit. If such documents are stored on CD-ROM, they must be available in a format that permits ready retrieval upon audit.

(3) **CLAIM NOT OPEN TO PUBLIC INSPECTION** Homeowners' exemption claims, Advices of Termination, and related homeowners' exemption records containing social security numbers of claimants, both past and present, are not public documents and shall not be open to public inspection

(4) **CLAIM FILE FORMAT** The active and inactive claim files may be maintained in the form of original documents and papers, photostatic copy thereof, on microfilm, or on CD-ROM For purposes of this section, CD-ROM means a read-only access system of

microphotography or optical disk that does not permit additions, deletions, or changes to the original document Reproductions from CD-ROM shall be considered true copies of the original documents and associated records

(5) DESTRUCTION OF RECORDS Claims, Advices of Termination, and other records required in the administration of the exemption may be destroyed seven years after the lien date for the last year for which the exemption claim was active, provided that when such documents have been photostated, microfilmed or stored on CD-ROM, the originals may be destroyed three years after the lien date for the tax year for which they were received or made by the assessor

(f) **COOPERATIVE HOUSING CORPORATIONS.** Annually prior to March 1 the assessor shall request on a form prescribed by the Board from every cooperative housing corporation containing dwelling units eligible for the exemption (1) a list of owners of shares or memberships entitling them to occupancy of a particular dwelling unit and (2) the apartment numbers or other designations of the dwelling units they are entitled to occupy as shown on the corporate shareholder or membership record for the lien date of the current year The list shall also indicate which of the shareholders or members resided on the lien date in the designated dwelling units. The assessor shall compare this list with a similar list from the preceding lien date and determine

1. Those dwelling units in which a newly listed shareholder or member is indicated to be residing on the lien date;

2 Those dwelling units in which a previously listed shareholder or member, who was also indicated to have been a resident, no longer is listed as a shareholder or member or, although so listed, no longer is indicated to be a resident.

With respect to the dwelling units in the first category, the assessor shall provide a claim form for the newly listed shareholders or members by April 1. With respect to dwelling units in the second category the assessor shall investigate to determine whether an active claim by the former shareholder or member in residence should be terminated.

If a cooperative housing corporation fails to respond to the assessor's request by March 15, the assessor immediately shall obtain the information requested by other suitable means and mail claim forms to new shareholders or members by April 1

*Authority : Section 15606, Government Code.*

*Reference: Sections 218, 218 5, 229, 253 5, 255, 255 1, 255 2, 255 3, 255 6, 255 7, 255 8, 275, 408, 531 1, 531 6, 2190, 2611 5, 2615 5, Revenue and Taxation Code*