

# Chapter 458-276 WAC

## ACCESS TO PUBLIC RECORDS

### WAC

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**WAC 458-276-010 Declaration of purpose.** This chapter is promulgated by the department of revenue in compliance with RCW 42.17.250 and to set out procedures by which public records of the department will be made available to the public for inspection and copying.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 42.17.250. WSR 78-02-064 (Order GT 78-1), § 458-276-010, filed 1/23/78.]

**WAC 458-276-020 Definitions.** (1) Public records. "Public record" includes any writing containing information relating to the conduct of government or the performance of any governmental or proprietary function prepared, owned, used or retained by any state or local agency regardless of physical form or characteristics.

(2) Writing. "Writing" means handwriting, typewriting, printing, photostating, photographing, and every other means of recording any form of communication or representation, including letters, words, pictures, sounds, or symbols, or combination thereof, and all papers, maps, magnetic or paper tapes, photographic films and prints, magnetic or punched cards, discs, drums and other documents.

(3) Department of revenue. The department of revenue is an agency headed by a director appointed by the governor subject to conformation by the state senate. The powers and duties of the director are, inter alia, those prescribed by RCW 82.01.060. The department of revenue will hereinafter be referred to as the "department," and the director will hereinafter be referred to as the "director." Where appropriate, the term department also refers to the staff and employees of the department of revenue.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 42.17.250. WSR 78-02-064 (Order GT 78-1), § 458-276-020, filed 1/23/78.]

**WAC 458-276-030 Description of central and field organization of the department.** The department of revenue administers state tax laws, acts as advisor on revenue matters to the governor, the legislature, and other state and local agencies, and supervises and assists in the administration of property tax laws at state and local levels. The central administrative offices of the department and its staff are located at

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General Administration Building, Fourth Floor, Olympia, Washington 98504. Operating divisions of the department are: Field Operations, Interpretation and Appeals, Research and Information, Office Operations, Inheritance Tax, Property Tax, Administrative Services, and Forest Tax.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 42.17.250. WSR 78-02-064 (Order GT 78-1), § 458-276-030, filed 1/23/78.]

**WAC 458-276-040 Operations and procedures.** Each of the major operating divisions of the department is the immediate responsibility of an assistant director of the department who is designated as director of that division.

(1) Field operations. The director of field operations directs employees engaged in field audits, enforcement, audit review and taxpayer assistance through 16 branch offices, 4 regional offices, and several out-of-state auditors.

(2) Interpretation and appeals. The director of interpretation and appeals and his hearing officers conduct tax hearings, publish excise tax bulletins and guidelines, issue formal and informal interpretations, and provide advice to the legislature on excise tax matters. The division administers rules published under the Washington Administrative Code, and makes written determinations on appeals involving disputed tax liability.

(3) Research and information. The director of research directs the preparation of revenue forecasts for state government and develops other statistical analyses used in the preparation of the governor's budget. The division is responsible for the analysis of proposed legislation, and advises both the executive and legislative branches of the fiscal impact of proposed tax measures.

The director of research also is in charge of informational services and the publication of official state and local statistical documents. His staff also provides supportive data, analyses, and advice to the other divisions.

(4) Office operations. The director of office operations supervises employees assigned to taxpayer registration, accounts receivable, taxpayer office audits and investigation, miscellaneous tax processing, and records maintenance.

(5) Inheritance tax. The director of inheritance tax administers the collection of gift and inheritance taxes and supervises escheats and unclaimed property.

(6) Property tax. The director of property taxes oversees the administration of property taxation at the state and local level, including the development of guidelines and regulations affecting the operation of assessors in the 39 counties. The division directly appraises the intercounty operating properties of railroad, power, gas, transportation, communications, and water companies.

Activities include assessment ratio studies used, in part, as a basis for allocating state funds to local taxing districts; tax mapping, coding, and appraisal assistance to the counties; appraisal manuals and tax reporting forms; motor vehicle

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excise tax valuations; statewide supervision of property tax exemptions and determination of eligibility for property tax exemptions for nonprofit organizations; rules for open space taxation; and supervision of county boards of equalization.

(7) Administrative services. The director of administrative services directs employees engaged in budget and fiscal controls, centralized word processing, office services, systems and procedures, and automated data processing.

(8) Forest tax. The director of forest tax is responsible for developing semi-annual timber stumpage value rates used in determining the tax liability for all timber harvested from private lands, and for the timely collection of the forest excise tax, and computation of the distribution of revenues to the state and local taxing districts. The division also develops forest land values annually to be used by the county assessors for the assessment of all classified and designated forest lands for property tax purposes. Field inspections of harvest sites, timber sales, and forest land sales are also performed by the division for audit, compliance, and valuation purposes.

(9) Director of personnel. The personnel officer coordinates departmental employment, personnel relations and labor relations, and also is in charge of personnel administration, employee development, employee benefits, services and safety, and affirmative action.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 42.17.250. WSR 78-02-064 (Order GT 78-1), § 458-276-040, filed 1/23/78.]

**WAC 458-276-050 Public records available.** All public records of the department, as defined in WAC 458-276-020(1) are deemed to be available for public inspection and copying pursuant to these rules, except as otherwise provided by RCW 42.17.310, 42.17.330, WAC 458-276-100, and other applicable laws.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 42.17.250. WSR 78-02-064 (Order GT 78-1), § 458-276-050, filed 1/23/78.]

**WAC 458-276-060 Public records officer.** The department's public records are in the charge of the public records officer designated by the director. The person so designated will be located in the central administrative office, research and information division, of the department. The public records officer is responsible for the following: The implementation of the department's rules and regulations regarding release of public records, coordinating the staff of the department in this regard, and generally ensuring compliance by the department with the public records disclosure requirements of chapter 42.17 RCW.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 42.17.250. WSR 78-02-064 (Order GT 78-1), § 458-276-060, filed 1/23/78.]

**WAC 458-276-070 Hours for records inspection and copying.** Public records maintained in the central administrative offices will be available for inspection and copying at the administrative office during the customary office hours of the department. For the purposes of this chapter, the customary office hours are 8:00 a.m. to noon and 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding legal holidays. Specific records not available in the central administrative offices will be made available pursuant to the procedures described in WAC 458-276-080(3).

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[Statutory Authority: RCW 42.17.250. WSR 78-02-064 (Order GT 78-1), § 458-276-070, filed 1/23/78.]

**WAC 458-276-080 Requests for public records.** (1) Chapter 42.17 RCW requires that agencies prevent unreasonable invasions of privacy, protect public records from damage or disorganization, and prevent excessive interference with essential functions of the agency. Accordingly, whenever the department believes these or other provisions of law would be violated by immediate disclosure of records, requests for inspection or copying by members of the public shall be in writing upon a form prescribed by the department which will be available at its administrative and all branch offices. The form shall be presented either to the public records officer at the central administrative offices of the department or to any tax service representative of the department at the administrative or any branch office of the department during customary office hours. Customary office hours at branch offices may vary from those of the department's administrative offices. If a tax service representative is not available at a branch office the request form may be completed and presented to the person in charge of the office at the time the request is made or mailed to the Public Records Officer, Research and Information Division, Department of Revenue, 414 General Administration Building, Olympia, Washington 98504. The request shall include the following information:

- (a) The name of the person requesting the record;
- (b) The time of day and calendar date on which the request is made;
- (c) The nature of the request;
- (d) If the matter requested is referenced within the current index maintained by the records officer, a reference to the requested record as it is described in such current index;
- (e) If the requested matter is not identifiable by reference to the department's current index, an appropriate description of the record requested.

(2) In all cases in which a member of the public is making a request, it is the obligation of the public records officer, or staff member to whom the request is made, to assist the member of the public in appropriately identifying the public record requested.

(3) If the record is not maintained in the central administrative offices of the department, after approval of the request, the public records officer will retrieve the record and advise the person making the request by telephone or mail of the time and place the record will be available, which time will be as reasonably soon after the request is made as possible.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 42.17.250. WSR 78-02-064 (Order GT 78-1), § 458-276-080, filed 1/23/78.]

**WAC 458-276-090 Copying.** There is no fee for the inspection of public records. The department will charge a fee of twenty-five cents per page of copy for providing copies of public records and for use of the department's copy equipment. This charge is to reimburse the department for its costs incident to such copying.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 42.17.250. WSR 78-02-064 (Order GT 78-1), § 458-276-090, filed 1/23/78.]

**WAC 458-276-100 Exemptions.** (1) The department reserves the right to determine that a public record requested in accordance with the procedures outlined in WAC 458-276-080 is exempt under the provisions of RCW 42.17.310, and other applicable laws.

(2) In addition, pursuant to RCW 42.17.260, the department reserves the right to delete identifying details when it makes available or publishes any public record, in any cases when there is reason to believe that disclosure of such details would be an invasion of privacy protected by chapter 42.17 RCW. The public records officer will fully justify such deletion in writing.

(3) All denials of written requests for public records will be accompanied by a written statement specifying the reason for the denial, including a statement of the specific exemption authorizing the withholding of the record and a brief explanation of how the exemption applies to the record withheld.

(4) The department reserves the right provided by RCW 42.17.330 to move the various superior courts to enjoin the examination of any specific public record when it believes such examination would substantially and irreparably damage any person, or would substantially and irreparably damage vital governmental functions.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 42.17.250. WSR 78-02-064 (Order GT 78-1), § 458-276-100, filed 1/23/78.]

**WAC 458-276-110 Review of denials of public records requests.** (1) Any person who objects to the denial of a request for a public record may petition for prompt review of such decision by tendering a written request for review. The written request shall specifically refer to the written statement by the public records officer or other staff member which constituted or accompanied the denial.

(2) Immediately after receiving a written request for review of a decision denying a public record, the public records officer or other staff member denying the request will refer it to the director. The petition will be reviewed promptly and the action of the public records officer approved or disapproved. Such approval or disapproval shall constitute final department action for purposes of judicial review under RCW 42.17.340.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 42.17.250. WSR 78-02-064 (Order GT 78-1), § 458-276-110, filed 1/23/78.]

**WAC 458-276-120 Limitations on disclosure.** The department will give due regard in considering requests for public records to RCW 82.32.330, 83.36.020, and other applicable limitations on disclosure.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 42.17.250. WSR 78-02-064 (Order GT 78-1), § 458-276-120, filed 1/23/78.]

**WAC 458-276-130 Records index.** The department will maintain and make available for public inspection and copying an appropriate index or indices in accordance with RCW 42.17.260.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 42.17.250. WSR 78-02-064 (Order GT 78-1), § 458-276-130, filed 1/23/78.]

**WAC 458-276-140 Administrative offices.** All communications with the department regarding administration or enforcement of chapter 42.17 RCW and these rules, and

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requests for copies of the department's decisions and other matters, shall be addressed as follows: Public Records Officer, Research and Information Division, Department of Revenue, 414 General Administration Building, Olympia, Washington 98504.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 42.17.250. WSR 78-02-064 (Order GT 78-1), § 458-276-140, filed 1/23/78.]

**WAC 458-276-150 Adoption of form.** The department hereby adopts for use by all persons making written request for inspection and/or copying or copies of its records under WAC 458-276-080, the Form S.F. 276 as it exists or may hereafter be revised.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 42.17.250. WSR 78-02-064 (Order GT 78-1), § 458-276-150, filed 1/23/78.]