

This letter discusses the taxability of computer software. 86 Ill. Adm. Code 130.1935. (This is a GIL.)

November 30, 2021

Dear NAME:

This letter is in response to your e-mail dated October 27, 2021, in which you requested information. The Department issues two types of letter rulings. Private Letter Rulings ("PLRs") are issued by the Department in response to specific taxpayer inquiries concerning the application of a tax statute or rule to a particular fact situation. A PLR is binding on the Department, but only as to the taxpayer who is the subject of the request for ruling and only to the extent the facts recited in the PLR are correct and complete. Persons seeking PLRs must comply with the procedures for PLRs found in the Department's regulations at 2 Ill. Adm. Code 1200.110. The purpose of a General Information Letter ("GIL") is to direct taxpayers to Department regulations or other sources of information regarding the topic about which they have inquired. A GIL is not a statement of Department policy and is not binding on the Department. See 2 Ill. Adm. Code 1200.120. You may access our website at www.tax.illinois.gov to review regulations, letter rulings and other types of information relevant to your inquiry.

The nature of your inquiry and the information you have provided require that we respond with a GIL. In your letter you have stated and made inquiry as follows:

Good afternoon,

I am hoping you can assist me with a sales tax question.

We are looking for guidance regarding Software used to "operate exempt manufacturing machinery and equipment" is also exempt from sales tax.

We have a client who is seeking clarification on this subject. This client fabricates/manufactures steel buildings along with construction of the buildings. Previously they have used design software and printed blueprints. The printed blueprints were used to fabricate/manufacture the pieces of the building. The situation we are seeking clarification on now is that they are purchasing or licensing new software that will actually guide the entire fabrication/manufacturing process from design all the way through production. They will no longer be printing blueprints to use during production because they will have military grade tablets that will be running this software to utilize throughout the production process. Do you know if this would be software that would qualify as exempt from sales tax based on the exemption of "software used to operate exempt manufacturing machinery and equipment"?

Thank you for your assistance!

DEPARTMENT'S RESPONSE:

The Illinois Retailers' Occupation Tax Act imposes a tax upon persons engaged in this State in the business of selling tangible personal property to purchasers for use or consumption. See 35 ILCS 120/2; 86 Ill. Adm. Code 130.101. In Illinois, Use Tax is imposed on the privilege of using, in this State, any kind of tangible personal property that is purchased anywhere at retail from a retailer. See 35 ILCS 105/3; 86 Ill. Adm. Code 150.101. These taxes comprise what is commonly known as "sales" tax in Illinois. If the purchases occur in Illinois, the purchasers must pay the Use Tax to the retailer at the time of purchase. The retailers are then allowed to retain the amount of Use Tax paid to reimburse themselves for their Retailers' Occupation Tax liability incurred on those sales. If the purchases occur outside Illinois, purchasers must self-assess their Use Tax liability and remit it directly to the Department.

"Computer software" means a set of statements, data, or instructions to be used directly or indirectly in a computer in order to bring about a certain result in any form in which those statements, data, or instructions may be embodied, transmitted, or fixed, by any method now known or hereafter developed, regardless of whether the statements, data, or instructions are capable of being perceived by or communicated to humans, and includes prewritten or canned software that is held for repeated sale or lease, and all associated documentation and materials, if any, whether contained on magnetic tapes, discs, cards, or other devices or media, but does not include software that is adapted to specific individualized requirements of a purchaser, custom-made and modified software designed for a particular or limited use by a purchaser, or software used to operate exempt machinery and equipment used in the process of manufacturing or assembling tangible personal property for wholesale or retail sale or lease. Software used to operate machinery and equipment used in (i) the generation of electricity for wholesale or retail sale; (ii) the generation or treatment of natural or artificial gas for wholesale or retail sale that is delivered to customers through pipes, pipelines, or mains; or (iii) the treatment of water for wholesale or retail sale that is delivered to customers through pipes, pipelines, or mains is considered "computer software". 35 ILCS 120/2-25; 86 Ill. Adm. Code 1935.

A license of software is not a taxable retail sale if:

- A) It is evidenced by a written agreement signed by the licensor and the customer;
- B) It restricts the customer's duplication and use of the software;

- C) It prohibits the customer from licensing, sublicensing or transferring the software to a third party (except to a related party) without the permission and continued control of the licensor;
- D) The licensor has a policy of providing another copy at minimal or no charge if the customer loses or damages the software, or permitting the licensee to make and keep an archival copy, and such policy is either stated in the license agreement, supported by the licensor's books and records, or supported by a notarized statement made under penalties of perjury by the licensor; and
- E) The customer must destroy or return all copies of the software to the licensor at the end of the license period. This provision is deemed to be met, in the case of a perpetual license, without being set forth in the license agreement.

If a license of canned computer software does not meet all the criteria the software is taxable. In order to comply with the requirements as set out in Section 130.1935(a)(1), there must be a written "signed" agreement. A license agreement in which the customer electronically accepts the terms by clicking "I agree" does not comply with the requirement of a written agreement signed by the licensor and customer. The Department previously held that an electronic signature did not comply with the requirement of Section 130.1935(a)(1)(A) that the license be evidenced by a written agreement signed by the licensor and the customer. ST 06-0005-PLR (December 16, 2006). In ST 18-0003-PLR (February 8, 2018), the Department decided that an electronic license agreement in which the customer accepts the license by means of a signature in electronic form that is attached to or is part of the license, is verifiable, and can be authenticated will comply with the requirement of a written agreement signed by the licensor and customer. See ST 18-0010-PLR (September 26, 2018) for examples of acceptable written signatures.

A license agreement in which the customer electronically accepts the terms by clicking "I agree" remains unacceptable. Computer software is defined broadly in the Retailers' Occupation Tax Act. However, computer software provided through a cloud-based delivery system – a system in which computer software is never downloaded onto a client's computer and is only accessed remotely – is not subject to tax.

The Retailers' Occupation Tax does not apply to sales of machinery and equipment that will be used by the purchaser, or a lessee of the purchaser, primarily in the process of manufacturing or assembling tangible personal property for wholesale or retail sale or lease, whether the sale or lease is made directly by the manufacturer or by some other person. 35 ILCS 120/2-5(14); 86 Ill. Adm. Code 130.330(a). The manufacturing machinery and equipment exemption requires that the product produced

NAME
Page 4
November 30, 2021

as a result of the manufacturing or assembling process be tangible personal property for wholesale or retail sale or lease. Section 130.330(a)(7).

As explained above, there are several situations where the sale of computer software is not taxable: if it is custom software, is provided pursuant to a license that meets the requirements of Section 130.1935(a), or is used to operate exempt machinery and equipment used in the process of manufacturing or assembling tangible personal property for wholesale or retail sale or lease. However, the Department cannot provide a determination of the taxability of the computer software in response to a request for a GIL.

I hope this information is helpful. If you require additional information, please visit our website at www.tax.illinois.gov or contact the Department's Taxpayer Information Division at (217) 782-3336.

Very truly yours,

Richard S. Wolters
Associate Counsel

RSW:rkn