Fire Fighting, Police, and Emergency Equipment

What’s New in 2016
We’ve updated the layout to make this fact sheet easier to use.

This fact sheet covers:
- Fire departments
- Sales by fire departments
- Water used in fighting fires
- Ambulance services
- Police departments
- Other vehicles
- Local sales and use taxes
- How to report sales and use tax

Fire departments
Definitions
Volunteer fire departments
Volunteer fire departments are independent nonprofit associations. These departments are exempt from sales and use tax if they:
- are exempt from federal income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code; and
- have been granted exempt status from the Minnesota Department of Revenue.

Municipal fire departments
Municipal fire departments are operated by local governments. For a definition of “local governments”, see Fact Sheet 176, Local Governments – Cities, Counties, and Townships.

Note: Fire departments that do not qualify as a local government must pay sales or use tax on certain purchases.

Purchases
Volunteer and municipal fire departments may purchase most items used to prevent fire or to protect property from fire, exempt from sales tax. To claim the exemption, give the seller a completed Form ST3, Certificate of Exemption.

Items that are not used exclusively to prevent fires or to protect property from fire are taxable. For example, a washing machine used to wash fire protection clothing is taxable.

Fire trucks and vehicles
Volunteer and municipal fire departments do not pay sales tax on:
- fire trucks, pumper trucks, hook and ladder trucks, trailers; or
- the components used to assemble or initially equip them; or
- items that are primarily attached to them

Replacement and repair parts
Replacement and repair parts for these vehicles are not taxable. This includes parts and accessories that upgrade or modify the vehicle. Examples include:
- Built-in radios
- Emergency lighting (mounted on vehicle)
- Fire hoses
- Fittings
- Foam unit
- Gated wyes
- Nozzles
- Valves

What’s New in 2016
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This fact sheet is intended to help you become more familiar with Minnesota tax laws and your rights and responsibilities under the laws. Nothing in this fact sheet supersedes, alters, or otherwise changes any provisions of the tax law, administrative rules, court decisions, or revenue notices. Alternative formats available upon request.
Replacement accessories
Volunteer fire departments and fire departments operated by a city, county, or township do not pay tax on replacement accessories.

Fire departments that do not qualify as a local government or volunteer fire department with exempt status may buy accessory items to initially equip an emergency rescue vehicle exempt from tax. However, replacement of these items is taxable. Local governments and volunteer fire departments with exempt status can buy replacement parts without paying tax. Examples include:
- Axes
- Canteens
- Cutters
- Extraction tools
- First aid kits and medical supplies
- Flashlights
- Ladders
- Pike poles
- Portable generators
- Portable radios
- Rams
- Tents
- Tire chains

Note: You initially equip a vehicle around the same time the vehicle is purchased. This exemption no longer applies when the vehicle is equipped and begins to operate as a fire or rescue vehicle.

Fire extinguishers
Fire extinguishers are taxable unless an exemption applies. Refilling, checking, and tagging fire extinguishers are nontaxable services.

Fuel
Fuel purchased by a government for use in a fire apparatus is exempt.

Personal protective gear
Firefighters’ personal protective equipment is not taxable. Examples include:
- Boots
- Bunker coats and pants (including suspenders)
- Canister filter masks
- Gloves
- Goggles
- Head covers and hoods
- Helmets (including chin straps, face shields, and neck covers)
- Optical and thermal imaging search devices
- Personal alert safety systems
- Protective coveralls
- Safety equipment required by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration
- Self-contained breathing apparatuses
- Spanner belts
- Wildfire jackets

Uniforms
Uniforms are clothing even if they are chemically treated or made from fire retardant fabric. Clothing is exempt regardless of who buys it.

Sales by fire departments
If a municipal fire department sells surplus equipment or other tangible items on a regular basis, the sales are taxable. For more information, see Fact Sheet 132, Isolated and Occasional Sales.

Water used in fighting fires
Water used directly in providing fire protection services by an organized fire department, fire protection district, or fire company regularly charged with the responsibility of providing fire protection to the state or a political subdivision is exempt.

Water used by fire departments to fight fires or protect property is not taxable. Water used for other purposes, such as flushing hydrants, washing fire trucks or cleaning the fire station, is taxable.

For more information, see Revenue Notice 12-09, Government Exemptions – Water Used Directly in Providing Fire Protection.
Ambulance services
Sales or leases of ambulances to an ambulance service licensed under Section 144E.10 (public or private) are not taxable. Accessory items used to initially equip ambulances and repair and replacement parts for ambulances are exempt.

To claim exemption, give the seller a completed, Form ST3, Certificate of Exemption.

Ambulances and motor vehicles
Any motor vehicle purchased by an ambulance service licensed under Section 144E.10 is exempt if it is equipped and specifically intended for emergency response. Starting Oct. 1, 2011, leases of motor vehicles that meet the same criteria are also exempt.

Fuel
Fuel for use in an ambulance, both air and ground, is exempt.

Repair and replacement parts
Repair and replacement parts for these vehicles are exempt when purchased by an ambulance service licensed under Section 144E.10. Examples include:

- a first responder vehicle, or
- a vehicle in a rural area that is equipped with medical equipment and supplies but is not an ambulance, if purchased or leased by an ambulance service licensed under Section 144E.10.

Note: This exemption only applies to motor vehicles; it does not apply to planes, boats, snowmobiles, etc.

Supplies and equipment
Supplies and equipment used by an ambulance service are exempt if they are used in the course of providing medical care.

Police departments
Starting Jan. 1, 2014, most purchases by city, county, and township police departments are not taxable.

To claim exemption, give the seller a completed Form ST3, Certificate of Exemption.

Marked police patrol vehicles
Marked police patrol vehicles are not taxable since they are not required to be registered. If the owner of the vehicle chooses to register the marked vehicle with the Department of Public Safety, no sales tax is collected.

Accessory items used to initially equip these vehicles are not taxable. Examples include:

- Gun racks
- Light bars
- Radar units
- Radios

Note: You initially equip a vehicle around the same time the vehicle is purchased. This exemption no longer applies when the vehicle is equipped and begins to operate as a fire or rescue vehicle.

Unmarked police patrol vehicles
Unmarked police cars and other unmarked patrol cars are taxable.

Body armor
All purchases of bullet-resistant body armor that provide ballistic and trauma protection by law enforcement agencies or licensed peace officers are not taxable.

Fuel
Fuel purchased by the state or a local government for use in marked police vehicles is exempt.

Miscellaneous Purchases
Other purchases by police departments are taxable. This does not include police departments owned by a city, county, or township. Examples include:

- Ammunition
- Badges
- Barrier tape
- DARE supplies
- Fingerprint kits/supplies
- Flares
- Guns
- Handcuffs
- Holsters
- Police dogs
- Scanners
- Traffic counters
Other vehicles

Note: The information in this section does not apply to cities, counties, or townships.

The following are not considered emergency rescue vehicles, even if used for emergency, fire, or police work:

- Aircraft
- Snowmobiles
- Watercraft
- Vehicles licensed only for off-road use

For entities that are not cities, counties, or townships, tax applies when these items are purchased or leased. Tax also applies to repair and replacement parts.

Fire chief and marked patrol vehicles
Fire chief and marked patrol vehicles are not taxable when purchased or leased. However, tax does apply to repair and replacement parts.

Private entity emergency vehicles
Emergency vehicles owned by private entities such as airports and mining companies are taxable, except for ambulances licensed under section 144E.10.

Fuel
Fuel is exempt when purchased by a state or local government for use in a vehicle that is exempt. For example, fuel for a fire chief car or a marked patrol car is exempt.

Local sales and use taxes
Although cities, counties, and townships are exempt from general sales and use taxes, they must pay other types of local taxes, such as restaurant, liquor, or lodging taxes. For more information, see Fact Sheet 142, Sales to Governments.

How to report sales and use tax
You can report state, local sales, and use taxes electronically at www.revenue.state.mn.us. If you do not have Internet access, you can file by phone at 1-800-570-3329.

For more information on how to file:

1. Go to our website, www.revenue.state.mn.us
2. Click “Sales and Use Tax”
3. Under “I need to file Sales and Use Tax…”, click “Electronically” or “Phone”.

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Legal References
Minnesota Statutes 144E.10, Ambulance service licensing
Minnesota Statutes 168.012, Vehicles exempt from tax or license fees
Minnesota Statutes 272.021, Property of volunteer fire department exempt from taxation
Minnesota Statutes 297A.67:
  subd. 28, Ambulance supplies, parts, and equipment
  subd. 30, Motor vehicles
Minnesota Statutes 297A.68, subd. 19, Petroleum products
Minnesota Statutes 297A.70:
  subd. 2, Sales to government
  subd. 3, Sales of certain goods and services to government
  subd. 4, Sales to nonprofit groups
  subd. 6, Ambulances
Minnesota Statutes 297B.03, Motor vehicle exemptions
Minnesota Rule 8130.6200, subp. 10, Volunteer fire departments

Revenue Notices
Revenue Notice 97-06, Exemptions for Police Car, Fire Truck, and Ambulance Accessories
Revenue Notice 12-09, Government Exemptions – Water Used Directly in Providing Fire Protection

Other fact sheets
116, Petroleum Products
125, Motor Vehicle Sales and Purchases
132, Isolated and Occasional Sales
142, Sales to Government
146, Use Tax for Businesses
164, Local Sales and Use Taxes
176, Local Governments – Cities, Counties, and Townships