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Woman Charged with Impersonating Revenue Agent

Everett, Wash., Aug. 12, 2009 — A Lynnwood woman who allegedly posed as a tax collector for the Washington State Department of Revenue has been charged with criminal impersonation in the first degree.

The Snohomish County prosecutor, in cooperation with the Edmonds and Marysville police departments and Department of Revenue, charged Karen Cunningham, 45, with impersonating a public servant in order to solicit cash payments from businesses in Edmonds and Marysville.

According to charging papers, Cunningham approached at least one Edmonds-area business and told them they owed taxes but could settle the matter if they paid her cash that day. The business paid her \$109 but was suspicious because she lacked Department of Revenue identification and didn't provide an official receipt. A separate attempt to solicit money from a Marysville business failed.

Cunningham worked intermittently for Revenue between 2003 and 2005, where she became familiar with Department procedures. This is the first time, to the Department's knowledge, that anyone has attempted to impersonate a Revenue agent.

Revenue Director Cindi Holmstrom said the Department and its employees were shocked and offended that someone would attempt to defraud businesses this way.

"We're cooperating fully with this investigation and stand ready to provide any assistance necessary to ensure that this breach of public trust is punished," she said.

She urged any other businesses that may have been approached by an impersonator to contact the Department's Everett Field Office at (425) 356-4800.

Holmstrom said Department of Revenue agents do contact businesses, but carry official photo identification and normally don't ask for cash payments. She suggested that anyone who is uncertain about the legitimacy of an agent contact the Department at 1-800-647-7706.

Criminal impersonation is a Class C felony subject to a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

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