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IRS Forcing All Applicants for Same-Day EINs to Apply Online.

Although taxpayers and their representatives will still be able to request a new employer identification number by faxing or mailing a Form SS-4, "Application for Employer Identification Number," those wishing to receive same-day EINs will be required to use the online EIN assistant, an IRS official said November 5.

Speaking at the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants National Tax Conference in National Harbor, Md., David Alito, deputy commissioner (operations), IRS Wage and Investment Division, said IRS phone assistants will be available to help only those with previously assigned EINs. "We want to be able to ensure that we have the service available for taxpayers with questions that need the phone service for existing EINs," he said.

Many practitioners expressed concern over the change both because the EIN assistant limits issuance to one EIN per responsible party per day (although that limitation also applies to requests submitted by phone, fax, or mail) and because the website is reportedly down a lot. "If this is the only way we can get them, this needs to be changed," one practitioner said in a written audience question.

The limit of one EIN per day is necessary "because we started having a run on EINs," Alito said, adding, "We had robotic systems pinging our system trying to get multiple EINs, and we were in danger of running out. It's a finite set of numbers."

If practitioners access the website when it happens to be down, they should try again the next day, Alito said.

Another practitioner, speaking from the audience, said that while the EIN assistant is good for a nonprofessional, for professionals it takes "about six times as long, going through screen after screen after screen."

Alito also pointed out that individual taxpayers who order their tax return or account transcripts online must wait seven to 10 days to receive them by mail. He said that in January the IRS plans to launch a new application that will allow taxpayers to request, view, and print transcripts in the same online session. "This hopefully will save both time and effort for the taxpayers as well as us," he said.

by Amy S. Elliott