



## FIRST-TIME HOMEBUYER TAX CREDIT

### Frequently Asked Questions

In 2008, Congress enacted a \$7500 tax credit designed to be an incentive for first-time homebuyers to purchase a home. The credit was designed as a mechanism to decrease the over-supply of homes for sale.

For 2009, Congress has increased the credit to \$8000 and made several additional improvements. This revised \$8000 tax credit applies to purchases on or after January 1, 2009 and before December 1, 2009.

## Tax Credits -- The Basics

### **1. *What's this new homebuyer tax incentive for 2009?***

The 2008 \$7500, repayable credit is increased to \$8000 and the repayment feature is eliminated for 2009 purchasers. Any home that is purchased for \$80,000 or more qualifies for the full \$8000 amount. If the house costs less than \$80,000, the credit will be 10% of the cost. Thus, if an individual purchased a home for \$75,000, the credit would be \$7500. It is available for the purchase of a principal residence on or after January 1, 2009 and before December 1, 2009.

### **2. *Who is eligible?***

Only first-time homebuyers are eligible. A person is considered a first-time buyer if he/she has not had any ownership interest in a home in the three years previous to the day of the 2009 purchase.

### **3. *How does a tax credit work?***

Every dollar of a tax credit reduces income taxes by a dollar. Credits are claimed on an individual's income tax return. Thus, a qualified purchaser would figure out all the income items and exemptions and make all the calculations required to figure out his/her total tax due. Then, once the total tax owed has been computed, tax credits are applied to reduce the total tax bill. So, if before taking any credits on a tax return a person has total tax liability of \$9500, an \$8000 credit would wipe out all but \$1500 of the tax due. ( $\$9,500 - \$8000 = \$1500$ )

### **4. *So what happens if the purchaser is eligible for an \$8000 credit but their entire income tax liability for the year is only \$6000?***

This tax credit is what's called "refundable" credit. Thus, if the eligible purchaser's total tax liability was \$6000, the IRS would send the purchaser a check for \$2000. The refundable amount is the difference

between \$8000 credit amount and the amount of tax liability. ( $\$8000 - \$6000 = \$2000$ ) Most taxpayers determine their tax liability by referring to tables that the IRS prepares each year.

**5. How does withholding affect my tax credit and my refund?**

A few examples are provided at the end of this document. There are several steps in this calculation, but most income tax software programs are equipped to make that determination.

**6. Is there an income restriction?**

Yes. The income restriction is based on the tax filing status the purchaser claims when filing his/her income tax return. Individuals filing Form 1040 as Single (or Head of Household) are eligible for the credit if their income is no more than \$75,000. Married couples who file a Joint return may have income of no more than \$150,000.

**7. How is my "income" determined?**

For most individuals, income is defined and calculated in the same manner as their Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) on their 1040 income tax return. AGI includes items like wages, salaries, interest and dividends, pension and retirement earnings, rental income and a host of other elements. AGI is the final number that appears on the bottom line of the front page of an IRS Form 1040.

**8. What if I worked abroad for part of the year?**

Some individuals have earned income and/or receive housing allowances while working outside the US. Their income will be adjusted to reflect those items to measure Modified Adjusted Gross Income (MAGI). Their eligibility for the credit will be based on their MAGI.

**9. Do individuals with incomes higher than the \$75,000 or \$150,000 limits lose all the benefit of the credit?**

Not always. The credit phases-out between \$75,000 - \$95,000 for singles and \$150,000 - \$170,000 for married filing joint. The closer a buyer comes to the maximum phase-out amount, the smaller the credit will be. The law provides a formula to gradually withdraw the credit. Thus, the credit will disappear after an individual's income reaches \$95,000 (single return) or \$170,000 (joint return).

For example, if a married couple had income of \$165,000, their credit would be reduced by 75% as shown:

Couple's income	\$165,000
Income limit	<u>150,000</u>
Excess income	\$15,000

The excess income amount (\$15,000 in this example) is used to form a fraction. The numerator of the fraction is the excess income amount (\$15,000). The denominator is \$20,000 (specified by the statute).

In this example, the *disallowed* portion of the credit is 75% of \$8000, or \$6000  
( $\$15,000/\$20,000 = 75\% \times \$8000 = \$6000$ )

Stated another way, only 25% of the credit amount would be allowed.  
In this example, the *allowable* credit would be \$2000 ( $25\% \times \$8000 = \$2000$ )

**10. What's the definition of "principal residence?"**

Generally, a principal residence is the home where an individual spends most of his/her time (generally defined as more than 50%). It is also defined as "owner-occupied" housing. The term includes single-family detached housing, condos or co-ops, townhouses or any similar type of new or existing dwelling. Even some houseboats or manufactured homes count as principal residences.

**11. Are there restrictions on the location of the property?**

Yes. The home must be located in the United States. Property located outside the US is not eligible for the credit.

**12. Are there restrictions related to the financing for the mortgage on the property?**

In 2009, most financing arrangements are acceptable and will not affect eligibility for the credit. Congress eliminated the financing restriction that applied in 2008. (In 2008, purchasers were ineligible for the \$7500 credit if the financing was obtained by means of mortgage revenue bonds.) Now, mortgage-revenue bond financing will not disqualify an otherwise-eligible purchaser. (Mortgage revenue bonds are tax-exempt bonds issued by a state housing agency. Proceeds from the bonds must be used for below market loans to qualified buyers.)

**13. Do I have to repay the 2009 tax credit?**

**NO.** There is no repayment for 2009 tax credits.

**14. Do 2008 purchasers still have to repay their tax credit?**

**YES.** The \$7500 credit in 2008 was more like an interest-free loan. All eligible purchasers who claimed the 2008 credit will still be required to repay it over 15 years, starting with their 2010 tax return.

## **Some Practical Questions**

**15. How do I apply for the credit?**

There is no pre-purchase authorization, application or similar approval process. All eligible purchasers simply claim the credit on their IRS Form 1040 tax return. The credit will be reflected on a new Form 5405 that will be attached to the 1040. Form 5405 can be found at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov).

**16. So I can't use the credit amount as part of my downpayment?**

No. Congress tried hard to devise a mechanism that would make the funds available for closing costs, but found that pre-funding would require cumbersome processes that would, in effect, bring the IRS into the purchase and settlement phase of the transaction.

**17. So there's no way to get any cash flow benefits before I file my tax return?**

Yes, there is. Any first-time homebuyers who believe they are eligible for all or part of the credit can modify their income tax withholding (through their employers) or adjust their quarterly estimated tax payments. Individuals subject to income tax withholding would get an IRS Form W-4 from their employer, follow the instructions on the schedules provided and give the completed Form W-4 back to the employer. In many cases their withholding would decrease and their take-home pay would increase. Those who make estimated tax payments would make similar adjustments.

## **Some "Real World" Examples**

**18. What if I purchase later this year but can't get to settlement before December 1?**

The credit is available for *purchases* before December 1, 2009. A home is considered as "purchased" when all events have occurred that transfer the title from the seller to the new purchaser. Thus, closings *must* occur before December 1, 2009 for purchases to be eligible for the credit.

**19. I haven't even filed my 2008 tax return yet. If I buy in 2009, do I have to wait until next year to get the benefit of the credit?**

You'll have a helpful choice that might speed up the process. Eligible homebuyers who make their purchase between January 1, 2009 and December 1, 2009 can treat the purchase as if it had occurred on December 31, 2008. Thus, they can *claim the credit on their 2008 tax return* that is due on April 15, 2009. They actually have three filing options.

- If they purchase between January 1, 2009 and April 15, 2009, they can claim the \$8000 credit on the 2008 return due on April 15.
- They can extend their 2008 income-tax filing until as late as October 15, 2009. (The IRS grants automatic extensions, but the taxpayer must file for the extension. See [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) for instructions on how to obtain an extension.)
- If they have filed their 2008 return before they purchase the home, they may file an amended 2008 tax return on Form 1040X. (Form 1040X is available at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov))

Of course, 2009 purchasers will always have the option of claiming the credit for the 2009 purchase on their 2009 return. Their 2009 tax return is due on April 15, 2010.

**20. I purchased my home in early 2009 before the stimulus bill was enacted. I claimed a \$7500 tax credit on my 2008 return as prior law had permitted. Am I restricted to just a \$7500 credit?**

No, you would qualify for the \$8000 credit. Eligible purchasers who have already claimed the \$7500 credit on a 2008 return for a 2009 purchase may file an amended return (IRS Form 1040X) for the 2008 tax year. This amended return will enable them to obtain the additional \$500 credit amount.

**21. If I claim my 2009 \$8000 credit on my 2008 tax return, will I have to repay the credit just as the 2008 credits are repaid?**

No. Congress anticipated this confusion and has made specific provision so that there would be no repayment of 2009 credits that are claimed on 2008 returns.

**22. I made an eligible purchase of a principal residence in May 2008 and claimed the \$7500 credit on my 2008 tax return. My brother, who has never owned a home, wishes to purchase a partial interest in the home this spring and move in. Will he qualify for the \$8000 credit, as well?**

No. Any purchase of a principal residence (or interest in a principal residence) from a related party such as a sibling, parent, grandparent, aunt or uncle is ineligible for the tax credit. Since you and your brother are related in this way, he cannot qualify for the credit on any portion of the home that he purchases from you, even if he is a first-time homebuyer.

**23. I live in the District of Columbia. If I qualify as a first-time homebuyer, can I use both the \$5000 DC credit and the \$8000 credit?**

No; double dipping is not allowed. You would be eligible for only the \$8000 credit. This will be an advantage because of the higher credit amount, plus the eligibility requirements for the \$8000 credit are somewhat more easily satisfied than the DC credit.

**24. I know there is no repayment requirement for the \$8000 credit. Will I ever have to repay any of the credit back to the government?**

One situation *does* require a recapture payment back to the government. If you claim the credit but then sell the property within 3 years of the date of purchase, you are required to pay back the full amount of any credit, including any refund you received from it. A few exceptions apply. (See below, #24). Note that this same 3-year recapture rule applies, as well, to the \$7500 credit available for 2008. This provision is designed as an anti-flipping rule.

**25. What if I die or get divorced or my property is ruined in a natural disaster within the 3 years?**

The repayment rules are eased for many circumstances. If the homeowner who used the credit dies within the first three years of ownership, there is no recapture. Special rules make adjustments for people who sell homes as part of a divorce settlement, as well. Similarly, adjustments are made in the case of a home that is part of an involuntary conversion (property is destroyed in a natural disaster or subject to condemnation by eminent domain by an authorized agency) within the first three years.

**26. I have a home under construction. Am I eligible for the credit?**

Yes, so long as you actually occupy the home before December 1, 2009.

**WITHHOLDING EXAMPLES:**

**Note: The impact of estimated tax payments would be the same.**

**Situation 1:** Sally plans her withholding so that her withholding is as close as possible to what she anticipates as her income tax liability for the year. When she fills out her 1040, her liability is \$6000. She has had \$6000 withheld from her paycheck. She also qualifies for the \$8000 homebuyer credit.

**Result:** Sally's withholding satisfies her tax liability and reduces it to zero. She will receive a refund of the full \$8000.

**Situation 2:** Nick and Nora file a joint return. Nick is self-employed and makes estimated payments; Nora has taxes withheld from her salary. When they compute their taxes, their combined withholding and estimated tax payments are \$11,000. Their income tax liability is \$9800. They also qualified as first-time homebuyers and are eligible for the \$8000 refundable tax credit.

**Result:** Ordinarily, their combined estimated tax payments and withholding would make them eligible for a refund of \$1200 ( $\$11,000 - \$9800 = \$1200$ ). Because they are eligible for the refundable tax credit as well, they will receive a refund of \$9200 ( $\$1200$  income tax refund +  $\$8000$  refundable tax credit =  $\$9200$ )

**Situation 3:** Cesar and LuzMaria both have income taxes withheld from their salaries and file a joint return. When they file their income tax return, their combined withholding is \$5000. However, their total tax liability is \$7200, generating an additional income tax liability of \$2200 ( $\$7200 - \$5000$ ). They also qualify for the \$8000 first-time homebuyer tax credit.

**Result:** Cesar and LuzMaria have been under-withheld by \$2200. Ordinarily, they would be required to pay the additional \$2200 they owe (plus any applicable interest and penalties). Because they are eligible for the refundable homebuyer tax credit, the credit will cover the \$2200 additional liability. In addition, they will receive an income tax refund of \$5800 ( $\$8000 - \$2200 = \$5800$ ). If they owed penalties and/or interest, that amount would reduce the refund.

FIRST-TIME HOMEBUYER TAX CREDIT  
As Modified in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act  
*Major Modifications Italicized*  
February 2009

FEATURE	CREDIT AS CREATED JULY 2008 APPLIES TO ALL QUALIFIED PURCHASES ON OR AFTER APRIL 9, 2008	REVISED CREDIT -- EFFECTIVE FOR PURCHASES ON OR AFTER JANUARY 1, 2009 AND BEFORE DECEMBER 1, 2009
<b>Amount of Credit</b>	Lesser of 10 percent of cost of home or \$7500	<i>Maximum credit amount increased to \$8000</i>
<b>Eligible Property</b>	Any single family residence (including condos, co-ops, townhouses) that will be used as a principal residence.	No change All principal residences eligible.
<b>Refundable</b>	Yes. Reduces (or can eliminate) income tax liability for the year of purchase. Any unused amount of tax credit refunded to purchaser.	No change Purchasers will continue to receive refund for unused amount when tax return is filed.
<b>Income Limit</b>	Yes. Full amount of credit available for individuals with adjusted gross income of no more than \$75,000 (\$150,000 on a joint return). Phases out above those caps (\$95,000 and \$170,000).	No change Same income limits continue to apply.
<b>First-time Homebuyer Only</b>	Yes. Purchaser (and purchaser's spouse) may not have owned a principal residence in 3 years previous to purchase.	No change Still available for first-time purchasers only. Three-year rule continues to apply.
<b>Revenue Bond Financing</b>	No credit allowed if home financed with state/local bond funding.	<i>Purchasers who utilize revenue bond financing can use credit.</i>
<b>Repayment</b>	Yes. Portion (6.67% of credit or \$500) to be repaid each year for 15 years, starting with 2010 tax filing.	<i>No repayment for purchases on or after January 1, 2009 and before December 1, 2009</i>
<b>Recapture</b>	If home sold before 15-year repayment period ends, then outstanding balance of repayment amount recaptured on sale.	<i>If home is sold within three years of purchase, entire amount of credit is recaptured on sale. Applies only to homes purchased in 2009.</i>
<b>Termination</b>	July 1, 2009 (But note program changes for 2009)	<i>December 1, 2009</i>
<b>Effective Date</b>	Purchases on or after April 9, 2008 and before January 1, 2009. Repayment to begin for 2010 tax year.	<i>All revisions are effective as of January 1, 2009</i>

**First-Time Homebuyer Credit**

▶ Attach to Form 1040

OMB No. 1545-0074

**2008**  
 Attachment  
 Sequence No. **163**

Name(s) shown on return

Your social security number

**Part I General Information**

**A** Address of home qualifying for the credit (if different from the address shown on return)

**B** Date acquired (see instructions)

**C** If you are choosing to claim the credit on your 2008 return for a main home bought after December 31, 2008, and before December 1, 2009, check here (see instructions)

**Part II Credit**

**1** Enter the **smaller** of:

- \$7,500 (\$8,000 if you purchased your home in 2009), but only half of that amount if married filing separately, or
- 10% of the purchase price of the home.

If someone other than a spouse also held an interest in the home, enter only your share of this amount (see instructions)

**2** Enter your modified adjusted gross income (see instructions)

**3** Is line 2 more than \$75,000 (\$150,000 if married filing jointly)?

**No.** Skip lines 3 through 5 and enter the amount from line 1 on line 6.

**Yes.** Subtract \$75,000 (\$150,000 if married filing jointly) from the amount on line 2 and enter the result

**4** Divide line 3 by \$20,000 and enter the result as a decimal (rounded to at least three places).

**Do not** enter more than 1.000

**5** Multiply line 1 by line 4

**6** Subtract line 5 from line 1. This is your **credit**. Enter here and on Form 1040, line 69

<b>1</b>					
<b>2</b>					
<b>3</b>					
<b>4</b>				X	
<b>5</b>					
<b>6</b>					

**General Instructions**

Section references are to the Internal Revenue Code.

**Purpose of Form**

Use Form 5405 to claim the first-time homebuyer credit. The credit may give you a refund even if you do not owe any tax.

For homes purchased in 2008, the credit operates much like an interest-free loan. You generally must repay it over a 15-year period. For homes purchased in 2009, you must repay the credit only if the home ceases to be your main home within the 36-month period beginning on the purchase date. See *Repayment of Credit* on page 2.

**Who Can Claim the Credit**

In general, you can claim the credit if you are a first-time homebuyer. You are considered a first-time homebuyer if:

- You purchased your main home located in the United States after April 8, 2008, and before December 1, 2009.
- You (and your spouse if married) did not own any other main home during the 3-year period ending on the date of purchase.

If you constructed your main home, you are treated as having purchased it on the date you first occupied it.

**Main home.** Your main home is the one you live in most of the time. It can be a house, houseboat, house trailer, cooperative apartment, condominium, or other type of residence.

**Who Cannot Claim the Credit**

You cannot claim the credit if any of the following apply.

1. Your modified adjusted gross income is \$95,000 or more (\$170,000 or more if married filing jointly). See the instructions for line 2.
2. You are, or were, eligible to claim the District of Columbia first-time homebuyer credit for any tax year. This rule does not apply for a home purchased in 2009.
3. Your home financing comes from tax-exempt mortgage revenue bonds. This rule does not apply for a home purchased in 2009.
4. You are a nonresident alien.
5. Your home is located outside the United States.
6. You sell the home, or it ceases to be your main home, before the end of 2008.
7. You acquired your home by gift or inheritance.
8. You acquired your home from a related person.

A related person includes:

- a. Your spouse, ancestors (parents, grandparents, etc.), or lineal descendants (children, grandchildren, etc.).
- b. A corporation in which you directly or indirectly own more than 50% in value of the outstanding stock of the corporation.
- c. A partnership in which you directly or indirectly own more than 50% of the capital interest or profits interest.

For more information about related persons, see *Nondeductible Loss* in Chapter 2 of Pub. 544, *Sales and Other Dispositions of Assets*. When determining whether you acquired your main home from a related person, family members in that discussion (except item 7) include only the people mentioned in 8a above.

### Amount of the Credit

Generally, the credit is the smaller of:

- \$7,500 (\$8,000 if you purchased your home in 2009), but only half of that amount if married filing separately, or
- 10% of the purchase price of the home.

You are allowed the full amount of the credit if your modified adjusted gross income (MAGI) is \$75,000 or less (\$150,000 or less if married filing jointly). The phase-out of the credit begins when your MAGI exceeds \$75,000 (\$150,000 if married filing jointly). The credit is eliminated completely when your MAGI reaches \$95,000 (\$170,000 if married filing jointly).

### Repayment of Credit

**Homes purchased in 2008.** You generally must repay the credit over a 15-year period in 15 equal installments. The repayment period begins in 2010 and you must include the first installment as additional tax on your 2010 tax return.

If your home ceases to be your main home before the 15-year period is up, you must include all remaining annual installments as additional tax on the return for the tax year that happens. This includes situations where you sell the home, you convert it to business or rental property, or the home is destroyed, condemned, or disposed of under threat of condemnation.

If you and your spouse claim the credit on a joint return, each spouse is treated as having been allowed half of the credit for purposes of repaying the credit.

**Example 1.** You claimed a \$7,500 credit on your 2008 tax return. You must include \$500 ( $\$7,500 \div 15$ ) as additional tax on your 2010 tax return and on each tax return for the next 14 years.

**Example 2.** You claimed a \$7,500 credit on your 2008 tax return. In 2009, you sold the home to your son. You must include \$7,500 as additional tax on your 2009 tax return.

**Exceptions.** The following are exceptions to the repayment rule.

- If you sell the home to someone who is **not** related to you, the repayment in the year of sale is limited to the amount of gain on the sale. (See item 8 under *Who Cannot Claim the Credit* for the definition of a related person.) When figuring the gain, reduce the adjusted basis of the home by the amount of the credit you did not repay.
- If the home is destroyed, condemned, or disposed of under threat of condemnation, and you acquire a new main home within 2 years of the event, you continue to pay the installments over the remainder of the 15-year repayment period.
- If, as part of a divorce settlement, the home is transferred to a spouse or former spouse, the spouse who receives the home is responsible for making all subsequent installment payments.

- If you die, any remaining annual installments are not due. If you filed a joint return and then you die, your surviving spouse would be required to repay his or her half of the remaining repayment amount.

**Homes purchased in 2009.** You must repay the credit only if the home ceases to be your main home within the 36-month period beginning on the purchase date. This includes situations where you sell the home, you convert it to business or rental property, or the home is destroyed, condemned, or disposed of under threat of condemnation. You repay the credit by including it as additional tax on the return for the year the home ceases to be your main home. If the home continues to be your main home for at least 36 months beginning on the purchase date, you do not have to repay any of the credit.

If you and your spouse claim the credit on a joint return, each spouse is treated as having been allowed half of the credit for purposes of repaying the credit.

**Exceptions.** The following are exceptions to the repayment rule.

- If you sell the home to someone who is **not** related to you, the repayment in the year of sale is limited to the amount of gain on the sale. (See item 8 under *Who Cannot Claim the Credit* for the definition of a related person.) When figuring the gain, reduce the adjusted basis of the home by the amount of the credit.
- If the home is destroyed, condemned, or disposed of under threat of condemnation, and you acquire a new main home within 2 years of the event, you do not have to repay the credit.
- If, as part of a divorce settlement, the home is transferred to a spouse or former spouse, the spouse who receives the home is responsible for repaying the credit.
- If you die, repayment of the credit is not required. If you filed a joint return and then you die, your surviving spouse would be required to repay his or her half of the credit.

## Specific Instructions

### Part I General Information

**Line B.** Enter the date you acquired the home. This is the date you purchased it (or the date you first occupied it if you constructed your main home).

**Line C.** You can choose to claim the credit on your 2008 Form 1040 for a main home purchased after December 31, 2008, and before December 1, 2009. If you make this choice, check the box.

### Part II Credit

**Line 1.** If two or more unmarried individuals buy a main home, they can allocate the credit among the individual owners using any reasonable method. The total amount allocated cannot exceed the smaller of \$7,500 (\$8,000 if you purchased your home in 2009) or 10% of the purchase price. See *Purchase price* on page 3.

**Note.** A reasonable method is any method that does not allocate all or a part of the credit to a co-owner who is not eligible to claim that part of the credit.

**Purchase price.** The purchase price is the adjusted basis of your home on the date you purchased it. This includes certain settlement or closing costs (such as legal fees and recording fees) and your down payment and debt (such as a first or second mortgage or notes you gave the seller in payment for the home). If you build, or contract to build, a new home, your purchase price can include costs of construction. For more information about adjusted basis, see Pub. 551, Basis of Assets.

**Line 2.** Your modified adjusted gross income is the amount from Form 1040, line 38, increased by the total of any:

- Exclusion of income from Puerto Rico, and
- Amount from Form 2555, lines 45 and 50; Form 2555-EZ, line 18; and Form 4563, line 15.

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You are not required to provide the information requested on a form that is subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act unless the form displays a valid OMB control number. Books or records relating to a form or its instructions must be retained as long as their contents may become material in the administration of any Internal Revenue law. Generally, tax returns and return information are confidential, as required by section 6103.

The average time and expenses required to complete and file this form will vary depending on individual circumstances. For the estimated averages, see the instructions for your income tax return.

If you have suggestions for making this form simpler, we would be happy to hear from you. See the instructions for your income tax return.