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Contact: Dan Bucks, Director, Montana Department of Revenue, (406) 444-1900 or Cynthia Pearson, Public Information Officer, Montana Department of Revenue, (406) 444-6700

Revenue Department Offers Advice to Taxpayers

(HELENA)- Even though the April filing deadline for individual income tax is still a few weeks away, it's not too early to get your tax return filed.

"We encourage Montana taxpayers to file early," said Dan Bucks, Revenue Director. "It's not too late to beat the last-minute crowd. The earlier you file, the better service we can provide in getting your return processed and your refund issued to you."

And, even if you don't plan to file early, Bucks said, your tax return needs to be filed on time. Because of the observance of Emancipation Day in Washington, D.C., this year the filing deadline has been extended until April 17.

Bucks offered several helpful tips for taxpayers:

- Remember to sign the tax return. If you are filing a joint return, your spouse must also sign the return.
- Check the box if you want to authorize another person to discuss your return with the department. This includes authorizing your spouse if you are married filing separately on the same form.
- Be sure to include all W-2s and any 1099s reporting Montana withholding that you were issued for 2011.
- Be aware that all the income you earn is reportable, including cash earned from a side business. For example, income gained from allowing hunting on a ranch property should be reported as income.
- Be sure to maintain documentation of the type and amount of expenses that you claim for tax credits such as the energy conservation tax credit.
- Keep a copy of your return with all schedules, worksheets, receipts and other supporting documents.

Bucks also encouraged taxpayers to file and pay electronically. Montana taxpayers can electronically file state income tax forms for free by using Taxpayer Access Point (TAP) on the department's website at revenue.mt.gov.

"This is definitely a great way to file," said Bucks.

Last year, nearly 77 percent of Montana taxpayers filed their individual income tax returns electronically. That's the largest percentage to date, up from 68 percent in tax year 2010, 63 percent in tax year 2009, and 60 percent in tax year 2008.

Taxpayers also can take advantage of other options to file electronically, including utilizing an authorized e-file tax professional, and using either an off-the-shelf software program or online software on a personal computer with Internet access. Some taxpayers also may qualify to prepare and file their state and

federal taxes online for free through services such as MontanaFreeFile.org, a "one-stop" website that provides information on free tax preparation and electronic filing to eligible taxpayers.

"If you file your tax return electronically and request direct deposit, it is possible to get your refund in about a week," said Bucks. "That's pretty quick."

If you have taxes due, you also are encouraged to file early. By filing early, you can still wait to pay any balance due closer to the April 17 tax deadline.

Electronic payment options include the following:

- Electronic funds withdrawal. You can use this option when you electronically file your state and federal returns at the same time. You can still file early but authorize the payment withdrawal from your financial account on the date you choose (not later than April 17).
- Electronic payment on Taxpayer Access Point (TAP). Using TAP, you can pay Montana individual income tax on the department's website at revenue.mt.gov. These electronic payment options are free, but a small fee applies if you choose to pay with a debit card or credit card.

Other electronic options are also available to make tax payments (estimated tax payments, for example). Taxpayers can find these options on the department's website at revenue.mt.gov.

Need some assistance? The department's website is a handy resource for helpful income tax information, downloadable forms/instructions, important updates, electronic payment options, and filing tips. In addition, taxpayers can get personal assistance by calling the department toll-free at (866) 859-2254 (in Helena, 444-6900).

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