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**1. General Questions**

**i. What does a "D" in the data mean?**

The letter "D" indicates that data have been withheld to avoid disclosure of individual firm information. This is required by the excise tax confidentiality statute. The Department replaces the data with a "D" whenever the figures represent fewer than three taxpayers.

When data contained in the QBR is not disclosable for a particular NAICS grouping, the non-disclosable data is rolled into the two- or three-digit industry total when possible, or the grand total at the bottom.

**ii. What are reporting periods?**

State excise taxpayers are assigned to monthly, quarterly, or annual tax reporting. The QBR data include the accruals of both monthly and quarterly taxpayers for the indicated period with the exception of the fourth quarter report which also includes amounts reported by annual taxpayers for the entire year. Calendar year data includes monthly, quarterly and annual taxpayers.

**iii. Why is the QBR, typically, published six months after the end of the reporting period?** There is typically a lag of six months or longer in the publication of QBR data from the close of the quarterly period to the actual publication of the QBR for several reasons:

- **Two-Month Wait Period**

The Department waits an additional two months after the end of the reporting period before compiling and analyzing the data for the QBR publication. This is to allow time to capture corrections, adjustments, and the majority of the late returns.

- **Data Checks**

Once the information is available, the Department begins analyzing the statewide data for irregularities or inconsistencies. One of the most common problems discovered are taxpayers reporting on the wrong line of the tax return. Depending on the magnitude of these corrections, they can delay the report two to six weeks.

- **Publication**

After the necessary corrections are made to the data, the Department creates the QBR tables. An additional one to two weeks are necessary for publishing the data on the Internet.

**iv. Why doesn't the sum of the quarterly data for a given SIC or NAICS grouping equal the annual figure?**

If a particular SIC or NAICS grouping contains fewer than three firms then the data cannot be disclosed. When this occurs in the QBR, the Department replaces the data with a "D". However, the annual data may contain enough firms to disclose the data for that particular SIC or NAICS grouping. This can cause the annual number for that SIC or NAICS grouping to appear larger than the sum of the individual quarters.

**v. What is an accrual period?**

Most taxpayers report on the accrual basis, meaning when the seller becomes entitled to receive payment (i.e. when the customer is billed). Some firms, whose books are kept strictly on a cash basis, report tax liability according to when payment is received.

The quarterly accrual period includes data reported by taxpayers who submit returns for business conducted during the indicated period. For example, the first quarter report includes the tax returns for all monthly taxpayers for January, February, and March, as well as the first quarter returns for all firms reporting on a quarterly basis. Because the fourth quarter includes annual reporters, there is some distortion that occurs when comparing the fourth quarter to any of the previous three quarters. However, annual reporters only represent about one-half of one percent of all excise taxes reported on the combined excise tax return.

**vi. What is the difference between QBR tables 1 and 5?**

Table 1 shows gross business income data by major industry grouping, and Table 5 shows business and occupation (B&O) tax data by major industry grouping. Gross business income equals a firm's combined reported gross income for the retail sales, use, B&O, and public utility taxes. The B&O data are just one component of gross income. The B&O tax is a gross receipts tax. It is measured on the value of products, gross proceeds of sale, or gross income of the business. For more information about gross business income and the B&O tax refer to the gross business income and B&O tax frequently asked questions.

## **2. SIC and NAICS Codes**

### **vii. What are SIC and NAICS codes?**

Both Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) and North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes identify a firm's primary business activity. For example a firm with SIC 571 primarily sells retail furniture. A firm with NAICS 311 is primarily engaged in food manufacturing.

These codes were developed by the federal government and are used by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) as well as many other U.S. statistical agencies. In 1997, OMB adopted NAICS as its new industry classification system.

Every Washington firm is assigned a SIC or NAICS code. SIC codes can be up to four digits and NAICS codes can be up to six digits. The QBR uses these codes to group firms together in order to create informative and useful information. Because the national standard has changed from the use of SIC codes to the use of NAICS codes, in November 2004 the Department stopped assigning SIC codes and now only assigns NAICS codes.

### **viii. What is the difference between a SIC and a NAICS code?**

NAICS codes provide a greater level of detail about a firm's activity than SIC codes. NAICS includes 1,170 industries and SIC includes 1,004 industries. There are 358 new industries recognized in NAICS, 250 of which are services producing industries.

Additionally, NAICS are based on a consistent, economic concept, while SIC codes are not. For NAICS codes, establishments that use the same or similar processes to produce goods or services are grouped together. Industries under the SIC codes were grouped together based on either demand or production.

Unlike SIC codes, the NAICS codes were developed by the U.S. federal government in cooperation with Canadian and Mexican statistical agencies. Because both Canada and Mexico use NAICS for their industry classifications, government and business analysts are now able to compare directly industrial production statistics collected and published in the three North American Free Trade Agreement countries. Additionally, NAICS provides for increased comparability with the International Standard Classification System (ISIC, Revision 3), developed and maintained by the United Nations (U.S. Census Bureau).

### **ix. Can I get SIC code data after 2004?**

No. In an effort to move in line with national standards, the Department stopped assigning SIC codes to firms in November 2004 and began only assigning NAICS codes. Because the Department has stopped assigning and updating SIC codes, the Department had to convert the QBR and its other databases to NAICS codes beginning with Quarter 1, 2005 data. This means calendar year 2005 data going forward will also only be available in NAICS codes.

### **x. Can I compare historical SIC data to the NAICS data?**

No. SIC codes do not seamlessly convert to NAICS codes. Therefore, a firm that may have fallen under a particular SIC code may now be classified under a completely different NAICS code. For example, a firm classified in SIC 7359 Business Services (Not Elsewhere Classified) could now be classified under NAICS 491110 Postal Service, or NAICS 541340 Drafting services, among others.

**xi. What do I do if I need historical QBR data in the NAICS version?**

With the release of the Quarter 1, 2005 QBR, the Department also released NAICS versions of the QBR data online for year 2004 (including quarterly and calendar year data). If you need NAICS data prior to 2004, use our online Create a Report tool at <http://apps.dor.wa.gov/ResearchStats/Content/QuarterlyBusinessReview/Report.aspx>.

The Create a Report functions contain NAICS data going back to 1994. You can use the Gross Business Income report to replicate QBR table 1. Or you can use the Local Sales/Use report to replicate QBR tables 3 and 4. For help with how to search and use the Create a Report tool visit the Department's web site at <http://apps.dor.wa.gov/ResearchStats/Content/TaxableRetailSalesLocal/Report.aspx>

**3. Unit Counts**

**xii. What are units?**

A unit represents a single taxpayer, including businesses that report no activity. Because state taxes are not reported based on geographic location, the unit count for the state tax data does not reflect the actual number of business establishments. For example, Firm A has five branches located in five different cities. Each location is subject to the B&O tax. However, Firm A will only submit one tax return on behalf of all five locations and will only show up as one taxpayer in the unit count.

For the local sales and use tax data, the unit count indicates the number of retailers reporting taxable retail sales activity within a county or city. However, firms that have multiple branches within the same location will only show up in the data as one unit count.

**xiii. Why do the unit counts differ between quarterly and calendar year data?**

One reason for this is that many small taxpayer accounts only report annually, and therefore only appear in the fourth quarter and annual QBR reports. However, most unit count differences occur because of businesses that report seasonally (e.g., several months or one or two quarters) and businesses that open and close during the year. While all these businesses will appear in the annual QBR report, they may only appear in one or two of the quarterly reports.

As a result, individual quarters do not accurately indicate the total number of businesses that may have reported to the Department during the entire year.

**xiv. Can I add unit counts for 4 quarters to get the annual unit count?**

No. This would result in double-counting of taxpayers. For example, if Firm A reports taxes each quarter it would show up as a single unit in each of the four quarters. When you add the quarterly unit counts together to get to an annual figure, Firm A would then be counted four times. However, Firm A should only be counted once. On the other hand, you cannot add all four quarters together and then divide by four because some taxpayers only report during one quarter and therefore they would be underrepresented in the annual unit count.

**4. Gross Business Income (GBI)**

**xv. What is gross business income?**

Gross business income equals a firm's combined reported gross income for the retail sales, business and occupation (B&O), and public utility taxes. Prior to 1995 the Department had included other tax data in the calculation of gross business income; however, this resulted in duplication and overstating of a firm's actual gross income. Therefore, gross business income data before 1995 may be misleading when compared to current data.

There are a couple of other considerations when using gross business income information:

- **Exempt firms**  
Many small firms, agricultural firms, and other select industries are not required to report taxes due to exemptions and filing thresholds. This, in turn, understates gross income figures.
- **Retail Sales Tax Requirements**  
If a firm is not required to pay B&O taxes but makes retail sales of taxable goods and services, the firm must report its retail sales taxes. Therefore, while a small firm may be exempt from paying B&O taxes, it may have to report sales and use taxes. Because it only reports a portion of its gross income when it reports sales and use taxes, this understates gross income figures.
- **B&O Tax Implications**  
The B&O tax applies at various stages in the chain of production (e.g. manufacturing, wholesaling, and retailing). For example, a manufacturer produces a widget and sells it to a wholesaler; the manufacturer pays manufacturing B&O tax on the income from the sale of the widget. The wholesaler then sells the same widget to a retailer and pays wholesaling B&O tax. And then finally, the retailer sells the widget to an end consumer and pays the retailing B&O tax. In effect, the income from the sale of that single widget was counted and taxed three times. Because of this "pyramiding" of the tax, gross income reported for B&O tax may not be compatible with other published data on income sources, like personal income.

**xvi. Can I get gross business income data by location?**

No. The data used to calculate gross business income are not reported to the Department by location. For example, when firms report their business and occupation taxes, they provide a single tax return and a single figure for all locations at which they do business. The Department cannot determine how much gross income is earned at a given location.

**5. Business and Occupation (B&O) Tax xvii.**

**What is the B&O tax?**

The B&O tax is a gross receipts tax. It is measured on the value of products, gross proceeds of sale, or gross income of the business. Virtually all businesses in Washington are subject to the B&O tax, including corporations, limited liability companies (LLCs), partnerships, and sole proprietors, whether nonprofit or for profit. The major exempt activities are farming and the sale or rental of real estate. The B&O taxes found in the QBR and other Create a Report functions reflect only the state B&O taxes and do not include local B&O taxes.

**xviii. Do cities levy a B&O tax?**

Yes. In addition to the state B&O tax, many Washington cities also assess a local B&O tax. However, the B&O data reflected in the QBR do not contain local B&O tax figures. The Department does not administer the local B&O tax; therefore the Department does not have data on local B&O tax figures. If you are interested in local B&O taxes, contact the jurisdiction of interest to inquire about their local B&O taxes.

**xix. What is the difference between B&O gross and taxable income?**

Gross income equals the income for a particular B&O activity before any deductions. Taxable income equals the gross income less any deductions and equals the amount subject to the B&O

tax. Examples of allowable deductions include bad debts, interstate and foreign sales, advancements or reimbursements, and returns/allowances/cash discounts.

**xx. Does the B&O tax due amount account for any tax credits?**

No. The tax due amount reflects the taxable (gross less deductions) multiplied by the applicable tax rate. This amount does not take into account any credits. Credits are later subtracted to calculate a final B&O tax liability.

**xxi. What are the state B&O tax rates?**

There are several classifications for the B&O tax based on the type of business activity. Each classification has its own tax rate. Some of the major categories and their rates are:

For more information about the B&O tax visit the Department's web site at <https://dor.wa.gov/find-taxes-rates/business-occupation-tax>

**xxii. Can I get B&O tax data by location?**

No. The B&O tax is not reported to the Department by location. When a taxpayer reports to the Department, the taxpayer provides a single tax return and a single figure for all locations at which they do business. Additionally, the addresses provided on the tax returns reflect mailing addresses and may not represent an actual firm location. In fact, they often are the address of a tax preparer. As a result, the Department cannot determine how much B&O tax is due for a given location.

**6. Retail Sales and Use Tax:**

**xxiii. What is the retail sales tax?**

Businesses in Washington collect and remit retail sales tax on the sale of tangible personal property and certain services. Examples of services subject to the retail sales tax include, but are not limited to, cleaning, repairing, altering, or improving real or personal property.

**xxiv. Are there exemptions to the retail sales and use taxes?**

Yes. Some of the most frequently used exemptions to retail sales and use taxes include:

- Groceries
- Prescription drugs
- Sales to federal government
- Newspapers
- Machinery and equipment used directly in a manufacturing operation
- Labor and services involved in the installation and repair of the manufacturing machinery and equipment noted above

**xxv. What is the difference between gross and taxable retail sales?**

Gross income from a retail sale is calculated before any deductions or exemptions. A taxable retail sale equals the retail sale activity less deductions or exemptions and is the amount subject to retail sales tax.

A substantial portion of retail sales are not subject to retail sales tax. Examples of deductions or exemptions include food for human consumption, prescription drugs, medical appliances and lenses, interstate sales, sales to the federal government, and sales to Native Americans for use on the reservation.

Statewide, taxable sales may understate the true level of retail activity by as much as 25-30 percent; however, this percentage can vary substantially across industries.

**xxvi. Do the retail sales and use tax due amounts account for any tax credits?**

No. The tax due amount reflects the taxable income (gross less deductions) multiplied by the applicable tax rate. This amount does not take into account any credits. Credits are subtracted later to compute a final tax liability.

**xxvii. What are the retail sales and use tax rates?**

The state retail sales and use tax rate is 6.5 percent for everything except motor vehicle sales/leases. The state tax rate for motor vehicle sales/leases is 6.8 percent. Local governments also levy sales and use taxes, and their tax rates vary depending on location.

To get a complete list of tax rates, check out the Department's Local Sales Tax flyer available online at <https://dor.wa.gov/find-taxes-rates/sales-and-use-tax-rates> or for a specific area, try the Department's Address Lookup system available at <https://webgis.dor.wa.gov/taxratelookup/SalesTax.aspx>

**7. Public Utility Tax**

**xxviii. What is the public utility tax?**

It is a tax on public service businesses, including businesses that engage in transportation, communications, and the supply of energy, natural gas, and water. The tax is in lieu of the business and occupation (B&O) tax.

**xxix. What is operating income?**

Income that is subject to the public utility tax is defined as operating income. This income is not subject to the B&O tax.

**xxx. What is the difference between gross and taxable operating income?**

Gross operating income equals the amount of income subject to the public utility tax before any deductions. Taxable operating income is the amount of income subject to the public utility tax less any deductions. Examples of allowable deductions include bad debts, interstate and foreign sales, advancements or reimbursements, and returns/allowances/cash discounts.

**xxxi. Does the public utility tax due amount account for any tax credits?**

No. The tax due amount reflects the taxable amount (gross less deductions) multiplied by the applicable tax rate. This amount does not take into account any credits. Credits are subtracted later to compute a final tax liability.

**xxxii. What are the public utility tax rates?**

There are five different rates, depending on the specific utility activity:

- Distribution of water
- Generation/distribution of electrical power
- Telegraph companies, distribution of natural gas, and collection of sewerage
- Urban transportation and watercraft vessels under 65 feet in length
- Railroads, railroad car companies, motor transportation and all other public service businesses



Rate information can be found at

<https://dor.wa.gov/find-taxes-rates/other-taxes/public-utility-tax>

**xxxiii. Can I get public utility tax data by location?**

No. The public utility tax is not reported to the Department by location. When a taxpayer reports to the Department, the taxpayer provides a single tax return and a single figure for all locations at which they do business. Additionally, the addresses provided on the tax returns reflect mailing addresses and may not represent an actual firm location. In fact, they often are the address of a tax preparer. As a result, the Department cannot determine how much public utility tax is due for a given location.

**Still can't find what you are looking for?**

**Try our Create-A-Report query tool from our Get Statistics and Reports site:**

<https://dor.wa.gov/about/statistics-reports>

**Contact the Department of Revenue,  
Research & Fiscal Analysis division via email at  
DORSTATISTICS@DOR.WA.GOV.**