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Washington State Department of Revenue Wins Two National Awards

Washington, D. C., April 6, 2009 -- The Washington State Department of Revenue won both of the 2009 national awards announced by the Federation of Tax Administrators today, one for its efforts to help taxpayers adjust to a major change to sales tax laws and another for innovative ethics training of its employees.

The FTA named Washington co-winner of its 2009 Award for Taxpayer Service and Education for its Streamlined Sales Tax Initiative, a program to help businesses deal with a major change to the sales tax law. The other co-winner was the California Board of Equalization, recognized for its Tax Appeals Assistance program.

Washington was sole winner of the FTA's 2009 Award for Training. The FTA lauded the Department's development of the "Wheel of Ethics," an online, interactive presentation that educated and tested the agency's 1000-plus employees on ethics laws and policies that govern employee actions.

The FTA's third annual award, for Leadership and Service, hasn't been announced yet, but the Department already has won that one twice, most recently in 2007. The Department also has won more FTA awards in the past five years than any other state taxing agency across the nation.

Washington's Streamlined Sales Tax initiative helped businesses implement one of the most significant tax law changes in the state's history, a switch to a sales tax system in which the local rate is based on the destination of shipped goods rather than their origin.

To prepare for the shift, the Department of Revenue employed a "user-centered" process that began with a survey of businesses and work with stakeholder groups. The agency then used their insights and recommendations to develop various tools for businesses such as online address lookups and downloadable databases. It also conducted more than 100 workshops around the state.

The training award applauded the Department's development of a "Wheel of Ethics" presentation that went over ethics rules and then tested employees on the answers before they could advance. This approach resulted in significant ongoing cost savings, and allowed the agency to teach a "vitally serious topic" in a highly efficient manner that maximized employee engagement and retention of the material, the judges said.

The Federation of Tax Administrators is a nonprofit organization comprised of the tax and revenue departments of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and New York City. Its mission is to improve the standards and methods of tax administration.

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