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# Highlights

Highlights of GAO-03-314, a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Oversight, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

The tax filing season is when millions of taxpayers file their returns and seek assistance by calling or visiting IRS's offices or Web site. Because of the large number of returns and critical nature of IRS's filing season activities, GAO was asked to assess IRS's 2002 filing season performance in processing tax returns and refunds and providing timely and accurate assistance to taxpayers.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that IRS (1) reinstate a telephone assistance caller wait-time measure, (2) revise its bi-weekly wait-time reports for walk-in sites, (3) explore the feasibility of revising its sampling plan for assessing the accuracy of walk-in account assistance, and (4) comprehensively evaluate walk-in site resource requirements after clarifying the extent and timing of workload and other changes at the sites.

In commenting on a draft of this report, IRS cited actions it has taken or plans to take that appear responsive to three of GAO's four recommendations. IRS's comments did not specifically address the recommendation that bi-weekly wait-time reports be revised.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-314](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-314).

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact James R. White at 202-512-9110 or [whitej@gao.gov](mailto:whitej@gao.gov).

# IRS'S 2002 TAX FILING SEASON

## Returns and Refunds Processed Smoothly; Quality of Assistance Improved

### What GAO Found

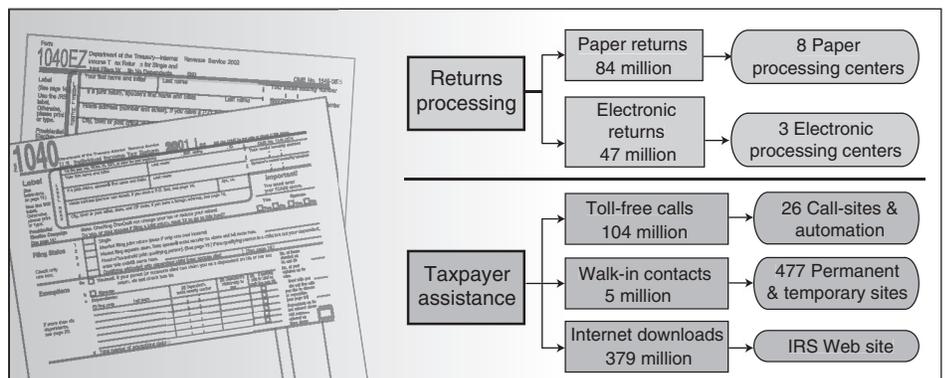
The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) processed returns and issued refunds smoothly and the quality of assistance provided to taxpayers improved in the 2002 filing season. In light of this, IRS should be commended for the various efforts it took to prepare for the 2002 filing season and improve performance. Still, opportunities exist for IRS to further improve aspects of its performance and some of its performance measures.

In 2002, IRS's performance included issuing almost all refunds on time, providing more accurate telephone service than in 2001, and meeting many of its 2002 performance goals in all areas. IRS also began measuring the accuracy of assistance at its walk-in sites to obtain better performance data. In addition, IRS's redesigned Web site was easier to access and more user friendly.

IRS's improved performance can be traced to its use of performance measures, which are part of its strategy to improve returns processing and taxpayer assistance as shown below. However, GAO identified opportunities for IRS to make further improvements. For example, IRS's suite of telephone measures lacks an indicator of how long callers wait to speak to an assistor—a key aspect of assistance that provides useful information for decision making by external stakeholders.

Although not a primary focus of this report, GAO also found that IRS lacked comprehensive plans related to the extent and timing of anticipated workload and staffing changes at its walk-in sites.

### IRS's Primary Filing Season Activities Are Processing Returns and Assisting Taxpayers



Source: GAO's analysis of IRS's data.