

CHAPTER OF CONTENTS:

- [7300](#) Payroll Factor
- [7320](#) Compensation Defined
- [7321](#) Deferred Compensation (e.g., 401(k) Plans)
- [7322](#) Stock Options
- [7323](#) Compensation Paid By Another Entity
- [7330](#) Employee Defined
- [7335](#) Employees vs. Independent Contractors
- [7340](#) Cash vs. Accrual
- [7345](#) Compensation Attributable to Nonbusiness Income
- [7350](#) Capitalized Payroll
- [7355](#) Foreign Payroll
- [7356](#) Payroll Equalization
- [7360](#) Partnership Payroll
- [7365](#) Offshore Payroll
- [7370](#) Compensation Assigned to Numerator
- [7372](#) Mobile Employees
- [7374](#) Payroll In States Where Taxpayer Is Immune From Tax
- [7376](#) Expatriate Payroll

7300 PAYROLL FACTOR

R&TC §25132 states that the Payroll Factor is a fraction, the numerator of which is the total amount paid in this state during the taxable year by the taxpayer for compensation, and the denominator of which is the total compensation paid everywhere during the taxable year.

The numerator of the payroll factor is the compensation paid to employees for personal services in this state under the tests described in MATM 7370. The denominator is the total compensation paid everywhere during the taxable year (R&TC §25132.) The payroll must be incurred in the unitary trade or business. Compensation related to nonbusiness activities is excluded (CCR §25132(a)(2)).

The term "compensation" is explained under MATM 7320. See MATM 7330 for the explanation of the term "employee".

7320 Compensation Defined

Pursuant to R&TC §25120(c) and CCR §25132(a)(3), "compensation" is "wages, salaries, commissions and any other form of remuneration paid to employees for personal services." CCR §25132(a)(3) further expands as follows:

Payments made to an independent contractor or any other person not properly classifiable as an employee are excluded. Only amounts paid directly to employees are included in the payroll factor. Amounts considered paid directly include the value of board, rent, housing, lodging, and other benefits or services furnished to employees by the taxpayer in return for personal services provided that such amounts constitute income to the recipient under the federal Internal Revenue Code. In the case of employees not subject to the federal Internal Revenue Code, e.g., those employed in foreign countries, the determination of whether such benefits or services constitute income to the employees shall be made as though such employees were subject to the Federal Internal Revenue Code.

Generally, the amount of compensation to be included in the property factor will be the same amount of compensation that is reported for unemployment and payroll tax purposes.

7321 Deferred Compensation (e.g., 401(k) Plans)

Although deferred employee compensation items, e.g., 401(k) plans are not taxable to employees until some future date, such compensation is generally expensed by the employer in the year paid or accrued (IRC §404). The department's policy is to include deferred compensation in the payroll factor in the year that it is expensed by the employer. Deferred compensation is reportable on the Federal Form 940 and the California Form DE-6. When reconciling the payroll factor to the payroll reports, the auditor should verify that the taxpayer included in its payroll factor total deferred compensation amounts the taxpayer expended during the year at issue. Verifying the inclusion of the 401(k) amounts through reconciliation to a Form 941 can be tricky. Since deferred compensation is not included in the employee's taxable wages, it is not included on the Form 941 line entitled "Wages, Tips and other compensation." Rather, deferred compensation is included on the Form 941 lines entitled "Taxable social security wages" and "Taxable Medicare wages and tips." (See Exhibit E.1 for a copy of the form.)

7322 Stock Options

Depending on the compensation arrangement between an employer and an employee, stock options can be a form of compensation. Stock options give the holder the right to purchase shares of the corporation at a fixed price on a specified future date or within a specified time period. The options are generally classified as either nonqualified or qualified. Qualified stock options are options meeting the requirements of IRC §422 or IRC §423. Options not described under those sections are nonqualified stock options. The payroll factor implications of granting stock options will vary depending upon the type of option.

- Qualified options: Neither the grant nor the exercise of qualified stock options is a taxable event for the employee, and no compensation related to such transactions will be included on the payroll tax reports (IRC §421). Furthermore, the employer corporation is not generally allowed a compensation deduction related to such options. Since no compensation is considered paid or received,

there will be no compensation reflected in the payroll factor. (An exception may occur if there is a disqualifying disposition of stock, in which case compensation may be deemed to occur in the year of the disqualifying disposition (IRC §§ 421--423).)

- Nonqualified options with a readily ascertainable fair market value (see Treas. Reg. § 1.83-7(b)): The difference between the value of the option and its cost (if any) to the employee is taxed to the employee and deducted by the employer at the grant date. The same amount would be considered compensation. As such, these amounts would be includable in the payroll factor for the period in which the option was granted. Generally, however, options do not have a readily ascertainable fair market value at the time of being granted.

Nonqualified options without a readily ascertainable fair market value: Taxation is not triggered until the option is exercised. The amount of compensation recognized by the employee and deducted by the employer will be the value of the stock at the exercise date, less any amounts paid for the stock or the option. Because such compensation is considered received on the exercise date, it should be included in the taxpayer's payroll factor during the year of the options being exercised. For reconciliation purposes, auditors should refer to Federal Forms 940 and 941 and California Form DE-6 because taxpayers are required to report such compensation under the same guidelines for the employment tax purposes.

7323 Compensation Paid By Another Entity

Occasionally, an employee will not receive direct compensation for services performed. For example, an individual may be an officer of both a parent corporation and its nonunitary subsidiary (the taxpayer). Although the individual performs services for the subsidiary in his or her capacity as an officer/employee, the parent pays the officer's entire salary. Since the subsidiary does not actually pay compensation for the services, no salary will generally be included in the subsidiary's payroll factor. An exception to this rule might occur if the compensation was clearly related to services performed for the subsidiary, in which case the salary paid by the parent might be deemed to be a contribution to the capital of the subsidiary, and constructively paid by the subsidiary to the employee. An example of this type of situation may be found in Revenue Ruling 84-68, 1984-1 CB 31.

7330 Employee Defined

CCR §25132(a)(4) defines "employee" as any officer of a corporation, and any individual who has the status of an employee under common law rules. Generally, an individual will be considered an employee when the corporation for whom the services are performed has the right to control and direct the individual who performs the services, not only as to the results to be accomplished, but also as to the details and means of accomplishing that result (*Coleng v. Ramsdell*, 19 Cal.App.2d 376).

In the *Appeal of Lipps, Inc.*, 87-SBE-017, March 3, 1987, the taxpayer contracted for an unrelated company in Mexico to provide the labor and facilities to assemble the taxpayer's products. The taxpayer paid the Mexican company a fee pursuant to the production contract, and the Mexican company in turn paid the workers. The taxpayer included the wages paid to Mexican workers in its payroll factor. The SBE held that since the compensation was not paid directly to the workers, it was not includable in the payroll factor. Moreover, the SBE found that the Mexican workers were not employees of the taxpayer under the common law definition. The most important aspect of an employee relationship, the right to control the manner and means of accomplishing the desired results, was lacking in this case.

In most cases, if a person is considered an employee for payroll tax or unemployment tax purposes, the person is also considered an employee for apportionment factor purposes. Therefore, unless the auditor has reasons to believe that a person, whose compensation has been included on a completed Federal Form 940 or 941 or California Form DE-6 is not the taxpayer's common law employee, the auditor should generally accept the payroll amount as reported for employment tax purposes.

7335 Employees vs. Independent Contractors

Only compensation paid to employees is included in the factor. Amounts paid to agents, brokers and other independent contractors are excluded. An independent contractor is not under an employment contract, but generally works on a contract or fee basis. Agents and brokers receive gross commissions or fees from which they must pay their own expenses such as travel, entertainment, rent, telephone, etc. There is no reasonable comparison between compensation paid an employee and a commission paid an independent contractor. Including such commissions in the payroll factor would unduly weight the numerators of those states where agents or brokers are located.

For an exception to the rule, see the special formula for Film Producers, MATM 7740.

Since commissions or fees paid to independent contractors are not included in the Federal Forms 940 and 941 or the California Form DE-6, the reconciliation of payroll to those sources will generally disclose whether material payments to U.S. independent contractors have been included in the factor. Some taxpayers conduct their foreign marketing and distribution activities through agents. If the combined report includes foreign payroll, an auditor should consider determining whether the recipients of these payments are actually employees. The SEC Form 10-K will sometimes contain detailed employee information that may be helpful in identifying this issue.

7340 Cash vs. Accrual

Pursuant to CCR §25132(a)(2), payroll amounts included in the payroll factor should be determined on the basis of the taxpayer's accounting method. Since most multistate taxpayers use the accrual method of accounting, the payroll factor should reflect compensation accrued during the period. For unemployment compensation purposes however, most states require corporations to file their payroll tax returns on the cash method of accounting even though their books are kept on the accrual method for other purposes. As such, many corporations maintain their by state payroll records on a cash basis. Recognizing this fact, CCR §25132(a)(2) allows taxpayers to elect into reporting total compensation using the cash method for payroll factor purposes.

During reconciliation, the auditor should verify that the cash method is used consistently for both the numerator and denominator.

If the taxpayer computes its payroll factor using the accrual method, it is still possible to reconcile the payroll factor to the cash basis payroll tax reports by analyzing the opening and closing accrual adjustments. These adjustments are usually made on the general ledger trial balance. Even if a thorough reconciliation is not possible, the payroll tax reports may still be useful for testing the reasonableness of the payroll factor as explained in MATM 7310.

Use of the cash method is an election of the taxpayer only. If the taxpayer does not wish to report compensation under the cash method, the auditor cannot require the taxpayer to use the cash method. If the payroll amounts reported by the taxpayer do not appear to be reasonable and the auditor is unable to verify the figures, it is generally acceptable to adjust the "as reported" amounts with amounts from the Forms DE-6 and 940/941.

The taxpayer should be given the opportunity to provide the appropriate accrual adjustments. This adjustment should only be made when the discrepancies are material and the auditor is unable to verify the accrued payroll. This type of the adjustment should not be viewed as routine.

7345 Compensation Attributable to Nonbusiness Income

Compensation paid to employees for services rendered in connection with nonbusiness activities is excluded from the payroll factor pursuant to CCR § 25132(a)(2). If the taxpayer has nonbusiness activities, the auditor should analyze the related nonbusiness expenses. (See MATM 4060). Any payroll expenses allocable to the nonbusiness activity should be eliminated from the payroll factor.

7350 Capitalized Payroll

Compensation is included in the payroll factor in the year that it is paid or accrued by the taxpayer, even if the compensation has been capitalized rather than expensed. CCR §25132(a)(2), -Example (A) describes a situation in which the taxpayer's employees are used in the construction of a storage building which, upon completion, will be used in the unitary trade or business. Although the wages paid to those employees are capitalized into the cost of the building, the wages should be included in the payroll factor.

The Forms DE-6, 940 and 941 include compensation that has been capitalized. If the payroll factor is developed from other sources, the auditor should verify that compensation paid to employees for the construction of fixed assets has been included.

7355 Foreign Payroll

Translation of foreign payroll is made at the simple average of beginning and end of year exchange rates unless there is a substantial fluctuation in the value of the currency during the year in which a weighted average is used. (CCR §25106.5-10(c)(2).)

In the case of employees in foreign countries, CCR §25132(a)(3) provides that the determination of whether benefits would constitute income to the employees shall be made as though such employees were subject to the Internal Revenue Code. The payroll costs for some foreign countries will include amounts paid for fringe benefits that would not be taxable to employees under the Internal Revenue Code. Consequently, care must be taken in developing or verifying the payroll for foreign entities in order to ensure that such nontaxable payments are excluded from the factor. Conversely, some payroll items that are nontaxable in the foreign country may be includable in the factor. In Japan for example, bonuses paid to corporate directors are posted directly to equity and are not deducted against income. Such bonuses are included in the denominator of the factor. Several publications are available which summarize the significant accounting principles of various countries (see Exhibit J). Such publications may provide clues regarding what has been included in a taxpayer's foreign compensation.

When auditing a taxpayer with foreign subsidiaries, the auditor should be asking whether the taxpayer conducts its foreign marketing and distribution activities through agents or brokers rather than its own employees. If the combined report includes foreign payroll, the auditor should consider whether the recipients of these payments are actually employees. The SEC 10-Ks will sometimes contain detailed employee information that may be helpful in identifying this issue.

If detailed income statements are available for foreign affiliates, the auditor may use these to verify foreign payroll. Often such income statements may be found as a supporting schedule to the Form 5471s (Information Return of U.S. Persons with Respect to Certain Foreign Corporations). Translated foreign financial statements may contain notes that are helpful in determining what has been included in payroll expense. Consolidating workpapers to the annual reports may also be used to verify the payroll of foreign entities. For example, corporations with employees in Canada are required to file a Form T4 (Summary of Remuneration Paid), with the Canadian Revenue Department. This form is comparable to the U.S. Form 940 and may be used to test the reasonableness of Canadian payroll. Similar reports used to report payroll to other governmental agencies may also be available, and the instructions to those forms may provide insights as to the types of benefits that are being included in the total payroll figures. As discussed above, auditors need to use caution in relying upon sources such as foreign financial statements or payroll tax returns because of differences that often exist between U.S. and foreign rules for payroll reporting.

If foreign income statements and other sources are not available or do not provide enough detail for reconciliation, the auditor may wish to test the reasonableness of the

foreign payroll by performing a ratio analysis (for example, the ratio of payroll expense to sales or cost of goods sold could be examined). Sources on economic statistics may also reveal information such as average monthly earnings for employees in various countries. The estimates that the auditor can draw from these sources will provide a starting point given no other information is supplied.

7356 Payroll Equalization

Some taxpayers, especially those with operations in low wage economies, may make adjustments to "equalize" foreign payroll expense to reflect equivalent U.S. wage rates. Their position is that \$1 of labor in many countries has more earnings potential than \$1 of labor in the U.S; therefore, distortion is created when the higher California values in the factors pull the income into this state. The U.S. Supreme Court has recognized that this potential for distortion exists, but has nonetheless validated California's system as a fair apportionment scheme on the basis that some degree of distortion is to be expected in any taxation system. (*Container Corp. of Am. v. Franchise Tax Bd.* (1983) 463 U.S. 159, aff'g 117 Cal.App3d 988 (1981).) The mere showing that property, payroll or sales in California are higher than in other jurisdictions will not be sufficient to justify departure from the standard formula. (See MATM 7000 for a discussion of distortion in the apportionment formula.) In unusual cases where an auditor believes distortion is present, the auditor should develop as many facts as possible concerning the activity and labor force in the foreign country. The taxpayer may have internal documents such as staffing reports that will aid in the examination.

7360 Partnership Payroll

If a partnership's activities are unitary with the activities of its corporate partner under established standards (disregarding the ownership requirement), then the partnership's payroll attributable to unitary business activities is includable in the corporation's payroll factor to the extent of its partnership interest. (CCR § 25137-1(f)(2).)

Example: Corporation A owns a 20-percent interest in unitary Partnership P and its distributive share of P's income is included in unitary business income. Corporation A's

payroll is \$1,000,000, and P's payroll is \$800,000. For purposes of the payroll factor, A's total payroll is \$1,160,000 (\$1,000,000 plus 20 percent of \$800,000).

Special rules for the apportionment of business income with respect to unitary partnerships engaged in long-term construction contracts may be found in CCR §25137-1(h).

Examination of items making up "Other Income" (line 10 of the Form 1120 return) will usually indicate whether the taxpayer owns partnership interests. The annual reports or SEC 10-Ks may also discuss significant partnership relationships. If the taxpayer has interests in unitary partnerships, the reconciliation of the payroll factor to the Form 1120 return or the Federal Forms 940/941 and California Forms DE-6 should identify whether partnership payroll has been included in the factor. The partnership tax returns (Form 565, or the foreign equivalent) will normally disclose the total payroll amounts. If the partnership operates both within and outside the state, it will normally provide its partners with a schedule disclosing the California property, payroll and sales.

7365 Offshore Payroll

Offshore payroll issues generally relate to compensation paid to employees working on offshore oil platforms or on oceangoing vessels. Discussion of this issue may be found in MATM 7795 (Oil & Gas Industry), and MATM 7760 (Sea Transportation).

7370 Compensation Assigned to Numerator

R&TC §25133 provides that compensation is considered paid within this state if any one of the following tests is met. The tests are to be applied consecutively. If the first test is not applicable, the second is applied. If the second is not applicable, the third is applied, etc.:

- The employee's service is performed entirely within the state.
- The employee's service is performed both within and without the state, but the service performed without the state is incidental to the service within the state. In this context, "incidental" is defined to mean any service which is temporary or transitory in nature, or which is rendered in connection with an isolated transaction.
- The employee's service is performed both within and without the state, and the employee's base of operation is in this state.
- There is no base of operations in any state in which some part of the service is performed, but the place from which the service is directed or controlled is in this state.
- The base of operations or the place from which the service is directed or controlled is not in any state in which some part of the service is performed, but the individual's residence is in this state.

CCR §25133 defines the term "base of operations" as the place from which the employee starts work and to which he or she customarily returns in order to receive instructions from the taxpayer or communications from customers, to replenish stock, repair equipment, or perform any other necessary functions. The term "place from which the service is directed or controlled" refers to the place from which the power to direct or control is exercised by the taxpayer.

In *Appeal of Photo-Marker Corporation of California*, 86-SBE-189, November 19, 1986, the issue was whether the compensation of two employees should be included in the numerator. The employees performed services in California for the taxpayer, but also traveled frequently to New York to perform services in their capacities as officers of the taxpayer's unitary parent corporation. The taxpayer argued that the officers' executive duties in New York were more important and permanent than their jobs in California, and that the base of their operations was at the corporate headquarters in New York. Although the SBE found that the employees' services in New York were more than "incidental," the employees were able to discharge their obligations to the parent by making short-term business trips to New York. Their long-term presence performing services in California led the SBE to hold that the base operations were in this state.

R&TC §25133 was patterned after the Model Unemployment Compensation Act, which California adopted for payroll tax purposes. Therefore, compensation reported to California on EDD Form DE-6 (Quarterly Payroll Report) is generally the same as compensation includable in the numerator of the payroll factor. For situations where the Form DE-6 may include payroll that is not includable in the payroll factor, see MATM 7376 (Expatriate Payroll) and MATM 7374 (Payroll in States Where the Taxpayer is Immune From Tax). The workpapers for the Federal Forms 940 will often contain a

breakdown by state, which an auditor may use to verify the numerator if the Forms DE-6 are not available.

7372 Mobile Employees

The general rules discussed above in MATM 7370 assign the compensation paid to any particular employee to one state, even though the services may have been performed in more than one state. Exceptions exist for employees in certain industries that use special formulas. See MATM 7735 (Air Transportation Companies), MATM 7765 (Bus Transportation), MATM 7725 (Commercial Fishing), MATM 7770 (Freight Forwarding Companies), MATM 7760 (Sea Transportation Activities), MATM 7745 (Railroads), and MATM 7755 (Trucking Companies), MATM 7715 Franchisors).

7374 Payroll In States Where Taxpayer Is Immune From Tax

In accordance with the provisions of Public Law 86-272, a corporation will be immune from taxation in a state if its activities within that state are limited solely to the solicitation of sales of tangible personal property (see MATM 1200 - MATM 1240 for a discussion of P.L. 86-272). If a member of the combined report is immune from taxation in California via operation of P.L. 86-272, then any payroll that would otherwise be assigned to California for that member is excluded from the numerator of the payroll factor.

Likewise, the rules for assignment of payroll to the states will sometimes result in payroll being assigned to another state in which the taxpayer member of the combined report is immune from tax under P.L. 86-272. Since there are no provisions that would allow such payroll to be excluded, it is included in the denominator of the payroll factor even though it will not be included in the numerator of any state ("Nowhere Payroll"). Unlike the sales factor, the payroll factor has no "throwback" provisions allowing the assignment of such compensation to other states.

7376 Expatriate Payroll

U.S. executives working in foreign countries who report on a regular basis to their superiors in the United States are often termed "expatriate employees." Although they may be considered a nonresident for California personal income tax purposes, expatriates from California frequently desire to be covered by the California unemployment and disability provisions. These employees will appear on the Form DE-6. Since the compensation paid to these employees is not paid in California pursuant to the rules described in MATM 7370, it is not includable in the numerator of the payroll factor. Wages paid to expatriate employees may be identified on the "Exempt Payments" line of the Federal Form 940 (Part I, Line 2) as wages paid outside of the United States. By comparing a list of the expatriate employees exempted on the Form 940 to the names of the employees whose wages are included on the Form DE-6, the auditor can verify whether such employees have been included in the California payroll.

The presence of expatriate employees as indicated on the Federal Form 940 should also alert the auditor to the possibility of a unitary relationship with a foreign entity.