



## Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration Office of Audit

### **INCREASED CALL DEMAND AND LIMITED RESOURCES CONTINUE TO ADVERSELY AFFECT THE TOLL-FREE TELEPHONE LEVEL OF SERVICE**

Issued on August 19, 2011

## Highlights

Highlights of Report Number: 2011-40-087 to the Internal Revenue Service Commissioner for the Wage and Investment Division.

### **IMPACT ON TAXPAYERS**

Each year, millions of taxpayers contact the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) by calling the various toll-free telephone assistance lines to seek help in understanding tax laws and meeting their tax obligations. During the 2011 Filing Season, the IRS exceeded its key toll-free telephone assistance performance measurement goals. However, wait times to speak with an assistor are still high.

### **WHY TIGTA DID THE AUDIT**

The objective of this audit was to evaluate the customer service toll-free telephone access during the 2011 Filing Season and evaluate the toll-free estimated wait time process.

### **WHAT TIGTA FOUND**

More taxpayers are calling the IRS's toll-free telephone lines every year. During the 2011 Filing Season, the IRS received approximately 80 million attempts to call the toll-free telephone lines, up from 54 million (48 percent), during the 2007 Filing Season—the last filing season with a Level of Service more than 80 percent. Taxpayers waited on average 10 minutes to speak to an assistor, a 137 percent increase since the 2007 Filing Season.

The IRS exceeded its key 2011 Filing Season toll-free telephone assistance performance goals. The IRS planned to achieve a 71 percent Level of Service and a 680-second Average Speed of Answer. Instead, it achieved a 74.6 percent Level of Service and a 596-second Average Speed of Answer.

During Fiscal Year 2008, the IRS implemented the Estimated Wait Time Message Pilot on six toll-free telephone applications. The message provides a real-time message that informs taxpayers of their

expected wait time to reach an assistor. This allows taxpayers to make more informed decisions on whether to wait for an assistor or hang up and call at another time. Currently, the Estimated Wait Time Message is on 74 percent of the IRS's assistor-staffed applications.

TIGTA evaluated a sample of 33 calls made to the toll-free 1-800-829-1040 telephone number that individual taxpayers call to ask tax account or tax law questions. The IRS provided an Estimated Wait Time Message and an assistor answered on 30 calls. The other three calls were disconnected prior to reaching an assistor or an Estimated Wait Time was not given. The Estimated Wait Time was accurate for 24 (80 percent) of 30 calls.

### **WHAT TIGTA RECOMMENDED**

Although TIGTA made no recommendations in this report, IRS officials were provided an opportunity to review the draft report. IRS management did not provide any comments in response to this report.

### **READ THE FULL REPORT**

To view the report, including the scope and methodology, go to:

<http://www.treas.gov/tigta/auditreports/2011reports/201140087fr.pdf>.