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Check Your Tax Returns

Most taxpayers engage tax preparers to get their tax returns done for them. If you are such a person, you should ensure that the tax return prepared by your tax preparer is accurate. When you sign your tax return form, you are doing so 'under penalties of perjury'. If your tax preparer prepares a tax return fraudulently, you may be held responsible.

There are some tax preparers who add certain things to a tax form to get the taxpayer a higher refund. Your signature does not automatically mean you are jointly responsible for such a fraud. Generally, if your tax preparer reported something but should have known better, and you as the taxpayer was not part of this and wasn't expected to pick it up, then if you can show reasonable cause to prove that you were relying on the tax preparer's advice, then you would be let off the hook. This means you will not be penalized but you still have to pay the tax and interest.

But why take the risk of being slapped with penalties just for not verifying the information on your tax return? You should not blindly sign your tax return form. Even if you are not conversant with tax law, you can check to see that your financial situation is accurately reported. If it is something obvious and common sense, like your tax preparer claimed for the new

home buyer credit when you did not buy a new house, then you should remove such reporting. Otherwise, you will be held jointly responsible with the tax preparer.

It is therefore important to hire only someone you can trust to prepare your tax returns. Preferably, engage someone who is a member of a professional body like a tax attorney, certified public accountant or enrolled agent. If you need tax preparation service, you could give us a call at (813) 229 7100 for a free consultation. We will advise you on the best way to have your tax return prepared.

By 2014, the government requires that all paid tax preparers and undergo a continuing education program that may entail regular examinations. This applies to all tax preparation companies and enrolled agents. CPAs and tax attorneys have their own continuing education requirements set by their respective professional bodies.

Starting from this year, the government has enforced the registration of all paid tax preparers including CPAs, tax attorneys and enrolled agents. Each one preparing a tax return and being remunerated for it has to have a Preparer Tax Identification Number (PTIN).