Tax Relief in Disaster Situations

Special tax law provisions may help taxpayers recover financially from the impact of a disaster, especially when the president declares their location to be a major disaster area. Depending on the circumstances, the IRS may grant additional time to file returns and pay taxes. Both individuals and businesses in a presidentially declared disaster area can get a faster refund by claiming losses related to the disaster on the tax return for the previous year, usually by filing an amended return.

Personal Losses

Generally, you may deduct losses to your home, household goods, and motor vehicles on your federal income tax return. However, you may not deduct a casualty or theft loss that is covered by insurance unless you filed a timely insurance claim for reimbursement. Any reimbursement you receive will reduce the loss. If you did not file an insurance claim, you may deduct only the part of the loss that was not covered by insurance.

***Amount of loss*.** You figure the amount of your loss using the following steps.

1. Determine your cost or other basis in the property before the casualty or theft.

2. Determine the decrease in fair market value of the property as a result of the casualty or theft. (The decrease in FMV is the difference between the property's value immediately before and immediately after the casualty or theft.)

3. From the smaller of the amounts you determined in (1) and (2), subtract any insurance or other reimbursement you received or expect to receive.

Apply the deduction limits, discussed later, to determine the amount of your deductible loss.

Cost or other basis. Cost or other basis usually means original cost plus improvements. If you did not acquire the property by purchasing it, your basis is determined as discussed in Publication 551, Basis of Assets.

Fair market value. Fair market value is the price for which you could sell your property to a willing buyer, when neither of you has to sell or buy and both of you know all the relevant facts. When filling out Schedules 1 through 20, you need to know the fair market value of the property immediately before and immediately after the disaster, casualty, or theft.

Separate computations. Generally, if a single casualty or theft involves more than one item of property, you must figure the loss on each item separately. Then combine the losses to determine the total loss from that casualty or theft.

Exception for personal-use real property. In figuring a casualty loss on personal-use real property, the entire property (including any improvements, such as buildings, trees, and shrubs) is treated as one item. Figure the loss using the smaller of the following.

1. The decrease in FMV of the entire property.
2. The adjusted basis of the entire property.

***Deduction limits*.** After you have figured the amount of your loss, as discussed earlier, you must figure how much of the loss you can deduct. You do this on Form 4684, section A. If the loss was to property for your personal use or your family's, there are two limits on the amount you can deduct for your casualty or theft loss.

1. You must reduce each casualty or theft loss by $100 ($100 rule).
2. You must further reduce the total of all your losses by 10% of your adjusted gross income (10% rule).

More information. For more information about the deduction limits, see Publication 547.

When your loss is deductible. You can generally deduct a casualty or disaster area loss only in the tax year in which the casualty or disaster occurred. You can generally deduct a theft loss only in the year you discovered your property was stolen. However, you can choose to deduct disaster area losses on your return for the year immediately before the year of the disaster if the President has declared your area a federal disaster area. For details, see *Disaster Area Losses* in Publication 547.

How to Get Tax Help

You can get help with unresolved tax issues, order free publications and forms, ask tax questions, and get information from the IRS in several ways. By selecting the method that is best for you, you will have quick and easy access to tax help.

Contacting your Taxpayer Advocate. If you have attempted to deal with an IRS problem unsuccessfully, you should contact your Taxpayer Advocate. The Taxpayer Advocate independently represents your interests and concerns within the IRS by protecting your rights and resolving problems that have not been fixed through normal channels. While Taxpayer Advocates cannot change the tax law or make a technical tax decision, they can clear up problems that resulted from previous contacts and ensure that your case is given a complete and impartial review.

To contact your Taxpayer Advocate:

- Call the Taxpayer Advocate toll free at 1-877-777-4778.
- Call, write, or fax the Taxpayer Advocate office in your area.
- Call 1-800-829-4059 if you are a TTY/TDD user.
- Visit www.irs.gov/advocate.

For more information, see Publication 1546, How To Get Help With Unresolved Tax Problems (now available in Chinese, Korean, Russian, and Vietnamese, in addition to English and Spanish).

Free tax services. To find out what services are available, get Publication 910, IRS Guide to Free Tax Services. It contains a list of free tax publications and an index of tax topics. It also describes other free tax information services, including tax education and assistance programs and a list of TeleTax topics.