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Paying sales tax on the Internet



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Safety

Q. When making an Internet purchase out of state, some companies charge sales tax and others don't. What's the law in this area?

— Phil Guiral, Laguna Hills

A. If you live in California, you have to pay sales tax on almost all goods sold on the Internet. The online vendor will either charge you a sales tax or you have the responsibility to report a user tax to the state on your own, said Diane Yetter, founder of the Sales Tax Institute, a Chicago-based organization devoted to providing sales tax training for businesspeople nationwide.

There are some items sold on the Internet that are excluded from sales tax, such as downloadable software. Whereas you pay a sales tax to buy software sold on discs from a store, you don't have to pay tax to buy downloadable software from the Internet because it's not a tangible item, Yetter said.

Here is how you know whether the vendor is responsible for collecting sales tax or whether you're in charge of reporting and paying a user tax to the state.

If the business maintains some sort of presence in California, it is required to collect a sales tax, tacking it to the end of your bill when you buy online.

The burden falls on to the customer when the business doesn't maintain a presence in the state.

For instance, Amazon.com wouldn't charge you sales tax if you live in California because they have no presence in the state and aren't required to collect. The burden would fall on to the customer to report and pay a user tax.

"I'd say the vast majority of individuals don't know they have that responsibility," Yetter said.

For more information on how to report the use tax, go to www.boe.ca.gov/pdf/pub79b.pdf.

Q. If you have a rat in your house walls or attic, what do you do? Is it a safety concern because of wires being eaten?

A. Yes. Rats like to chew on anything, including electrical wires, which can than short circuit and pose a safety hazard, said Orange County Vector Control District spokesman Michael Hearst.

Here are three steps the agency recommend you take to help eliminate the rat problem:

- Eliminate the food source, such as pet food, bird seed or any other easily accessible food
- A thumb-size hole is big enough for a rat to fit through so plug up any openings into your home. Stainless steel scrubbers or bronze wool will do the trick.

- Trim bougainvillea, ivy or any other type of vegetation that could help harbor or provide them with shelter.

After doing the above, set traps out. Do not use poison because the rat could die in an inaccessible area and stink up the whole house, Hearst said.

If you want more information or guidance on your vector problems call the agency at 714-971-2421.

Got a question? Contact Cindy Carcamo at ccarcamo@ocregister.com or 714-796-7829.