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Oregon State Board of
Tax Practitioners

PRESS RELEASE

To: News Media & Interested Parties
From: Oregon State Board of Tax Practitioners
Date: April 7, 2008
Re: Consumer Alert – Verify Your Tax Professional's Credentials

Would you hand your Social Security card or your checkbook to a stranger? How about your wage stubs? If you don't know your tax preparer is a legitimate, licensed professional with a good track record, why should you give them your confidential financial information? Unfortunately, every year many citizens are the victims of fraudulent tax preparation by unlicensed people.

Oregon law requires every person who prepares, assists, or advises in personal income tax matters for another for payment in any form to be licensed. The Board of Tax Practitioners urges all consumers to protect themselves by checking for their practitioner's license. The Board's mission is to protect the consumer by ensuring Oregon tax professionals are competent and ethical in their professional activities.

Tax Board licensees must first pass a basic level tax course and prove their competency by passing an examination. There are two types of license. The Licensed Tax Preparer is an apprenticeship level that permits a person to work under the supervision of a Tax Consultant or Certified Public Accountant. Tax Consultants must have sufficient experience and must pass a higher level examination demonstrating their ability to work without supervision. All licensees must take continuing education courses to remain knowledgeable of the latest law changes and tax information. They must also continue to follow an ethical code of conduct that is outlined in Oregon Rule and Statute.

Consumers can protect themselves by following these basic tips when working with a tax professional:

- Check first to make certain the person and business is licensed for tax preparation. Every tax season, tax businesses "spring-up" overnight. Some take their clients' money and information only to disappear the next day. If you do not see a current license posted, protect yourself by: 1) Looking-up the name of the tax practitioner on the Board's website at: www.oregon.gov/OTPB OR 2) Calling the Tax Board at (503) 378-4034.
- Never sign a blank return. The person preparing your return should sign the returns in the preparer's signature block and give you a copy of that return.
- The person should return to you all of your supporting documentation, such as W-2s, receipts, and other information.
- Do not pay a percentage of your refund for the fee. Practitioners should have a published fee schedule and tax preparation fees should be listed separately from other professional services provided.
- Do not allow your refund to be mailed to the person preparing your taxes. And, if you owe taxes, you should make the payment directly to the IRS or the Department of Revenue. Refund Anticipation Loans are legal if they are made through third party financial institutions.
- Be especially cautious if the person or business handling your return is sending your information to another location for preparation.

For further information on the licensing of tax professionals and how to protect yourself this tax season:

- 1) View the Oregon Board of Tax Practitioners' website at: www.oregon.gov/OTPB
- 2) Contact the Oregon Board of Tax Practitioners at: (503) 378-4034.