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NEWS RELEASE

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

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PAYMENT OF PROPERTY TAXES GETS EASIER WITH NEW WEB SERVICE

Los Angeles County officials today announced a new service that allows taxpayers to pay their property tax bills online by electronic check – avoiding long lines, credit card fees or reliance on mail service.

The announcement comes as County Treasurer and Tax-Collector Mark Saladino begins sending out 2.3 million annual property tax bills, which will be received throughout October.

The new service, called Vcheck, allows property owners to make their payments by going to the Treasurer-Tax Collector's website at <http://ttax.co.la.ca.us> or the property tax web portal at lacountypropertytax.com

"The Vcheck payment option is just one more way the County of Los Angeles is making sure that paying property taxes is as convenient as it can be," said County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky. "I want to thank the Treasurer-Tax Collector's Office for thinking 'outside the box' and making this happen."

Besides Vcheck, property taxes may be paid by check or credit card.

"Unlike credit card payments," said Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke, "there is no fee for this service." This is possible, she noted, because there is no ongoing cost to the County from a vendor for processing transactions, unlike other service-based options. "I encourage property owners to consider using this service -- it's easy, secure and convenient."

"This is a great service that will allow both homeowners and businesses to pay their property taxes with little effort," said Supervisor Don Knabe, who in 1997 authored a Board motion asking departments to provide Internet payment options to the public.

Saladino said his department implemented Vcheck on a pilot basis on July 18 for those taxpayers who needed to pay supplemental tax bills, and the system has worked well. As of Oct. 4, nearly 200 payments have been processed online for 249 parcels, for a total of approximately \$245,000.

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“The V-check program is an excellent example of our goal to make County services more accessible online and easier for the public to interact with County government,” said Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich. “This program is part of our continuing effort to meet the needs of the community, which has requested more convenient online payment options.”

A future goal of the Treasurer-Tax Collector is to provide the Vcheck as an option for other types of payments, Saladino said.

To pay online, taxpayers fill out an electronic check with the information that appears on their written checks, including their bank routing number and checking account number, and provide their e-mail address. Once a Vcheck payment is made online, the taxpayer prints a confirmation page and receives an e-mail confirming payment has been received.

The Treasurer-Tax Collector prints the check and processes it as if it were received by mail. Taxpayers can verify their payment has been processed by entering their property parcel number on a payment-status page on the Treasurer-Tax Collector’s website. Updates are made immediately.

Payments on up to four parcels may be made per check. Taxpayers may select the items and amounts they wish to pay, but may not exceed the amount due.

Saladino said security measures have been implemented to protect the public from fraudulent activity or mistakes. The system resides in a secure server environment within the County’s data center and is protected by firewalls. Taxpayers are required to enter a personal identification number (PIN) that appears on their tax bill. If three unsuccessful attempts are made, the taxpayer is locked out of paying online for a week. Additionally, taxpayers are required to enter their checking account number twice to avoid mistyping.

Saladino said he hopes the new Vcheck will reduce some of the 250,000 late payments received annually. Current year property tax installments are due no later than Dec. 12, 2005 and April 10, 2006. Vcheck payments, which are time-stamped, may be made without penalty up to midnight on those dates.