

Delinquent-tax rolls showing little change

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The number of taxpayers in Richland and Kershaw counties who are having trouble paying their property taxes is not up this year over last, treasurers in each county said.

But the recession is causing some new taxpayers to fall behind on paying their tax bills for the first time, they said.

Based just on the number of people whose names will appear soon on delinquent-tax rolls, Midlands treasurers aren't seeing much change in the volume of latepaying taxpayers.

"Last year was worse than this year," Richland Treasurer David Adams said.

Lexington County, meanwhile, is seeing a small increase in the number of property owners who are behind on their tax bills.

Delinquent-tax rolls list people who should have paid their taxes at the beginning of the year. They have another full year to get current before they risk losing their property for nonpayment of taxes.

The treasurers say they usually recognize the names of people who wait, year after year, until the

deadline to pay previous years' taxes.

"Those, I don't worry about so much," Kershaw Treasurer Steve Vincent said. "But the ones that are fresh, that are new - that bothers me a little bit."

Vincent said there are "a lot of people out there this year who normally do pay" who are running into trouble this year.

Adams, in Richland County, reported a similar experience.

"We're seeing some people - some people - come into our office who have never had trouble paying their taxes before," Adams said.

Lexington County has about 500 more property owners who are behind on their taxes this year compared with last year, said Gene Rishkofski, deputy delinquent-tax collector.

"When we go to sale, my gut feeling is it's going to be pretty similar to last year," Rishkofski said. "It may be up 100 pieces (of property), but 100 pieces in a tax sale is not that much."

More mobile home owners are current on their taxes this year, Rishkofski added.

Tax bills going out now are due shortly after the new year.

Adams said his office has been getting standard questions and the normal number of calls from the public about those bills.

Treasurers in each county said they are expecting on-time collections to be about the same, with perhaps a slight decline in Kershaw County.

There, Vincent said, about 5 percent of property owners typically are late. He has been treasurer for 13 years.

Upcoming tax sales - on Dec. 7 in Richland and Lexington counties, and Feb. 1 in Kershaw County - ensure the county collects delinquent taxes.

Buyers of land on the delinquent-tax rolls make bids that cover the taxes. But they must wait a full year to see whether the original owner "redeems" the property, catching up on the property taxes and other costs associated with the sale.

In Richland County, for example, about 1,860 pieces of property were sold at the most recent sale. But fewer than 200 of the parcels actually changed hands, Adams said.

Many more names than that - about 3,850 - appear on the delinquent-tax roll Adams published today. However, this time last year, there were 4,083 names on the list.

Adams said people were panicked over the recession this time last year and feeling uncertain about what might happen next. By now, they have made adjustments to their budgets.

"Last year was a big, giant year" for delinquent taxes, Adams said. "This year's going to be big. But last year, that economic impact kept money in their pockets for a little bit longer."

Section: Metro

Page: 11

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