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City Controller Wendy Greuel blows the whistle on delinquent taxpayers

By Rick Orlov, Staff Writer

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Five months after the public disclosure of tax scofflaws generated \$2.8 million for city coffers, City Controller Wendy Greuel released an updated list of 126 firms Wednesday that owe more than \$107 million in taxes.

"We will remain vigilant in cracking down on tax cheats," Greuel said at a City Hall news conference. "Cheating on your taxes may seem appealing in the short term, but it costs the city money and puts an unfair burden on those who do pay their taxes."

The names of delinquent taxpayers are listed at www.lacity.org/finance/delinquent.htm. Greuel said she hoped that being listed on the Web site will compel scofflaws to pay up.

Greuel said letters have been sent to those on the list asking them to contact the city and arrange to either pay the overdue amount in full or to work out a payment plan.

Many of the most serious violators are operators of parking lots, who are supposed to charge customers a 10 percent parking tax, then remit the money to the city.

"A lot of these operators either do not pay the tax to the city or do not remit the full amount," Greuel said.

Finance Director Antoinette Christovale said several programs are in place in an effort to collect overdue taxes for the city, which is working to close a \$530 million budget deficit.

"We have a tax amnesty program in place until July 31," Christovale said. "We have brought in \$7 million and expect to hit our goal of \$10 million."

Greg Lippe, chairman of the Valley Industry and Commerce Association, lauded the city's efforts to collect its overdue payments.

"While we recognize this success, it reminds us there is still a lot of work to be done and that these uncollected funds are needed to help close the city's budget gap."

Carol Schatz, president and CEO of the Central City Association, said she recognizes that it is a difficult time for many businesses, but the taxes are needed.

"When you are trying to attract businesses, you need the city services to attract businesses," Schatz said. "It's no secret that Los Angeles has one of the highest business tax rates in the state, but the law is the law."

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