

701—219.4(423) Contractors, subcontractors or builders who are retailers. In some instances, contractors, subcontractors and builders are in a dual business which includes reselling to the general public on a recurring “over-the-counter” basis the same type of building materials and supplies which are used by the contractors, subcontractors and builders in their own construction work. A person operating in such a manner is referred to in this rule as a contractor-retailer. Any person who is engaged in the performance of construction contracts and who also sells building materials or other items at retail is obligated to examine the person’s business and determine if it is that of a contractor or a contractor-retailer. A sale by a contractor-retailer of building materials, supplies and equipment which does not provide for installation of the merchandise sold is considered a retail sale and subject to sales tax. Conversely, a sale by a contractor-retailer of building supplies, materials and equipment which provides for installation of the merchandise is considered a construction contract and tax shall be paid by the contractor-retailer based upon the cost of materials at the time the materials are withdrawn from inventory for use in a construction contract performed in Iowa. When a contractor-retailer does repair work, the contractor-retailer is acting as a retailer and not a contractor and must collect tax on the sales price charged for materials used in the repair and on the sales price charged for any labor used in the repair which is a taxable service or on the entire charge if materials and labor are not separately invoiced. Reference rule 701—18.31(422,423) and rule 219.13(423).

The following is a list of the characteristics of the usual contractor-retailer:

1. A contractor-retailer is a business which makes frequent retail sales to the public or to other contractors and also engages in the performance of construction contracts (see rule 219.8(423)). In determining whether a business is a contractor-retailer or a retailer only, the department looks to the totality of business activity and not only to one portion of the business’s activity. Thus, the maintenance of a small retail outlet does not automatically transform a contractor-retailer into a retailer, and a large number of retail sales without a retail outlet can qualify a business as a contractor-retailer.

2. A business cannot claim the status of a contractor-retailer unless the business is in possession of a valid sales tax permit to report tax due from retail sales and from withdrawals of materials or supplies from inventory for use in construction contracts.

3. A contractor-retailer must purchase building materials, supplies, and equipment placed in its inventory for resale; the contractor-retailer should not pay sales or use tax to its suppliers for these items. Instead, the contractor-retailer should provide suppliers with valid resale exemption certificates. When a valid certificate is furnished, the vendor is relieved from the responsibility of collecting the tax if the purchaser has demonstrated that the purchaser is a contractor-retailer under the provisions of this rule. Reference rule 701—15.3(422,423) and rule 219.19(423) for a detailed explanation of this matter.

4. A contractor-retailer purchasing construction material which will not be placed in its inventory must purchase that material subject to Iowa sales or use tax. For example, if a contractor-retailer purchases wet concrete for use in a construction project, that purchase is taxable.

5. A contractor-retailer usually has a retail outlet, but if not, frequent sales to individuals or other contractors qualify a business as a contractor-retailer.

6. Contractor-retailers do not pay tax on materials withdrawn from inventory for use in construction projects performed outside Iowa. See 2005 Iowa Code subsection 423.2(1)“b.”

The business records of a contractor-retailer must clearly reflect the use made of items purchased, and the records must be in such form that the director can readily determine that the proper sales and use tax liability is being reported and paid.

The following examples are offered to illustrate the responsibility for paying and remitting sales tax under this rule:

EXAMPLE 1. ABC Company operates a retail outlet that sells lumber and other building materials and supplies. ABC Company is also a contractor which builds residential and commercial structures. ABC Company would be considered a contractor-retailer and would, therefore, purchase all inventory items for resale. Those items which are used in the performance of a construction contract would be subject to tax in the period that they are withdrawn from inventory. The tax would be computed on the cost of the items withdrawn from inventory. Those items which are sold over the counter in the retail

outlets would be subject to tax at the time of sale. The tax would be computed on the over-the-counter sales price.

EXAMPLE 2. EFG Company is a mechanical contractor and has no retail outlets. EFG Company rarely sells any of its inventory to other persons or to other contractors. EFG Company would not be considered a contractor-retailer under this rule. However, EFG Company would be considered a contractor and must pay tax to its vendor at the time it purchases any building materials, supplies and equipment. However, on those rare occasions when an inventory item is sold to another person or to another contractor, tax must be collected at the time of sale; therefore, EFG Company should have a sales tax permit. An adjustment can be made to the sales tax report by taking a credit for tax previously paid on the item sold.

EXAMPLE 3. Home Town Construction Company is owned and operated by two individuals in a rural Iowa farming community. They do not have a retail outlet but they frequently make sales of building materials which are in their inventory to local residents. Home Town Construction Company would be a contractor-retailer and could purchase all inventory items for resale. Those items which are used in the performance of a construction contract would be subject to tax in the period they are withdrawn from inventory. The tax would be computed on the cost of the items withdrawn from inventory. Those items which are sold to residents would be subject to the tax at the time of sale. The tax would be computed on the sales price of the items.

EXAMPLE 4. Down Home Construction Company is operated by two individuals in a rural Iowa farming community. They do not have a retail outlet and rarely make sales of building materials from their inventory to local residents. Down Home Construction Company would not be considered a contractor-retailer under this rule. Rather, Down Home Construction Company would be considered a contractor and must pay tax to its vendor at the time it purchases any building materials, supplies and equipment. When sales are made to local residents, tax must be collected at the time of sale; therefore, Down Home Construction Company should have a sales tax permit. However, Down Home Construction Company can adjust its sales tax report by taking a credit for tax paid to its vendor on an item sold to a local resident.

EXAMPLE 5. Intown Home Construction Company places modular homes on slabs or basement foundations; makes electrical, plumbing and other connections; and otherwise prepares the modular homes for sale as real estate. Intown also has a sales tax permit, maintains an inventory of modular homes for sale, and sells homes from the inventory as tangible personal property to owners who later convert the property to real estate. Intown is a contractor-retailer and is obligated to pay or collect sales tax, respectively, at the time a modular home is withdrawn from inventory for use as material in a construction contract or at the time a modular home is withdrawn from inventory for sale to an owner. See rule 701—231.11(423) for an explanation of the basis on which tax is computed.

EXAMPLE 6. Smith's Plumbing has a retail store in Davenport, but it also installs plumbing fixtures and lines in new construction and remodeling projects. Plumbing supplies that are taken from an inventory in Davenport for a new home being built in Rock Island, Illinois, are withdrawn exempt from Iowa sales tax because the construction contract is performed outside Iowa. However, those supplies may be subject to Illinois sales or use tax.