

# Provincial government taking tough stand on tax evasion

Ontario's escalating battle against tax evasion is showing results. The Ministry of Finance reports

that in 1995 and 1996, fines totalling \$4,198,397 were imposed in 62 evasion cases, and 3,852 offence certificates were issued

for less serious infractions, resulting in additional fines of \$745,370. More than half of the fines were

imposed for offences against the Retail Sales Tax Act. The remainder were levied under the Tobacco Tax Act, the Fuel Tax Act, the

Employer Health Tax Act, and the Criminal Code of Canada. Prosecutions for selling smuggled cigarettes have decreased steadily since the 1994 reductions in federal and Ontario tobacco taxes.

"Firm and fair enforcement of Ontario's tax laws is essential" said Finance Minister Ernie Eves. "Honest taxpayers have nothing to fear from it. In fact, it protects their interests by ensuring that they are not saddled with someone else's share of the burden. It also allows government to implement tax reductions without cutting essential services."

Dario Savio, director of the ministry's Special Investigations Branch, said that fines and court surcharges are the tip of the iceberg, because convicted taxpayers must also pay all back-taxes, plus penalties and interest.

"Evasion is a costly proposition when you're caught," said Savio. "The total bill can amount to three times the amount originally evaded, and the tax statutes also provide for jail terms of up to two years."

The Provincial Auditor said in 1995 that hundreds of millions of dollars in retail sales taxes are collected and not remitted every year. With the decrease in cigarette smuggling, more staff have been assigned to other types of underground economic activity, such as sales tax evasion. The success of these efforts is reflected in a jump in audit recoveries from \$256 million in the year ending March 31, 1996 to \$317 million in the year ending March 31, 1997.

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