



## **Robert W. Wood** THE TAX LAWYER

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### Don't Miss The IRS Website

I recently wrote that the IRS [website](#) is an incredibly helpful resource which taxpayers should peruse. See [IRS 2010 Milestones](#). Of course, the internet and all of the access and security problems it has spawned has given us a raft of new problems. But the IRS has done a superb job of disseminating information, giving previously unheard of access to its forms, the tax law and its interpretations of it. As with most websites, you need to peruse it yourself as there are many nooks and crannies.

A couple points about security. Make sure you're at the official site. Beware of sites ending .com, .net, .org, etc. Just as obviously, don't start responding to emails from the IRS or clicking on links to the IRS in spam emails. The same precautions you'd use with your bank apply. See [Protect your personal information! The IRS does not initiate taxpayer communications through e-mail](#).

I'm sometimes asked by clients if the IRS tracks users on its website and can determine whether you've accessed information or downloaded forms or publications about a particular topic—say foreign bank accounts. To my knowledge, there's no way the IRS could do this even if it wanted to. I have my own bugaboos and conspiracy theories, but even I wouldn't worry one bit about this one.

The IRS is doing its best to encourage taxpayers to use its site, espousing in IRS Tax Tip 2011-05 the "[Top 10 Reasons to Visit IRS.gov](#)." Here's my own list:

**1. IRS Forms and Publications.** This may be how most people use the site especially initially, with good reason. What a change from the old days! And don't just get the [Forms](#) and Instructions. IRS Publications are somewhat one-sided in that they generally reflect the IRS view of an issue, even if there is a more taxpayer-friendly court decision. Still, IRS Publications are incredibly helpful.

**2. Check the Status of Your Tax Refund.** Whether you chose direct deposit or asked the IRS to mail you a check, you can check the status of your refund through [Where's My Refund?](#) See also [Getting a Tax Refund? Ten Things to Know.](#)

**3. Facilitate Electronic Payments.** You can authorize an electronic funds withdrawal, use a credit or debit card, or enroll in the U.S. Treasury's [Electronic Federal Tax Payment System](#) to pay your federal taxes. Electronic payment options are a convenient, safe and secure way to pay taxes, and for some types of tax payments are now even required.

**4. Calculate Payroll Withholding.** Every employee must submit an IRS [Form W-4](#) to their employer to facilitate payroll tax withholding. You may want to give your employer a new one to update it. The [IRS Withholding Calculator](#) will help you ensure that you don't have too much or too little income tax withheld from your pay.

**5. Request a Payment Agreement.** Paying your taxes in full and on time avoids penalties and interest. However, if you cannot pay your balance in full you may be eligible to use the [Online Payment Agreement Application](#) to request an installment agreement.

**Electronic Filing?** Of course, [e-filing](#) of tax returns is a huge reason to visit the IRS site and one that deserves full coverage. Tomorrow I'll post comments (gulp) about electronic filing.

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