



# CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TAX AND FEE ADMINISTRATION



## Cigarette and Tobacco Products Taxes

Excise taxes are imposed upon the distribution of cigarettes and tobacco products in California. Distributors must be licensed to conduct these transactions and have an account number to remit the excise taxes owed.

Two types of excise taxes are collected on cigarettes and tobacco products distributed in California:

- 1) the cigarette tax, and
- 2) the cigarette and tobacco products surtaxes, and
- 3) the cigarette distribution tax.

Each tax is described below, according to the type of product sold.

### Cigarettes

Cigarettes are subject to both the cigarette tax and the cigarette and tobacco products surtax, collectively referred to as taxes. The taxes are assessed on each cigarette distributed in California.

Effective April 1, 2017, the tax rate is \$0.1435 cents per cigarette, which is two dollars and eighty seven cents (\$2.87) per pack of twenty (20) cigarettes. Distributors pay the taxes by purchasing cigarette tax stamps from the California Department of Tax and Fee Administration (CDTFA). Distributors are required to affix the tax stamp to each package of cigarettes before distribution. Distributors pass the excise taxes on to their customer, and the taxes become part of the retail selling price of the cigarettes.

The cost of the cigarette tax stamp includes all three taxes. A list of the current and historical cigarette tax rates is available at [www.cdtfa.ca.gov](http://www.cdtfa.ca.gov).

Distributors receive a purchase discount of 0.85 percent, up to one dollar (\$1.00) of the denominated tax value of the stamps at the time of purchase to help offset the cost of affixing cigarette tax stamps.

With the passage of Proposition 56 and effective April 1, 2017, product labeled as little or small cigars are no longer considered cigarettes and no longer require a cigarette tax stamp. Little or small cigars fall under the definition of tobacco products and their distributions are to be reported as

tobacco products on the tobacco products tax return by the tobacco products distributor.

### Tobacco products

Proposition 56 amended the definition of tobacco products effective April 1, 2017, to include, but not limited to cigars including little cigars, smoking tobacco (including shisha), chewing tobacco, snuff, any products containing, made of, or derived from any amount of tobacco or nicotine that is intended for human consumption.

“Tobacco products” do not include cigarettes or any product that has been approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration for sale as a tobacco cessation product or for other therapeutic purposes (for example, nicotine patches) where that product is marketed and sold solely for such approved use.

### Nicotine products

Proposition 56 also amended the definition of “tobacco products” to include:

- Any product containing, made, or derived from any amount of nicotine that is intended for human consumption and sold with or without a delivery device or system, electronic cigarettes, or
- Any device or delivery system sold in combination with nicotine, and any component, part or accessory of an electronic cigarette that is used during the operation of the device when sold in combination with nicotine (for example, a battery used in the operation of the device sold with nicotine for a single price).

Tobacco products do not include delivery devices sold without liquid or substance containing nicotine. For example, electronic cigarettes or vape pens sold without nicotine, or “eJuice” sold without nicotine are not considered tobacco products for excise tax purposes, but are subject to tobacco products retail licensing requirements. For more information on retail licensing requirements, see publication 78, *Sales of Cigarettes and Tobacco Products in California—License Requirements for Retailers*, available at [www.cdtfa.ca.gov/formspubs/pub78.pdf](http://www.cdtfa.ca.gov/formspubs/pub78.pdf).

## Tobacco products tax application

The tax, which is a component of the cigarette and tobacco products surtax, is paid by tobacco products distributors.

The tobacco products tax is imposed upon the first distribution of tobacco products at a rate determined annually by the CDTFA. The tobacco products tax rate is based upon the equivalent to the combined rate of the taxes applied to cigarettes (for details, please refer to “How are the revenues used?”). The rate is applied to the wholesale cost of the tobacco products. “Wholesale cost” means the cost of the tobacco products to the distributor prior to any discounts or trade allowances. If a manufacturer or importer is also the distributor, the wholesale cost of tobacco includes all manufacturing costs, the cost of raw materials (including waste materials not incorporated into the final product), the cost of labor, and any direct and indirect overhead costs, and any excise and/or U.S. Customs taxes paid. Wholesale cost includes all freight or transportation charges for shipment of materials/unfinished product from the supplier to the manufacturer who is also the distributor. Wholesale cost does not include domestic freight or transportation charges for shipment of a finished product from the supplier to the distributor. In most cases, the wholesale cost will be the invoiced price of the tobacco products without any allowance for discounts.

When an out-of-state California licensed tobacco products distributor sells tobacco products from outside California to a wholesaler, retailer or consumer located in California, the licensed distributor must collect the excise tax from the California customer, based on the customer’s wholesale cost; that is, the cost to the customer or the invoiced sales price charged for the tobacco products prior to any discounts or trade allowances.

For additional information on how to calculate or estimate the wholesale cost, please refer to Regulation 4076, *Wholesale Cost of Tobacco Products*. A list of the current and historical tobacco products rates is available at [www.cdtfa.ca.gov](http://www.cdtfa.ca.gov).

### How are the revenues used?

Of the total two dollars and eighty-seven cents (\$2.87) tax per package of twenty cigarettes, ten cents (\$0.10) is deposited into the Cigarette Tax Fund, and two cents (\$0.02) goes into the Breast Cancer Fund.

Twenty-five cents (\$0.25) is deposited into the Cigarette and Tobacco Products Surtax Fund and may only be used for these purposes:

- Tobacco-related health education programs and disease research.
- Medical and hospital care and treatment of patients who cannot afford those services, and for whom payment will not be made by any private coverage or federal program.
- Programs for fire prevention; environmental conservation; protection, restoration, enhancement, and maintenance of fish, waterfowl, and wildlife habitat areas; and enhancement of state and local parks and recreation.

Fifty cents (\$0.50) is deposited into the California Children and Families Trust Fund and is used for programs that encourage proper childhood development, including the development of professional and parental education and training, informed selection of childcare, development and education of childcare providers, and research into the best practices and standards for all programs and services relating to early childhood development.

Two dollars (\$2.00) is deposited into the California Healthcare, Research and Prevention Tobacco Tax Act of 2016 Fund (Proposition 56), and is a trust fund used only for these purposes:

- Increase funding for existing healthcare programs and services including programs that provide healthcare, treatment, and services for Californians with tobacco-related diseases and conditions.
- Funding for implementation, evaluation, and dissemination of health promotion and activities in order to monitor, evaluate, and reduce tobacco and nicotine use and tobacco-related disease rates.
- Funding for school programs to prevent and reduce the use of tobacco and nicotine products by young people.
- Funding to the University of California for medical research of cancer, heart, and lung tobacco-related diseases.

### Who is required to register?

You are required to register if you are a distributor, wholesaler, manufacturer, or importer of cigarettes or tobacco products in California. Definitions of the above terms are provided under the heading “What are my reporting requirements?”

Retailers are also required to register. For retail license requirements, see publication 78, *Sales of Cigarettes and Tobacco Products in California—License Requirements for Retailers*, available at [www.cdtfa.ca.gov/formspubs/pub78.pdf](http://www.cdtfa.ca.gov/formspubs/pub78.pdf).

Delivery sellers (see “Requirements for Delivery Sellers”) are required to have a distributor license. Delivery sellers having a physical presence in California such as a warehouse must also apply for a retailer’s license.

### How do I register?

You can apply online using CDTFA’s online services, available at [www.cdtfa.ca.gov](http://www.cdtfa.ca.gov). If you have questions or need help, contact CDTFA’s Customer Service Center at 1-800-400-7115 (CRS:711).

### If I am required to register, what are the requirements?

**Licensing.** You must first apply for a distributor, wholesaler, manufacturer, or importer license and pay the applicable licensing fee. Current licensing fees can be found at [www.cdtfa.ca.gov](http://www.cdtfa.ca.gov). All licenses must be renewed annually. If you are applying for a distributor’s license, you must also post a minimum \$1,000 security deposit before the license can be issued. There are no security deposit requirements for wholesalers, manufacturers, or importers. For information on purchasing cigarette tax stamps, please see publication 63, *Cigarette Distributor Licensing and Tax Stamp Guide*, available at [www.cdtfa.ca.gov/formspubs/pub63.pdf](http://www.cdtfa.ca.gov/formspubs/pub63.pdf).

**Cigarette and Tobacco Products Account.** After receiving a license issued under the California Cigarette & Tobacco Products Licensing Act of 2003, a separate account must be established to sell cigarettes and tobacco products in California.

**Filing.** All licensed distributors, wholesalers, manufacturers, and importers (with the exception of tobacco products wholesalers) are required to file tax returns, reports, and/or schedules, which are due on or before the 25th of the month following the reporting period. Tax returns, reports, and schedules must be filed even if no transactions were made during the reporting period. [Online filing](#) is available for all appropriate tax returns, reports and schedules for cigarette and tobacco products manufacturers, importers, distributors, and wholesalers. Additional information can be found at [www.cdtfa.ca.gov](http://www.cdtfa.ca.gov). All records must be kept and maintained at the taxpayer's licensed premises in California, unless another location has been approved by the CDTFA.

### What are my reporting requirements

**Cigarette Distributor.** A cigarette distributor is a person who purchases untaxed (unstamped) cigarettes and makes the first distribution of the cigarettes in this state. Distribution includes the sale, use, or consumption of untaxed cigarettes, or the placing of untaxed cigarettes in a vending machine or in retail stock\*. A cigarette distributor is required to affix the California cigarette tax stamp to each package of cigarettes prior to distribution to indicate that taxes have been paid. All licensed distributors are required to file monthly returns or reports along with any accompanying schedules.

**Tobacco Products Distributor.** A tobacco products distributor is a person who makes the first distribution of tobacco products in this state. Distribution includes the sale, use or consumption of untaxed tobacco products, or the placing of untaxed tobacco products in a vending machine or in retail stock\*. A tobacco products distributor is required to calculate the tobacco products tax due based on the wholesale cost of the tobacco products distributed and pay the amounts owed each month on tax return forms provided by the CDTFA.

**Cigarette Wholesaler.** A cigarette wholesaler is a person, other than a licensed distributor, who sells taxed (stamped) cigarettes, obtained from a distributor or another wholesaler, for resale. Cigarette wholesalers cannot purchase their products directly from an importer or manufacturer. Every licensed cigarette wholesaler is required to file a monthly report following the monthly reporting period showing the cigarette inventory activity. Reports must be made even if no transactions were made during the reporting period.

**Tobacco Products Wholesaler.** A tobacco products wholesaler is a person, other than a licensed distributor, who sells tax-paid tobacco products for resale. Tobacco products wholesalers cannot purchase their products directly from an importer or manufacturer. There are no reporting requirements for tobacco products wholesalers.

**Manufacturer/Importer.** A manufacturer is a person who manufactures cigarettes and/or tobacco products sold in this state. An importer is any purchaser who purchases for resale in the United States, cigarettes and/or tobacco products manufactured outside the United States for the purpose of making a first sale or distribution within the United States.

All licensed manufacturers and importers are required to file monthly tax returns and report any sample sales as set forth in [Regulation 4081](#), reports and/or schedules.

\*Retail stock includes all cigarettes (for cigarette distributors) or tobacco products (for tobacco products distributors) on the premises of a retail site whether on display or not.

### Are any transactions not subject to taxes?

Yes. The following sales and distributions of cigarettes and tobacco products are generally not subject to the taxes although these transactions may be subject to reporting requirements. This list is not intended to be all-inclusive.

- Sales of cigarettes or tobacco products by the original importer to a licensed distributor if the cigarettes or tobacco products are manufactured outside the United States ([Revenue and Taxation Code. \[R&TC\] § 30105](#));
- Sale or gift of federally tax-free cigarettes or tobacco products when the cigarettes or tobacco products are delivered directly from the manufacturer under Internal Revenue bond to a veteran's home of the State of California or a hospital or domiciliary facility of the United States Veterans' Administration for gratuitous issue to veterans receiving hospitalization or domiciliary care. The tax shall not apply to the use or consumption of such cigarettes or tobacco products by the institution or by the veteran patients or domiciliaries. ([R&TC § 30105.5](#));
- Sales of cigarettes or tobacco products by the manufacturer to a licensed distributor. ([R&TC § 30103](#));
- Sales by a distributor to a common carrier engaged in interstate or foreign passenger service. ([R&TC § 30104](#));
- Sales to United States military exchanges, commissaries, ships' stores, or the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. ([R&TC § 30102](#));
- Distributions of federally untaxed cigarettes or tobacco products that are under Internal Revenue bond or U.S. Customs control. ([R&TC § 30102.5](#));
- An individual shipment of not more than 400 cigarettes (typically 20 packs or 2 cartons) personally transported into California. ([R&TC § 30106](#));
- Sales and distributions of cigarettes and tobacco products that cannot be taxed by the state under the U.S. Constitution or federal law, or under the California Constitution or state law, such as shipments to purchasers in other states, territories, or foreign countries when the cigarette and tobacco products are not to be returned to California before use.

### What if consumers purchase cigarettes or tobacco products from outside of California?

If consumers purchase cigarettes or tobacco products for their own use from outside the state, or from an unlicensed vendor without paying California excise tax or use tax, they are required to file a *Cigarette and Tobacco Products Excise and Use Tax Return*, and pay the tax directly to the CDTFA. The return is due at the end of the month following the quarter in which the purchases were made. This includes products purchased through the mail, by telephone, or via the Internet that are shipped into California. Consumers also owe the taxes if they physically bring more than 400 cigarettes into California. These purchases are also subject to California use taxes. For information regarding California use tax, please visit [www.cdtfa.ca.gov](http://www.cdtfa.ca.gov).

### Do distributors need to contact the CDTFA before destroying cigarettes or tobacco products?

Yes. Contact us before you destroy cigarettes and/or tobacco products. To make arrangements for a CDTFA employee to be present for the destruction, call 1-916-323-6361 or send an email to: [adab@cdtfa.ca.gov](mailto:adab@cdtfa.ca.gov). If you do not have an authorized CDTFA representative witness the destruction of the cigarettes or untaxed tobacco products, you may be liable for any unpaid cigarette and tobacco products taxes. It is presumed that all cigarettes or tobacco products acquired by a distributor are untaxed cigarettes or tobacco products, and that all cigarettes or tobacco products manufactured in this state or transported to this state and no longer in the possession of the distributor have been distributed. (R&TC § 30109)

If you have stamped cigarettes which need to be returned to the manufacturer or destroyed because they are unfit for sale, or have become unfit for use or sale, you must file a claim for refund by using our [online services system](#). You must sign in using your Cigarette Stamp account and select *Submit a Cigarette Stamp Refund Claim*. If the claim includes a cigarette tax stamp affixed to unsalable cigarettes, you must file a separate claim for each cigarette manufacturer.

### What are the PACT Act requirements?

The Prevent All Cigarette Trafficking (PACT) Act is federal law that amends the federal Jenkins Act. It revises provisions governing the collection of taxes and trafficking by requiring Internet and other remote sellers of cigarettes and smokeless tobacco products to comply with the same laws that apply to local cigarette and tobacco products sellers.

#### Registration

If you operate a business for profit that sells, transfers, ships, advertises, or offers for sale cigarettes or smokeless tobacco products through interstate commerce into California, or into Indian Country located within California's borders, you must register [online](#) with the CDTFA at [www.cdtfa.ca.gov](http://www.cdtfa.ca.gov).

#### Monthly Report Filing

You must also file monthly reports, using uniform PACT Act forms with the CDTFA. To report cigarettes, use CDTFA-5204-PA-1: *State CIGARETTE PACT Act Report*. To report smokeless tobacco products, use CDTFA-5204-PA-2: *State TOBACCO PACT Act Report*. Copies of the forms are available at [www.cdtfa.ca.gov](http://www.cdtfa.ca.gov). The monthly report forms contain detailed information on each shipment of cigarettes (CDTFA-5204-PA-1) and smokeless tobacco products (CDTFA-5204-PA-2) into California or Indian Country during the previous calendar month. The reports are due before the tenth day of the month following each calendar month. You must file a report regardless of whether you have transactions to report for the month. You are able to file the reports using our online services at [www.cdtfa.ca.gov](http://www.cdtfa.ca.gov).

### Requirements for delivery sellers (direct sales to consumers)

A "delivery sale" is defined, in part, as any sale of cigarettes or smokeless tobacco products (such as chew or snuff), sold by an out-of-state vendor to an in-state consumer. If you are a delivery seller, and plan to make delivery sales of cigarettes or tobacco

products, including e-cigarettes or vape products containing nicotine in California, you must apply for a California Cigarette and Tobacco Products Distributor license. If you are a delivery seller with a physical presence in California such as a warehouse, you must also apply for a California Cigarette and Tobacco Products Retailer's license. A delivery seller must comply with all California laws regarding the sale of cigarettes and tobacco products in the state as if that seller were located in California.

### Additional Resources

Other related publications that may interest you are listed below. Helpful guides, regulations, forms, publications, and other resources are available at [www.cdtfa.ca.gov](http://www.cdtfa.ca.gov).

#### Publications

- 63 Cigarette Distributor Licensing and Tax Stamp Guide
- 78 Sales of Cigarettes and Tobacco Products in California—License Requirement for Retailers
- 152 Cigarette and Tobacco Products Inspections
- 201 Special Taxes and Fees Newsletter
- 403 California Counterfeit-Resistant Cigarette Tax Stamp

### For More Information

If you have any questions regarding this program, you may contact the CDTFA by telephone, email, or mail.

### Customer Service Center

1-800-400-7115 (CRS:711)

Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Pacific time), except state holidays. Select the option for *Special Taxes and Fees*.  
[www.cdtfa.ca.gov/email](http://www.cdtfa.ca.gov/email)

Special Taxes and Fees, MIC:88  
California Department of  
Tax and Fee Administration  
PO Box 942879  
Sacramento, CA 94279-0088

### Taxpayers' Rights Advocate

If you have not been able to resolve a problem through normal channels (for example, by speaking to a supervisor), contact the Taxpayers' Rights Advocate Office for help:

Taxpayers' Rights Advocate Office, MIC:70  
California Department of  
Tax and Fee Administration  
PO Box 942879  
Sacramento, CA 94279-0070  
[www.cdtfa.ca.gov/tra](http://www.cdtfa.ca.gov/tra)

1-888-324-2798 toll-free telephone

1-916-323-3319 fax

*Please note:* This publication summarizes the law and applicable regulations in effect when the publication was written. However, changes in the law or in regulations may have occurred since that time. If there is a conflict between the text in this publication and the law, decisions will be based on the law and not on this publication.

