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Treasurer plans to shame businesses owing long-overdue taxes

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By Drew Stewart

COLUMBIA, SC (WIS) - Starting Monday, a mission to find businesses that owe taxes in Richland County begins. It starts with embarrassment, but it could get much uglier.

People were waiting in line Friday to pay property taxes at the Richland County Treasurer's office, a sign that the end of the month is near.

It's not something a lot of folks like to do, but when taxes go unpaid, everyone pays a hefty price -- especially when the total amount comes to about \$5 million.

Treasurer David Adams says it just isn't fair for honest taxpayers, which is why he's been chasing after delinquent taxpayers since 2005.

"It's an issue of fairness, and as we've gone along we've just tried to make everybody pay their fair share," said Adams.

That applies to businesses as well, which is why Adams is going after the ones that aren't paying up.

Beginning Monday, businesses that have been tax-delinquent for more than a year will start receiving letters saying to pay your bills by March 31 or face further penalties.

"First we're going to publish the list of folks in the local media who are still in operation but not paying taxes," said Adams.

If that doesn't make them get caught up, Adams says their business licenses could be revoked.

Basil Garzia owns Rosewood Market in Columbia, and is up to date with his taxes. He's angry with businesses that don't cough up their fair share.

"Sure you get steamed if you've been paying right along and you're prompt with your tax payment it's upsetting," said Garzia.

Garzia says Adams is making the right call.

"Absolutely, it sounds like its overdue if \$4.8 million is unpaid," he said.

Adams says making sure everyone is included in sharing the tax burden is what this is all about.

"We're just trying to make it fair for everybody so some folks don't get to cheat, while everybody else pays their fair share," said Adams.

Adams says of the 1,457 businesses in arrears, 26 of them owe \$2 million of the \$4.8 million owed to Richland County. Adams says the county will offer payment plans to businesses that contact the county by March 31.

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