

Tobacco puffers smoking mad, as Oregon aims to collect cigarette tax avoided online

By CURRY COASTAL PILOT, BROOKINGS

A few years ago, Joyce Miller, 60, a smoker since age 16, began buying cigarettes on the Internet after seeing an advertisement for tax-free smokes.

Now the state of Oregon wants to collect those back taxes.

Miller; her friend, Delma Olsen, and a number of other Oregonians this month received mailed notices informing them that they owe the state quite a bit in back taxes. The notices caught them off guard and have most smoking mad.

The notices of tax delinquency received by Miller, Olsen and the rest originated in Salem.

Rosemary Hardin, public information officer with the state Dept. of Revenue, said that the department was directed by the Legislature to collect the estimated millions in taxes that Internet

purchases have subverted. She said that a public notification effort began last year.

Hardin said that the state collects approximately \$235 million in cigarette tax each year, placing it fourth in revenue behind income tax, property tax and corporate tax.

She also said that the state estimates 3 percent, or 15,000 people, in Oregon are buying cigarettes online.

What quantities they are buying is still unknown, Hardin said.

Also unknown is how some smokers notified by the state will pay those taxes. Miller said that she orders about three cartons every 30 to 45 days. When she places orders, she also orders for friends.

“The thing is, I ordered for a lot of people because I had Internet,” Miller said.

She’s not alone, she said. Miller rattled off the names of approximately six

friends who do the same thing. Hardin said that Miller and others in similar situations would be responsible for paying additional taxes.

The discounts offered by Internet distributors are substantial. Cigarettes purchased over the counter in Oregon cost approximately \$30 a carton. Costs drop to \$10 to \$25 a carton online.

Most of the online sites that offer tax-free cigarettes are based on Indian reservations, such as the Seneca Nation in western New York. Many tribes offer premium, generic and tribal brands.

As with most goods and services offered by Native American tribes, their to-

bacco products aren’t subject to local and state laws..

State legislators across the nation, watching cigarette tax revenue affected by on-line sales, have taken action. Some, like Oregon, have decided to collect the tax from consumers.

That has caused some tribes to quit shipping to Alaska, Hawaii, Michigan, New York, Washington and Oregon. Others no longer accept credit cards.

The Dept. of Revenue in Oregon has received approximately 25,000 invoices from distributors so far, Hardin said. Approximately 4,000 have been processed, and the first notices were sent earlier this month.



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Pre-Christmas grinchess spoil holiday happiness

By ZINA BOOTH
IVN Staff Writer

“How the Grinch Stole Christmas” is a popular Christmas special -- but not so fun when it happens to you.

On Monday, Nov. 28, the day after finishing most of my Christmas shopping, I came home for lunch to find that someone else had saved themselves the expense and bother of shopping -- by stealing my presents!

Despite finding my front door jimmied open, and the back sliding door wide open, I disregarded all advice and proceeded through my house, screaming at whoever might have been so unlucky as to still be inside.

Two DVD players were gone, with VCRs lying disconnected on the floor, apparently awaiting the next moving load. Jewelry boxes lay empty on the floor.

Cabinets were open, food missing. Even my garbage can, laundry baskets and blankets were stolen.

I hope those blankets keep the thieves warm and dry until they get arrested and have their “three hots and a cot” provided by the county jail.

The part that made me physically ill was the missing Christmas presents that I had purchased for my grandchildren -- I sure hope the thieves’ children enjoy the “effort” their parent put forth to acquire these presents.

Heaven forbid that the thieves get their gifts the way I did, by working for the money and shopping to choose just the right item.

By phoning the Josephine County Sheriff’s Office I.V. Substation, and speaking with Cpl. Sean Rarey, I found that this is a common occurrence. Between Thanksgiving and Christmas, Rarey said they get “dozens” of these calls a day.

Rarey said that food is a biggie this time of year, citing the recent break-in at Giant Burger, where thieves made off with their whole food inventory.

Rarey offered suggestions on how to protect my home. He said the best bet is to purchase an alarm system from Radio Shack. Unlike alarms systems monitored by security companies, the shrill siren of an alarm is much more apt to discourage would-be robbers.

Rarey said that another way home owners can protect themselves is to be sure to have serial numbers on electronic devices, and as detailed descriptions as possible on jewelry and other stolen items. This information is then placed into a databank, allowing thieves fencing items in a Portland pawn shop to still be traced.

Dead bolts also help, although the loser who broke into my house settled for prying open the metal door with my own pruning tool. Motion detector lights might also discourage would-be thieves.

Wooden dowels in sliding doors, and window locks also help. But if a thief really wants to get in, he will.

Rarey stated that it is not uncommon for these thieves to break into a house and make themselves a sandwich as the rest of the household sleep peacefully.

All-in-all, says Rarey, there is no substitute for getting to know your neighbors, and watching out for each other.

And a final “Bah, Humbug” to the derelict who stole my children’s Christmas: Just remember the saying, “What goes around, comes around.”

I sincerely hope the thieves get the Christmas they deserve.

GP murder suspect arrested

Burns resident Brian Scott Kanuch, 40, has been arrested and charged with the 2004 murder of a rural Grants Pass resident, said Maj. Brian Anderson of Josephine County Sheriff’s Office.

Kanuch is charged with three counts of aggravated murder, murder, first-degree burglary, first-degree robbery, and three counts of being a felon in possession of a firearm, said Anderson, who is undersheriff.

The body of Charles Krugle, of Shadow Hills Drive, was discovered May 12 last year.

“In spite of high case loads and extremely short staffing, sheriff’s investigators have arrested Kanuch for the murder,” said Anderson.

He added that numerous citizens provided information during the past 18 months “that proved invaluable.”



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