

WI EXEMPTION CERTIFICATE COMPLIANCE GUIDE

Acceptable forms, seller protection, purchaser liability, certificate scope, and audit defense

START HERE: An exemption certificate serves different functions for the seller and purchaser. A valid certificate may relieve the seller of collection liability, but the certificate does not convert a taxable purchase into an exempt purchase. The purchaser remains responsible for tax or use tax when the exemption does not apply or the property is used in a taxable manner.

1	ACCEPTABLE EXEMPTION CERTIFICATES	
Certificate	Permitted use	Key compliance point
Wisconsin Form S-211	Multipurpose Wisconsin certificate for exemptions allowed by Wisconsin law, subject to the form and rule limitations.	Complete the purchaser, seller, business, exemption reason, identification, scope, and signature fields that apply.
SSTGB Form F0003 / Wisconsin S-211SST	Multistate certificate that may claim Wisconsin exemptions.	Not every exemption printed on a multistate form is available in Wisconsin. The purchaser must qualify under Wisconsin law.
Substitute certificate	May be used if it contains all essential transaction information and is in a form approved by the Department.	Paper substitutes require a signature. Electronic certificates require the same information except a signature is not required.
Government alternative support	For qualifying government or tribal sales, specified purchase-order, invoice, or CES-number documentation may be accepted in lieu of a certificate.	The invoice must be issued in the qualifying purchaser name and the alternative support must satisfy Tax 11.14(11).

2	WHAT "FULLY COMPLETED" MEANS	
Required element	Review point	
Purchaser and seller identity	Names and addresses identify both parties.	
Business description	The purchaser describes the type or nature of its business.	
Exemption basis	The form states the reason for the claimed exemption and supplies the identification or permit information required for that claim.	
Scope	The form clearly indicates Single Purchase or Continuous and, for Single Purchase, identifies the invoice, purchase order, or specific project covered.	
Signature	A paper certificate is signed. An electronically received certificate does not require a signature under Tax 11.14.	
Consistency	No required field is missing, contradictory, or facially inconsistent with the exemption claimed.	

CONFIDENCE: HIGH. Tax 11.14 expressly lists acceptable certificates and required core data. "Fully completed" remains fact-specific to the exemption claimed because some exemptions require additional numbers, descriptions, or project information.

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The certificate scope determines how the seller processes future sales

3	SINGLE PURCHASE VS. CONTINUOUS	
Feature	Single Purchase	Continuous / blanket
Scope	One invoice, one purchase order, or one specifically identified project.	Applies on an ongoing basis according to the certificate's stated exemption and scope until rescinded or replaced.
Best use	Use when only identified purchases should be processed without tax.	Use when the purchaser intends recurring qualifying purchases to be processed under the certificate and will review taxability internally.
Seller processing	Seller applies the certificate only to the identified invoice, purchase order, or project. Other sales remain taxable unless independently supported.	Seller keeps the certificate on file. Tax 11.14 states the seller is not liable for tax on transactions covered by a valid certificate.
Purchaser action	Identify the covered invoice, purchase order, or project clearly.	Review purchases, identify nonqualifying items, and report applicable use tax. To stop blanket treatment, rescind in writing.
Expiration	Ends with the identified transaction or project scope.	Does not expire at a prescribed interval, but should be renewed at reasonable intervals for business, registration-number, or business-status changes.

DO NOT USE "TAXABLE" AS A ONE-OFF OVERRIDE: Wisconsin states that a "taxable" notation on a purchase order does not cancel a continuous certificate. A purchaser that does not want the continuous certificate to apply must notify the seller in writing that the certificate is rescinded.

4	SELLER COLLECTION LIABILITY VS. PURCHASER USE-TAX LIABILITY	
Issue	Seller collection responsibility	Purchaser tax / use-tax responsibility
Valid continuous certificate	Retain and apply the valid certificate to covered transactions. The seller is not liable for tax on transactions covered by a valid certificate.	Determine whether the purchase actually qualifies. A certificate does not alter the substantive taxability of the property or use.
Nonqualifying item purchased without tax	Seller collection relief depends on a valid certificate and the transaction being covered by it, subject to the fraud, solicitation, and facially unavailable entity-exemption exceptions.	Report and pay applicable tax or use tax when the item is used in a nonexempt manner or the claimed exemption does not apply.
Mixed manufacturer order	Tax 11.14(7)(a) allows tax-free sales under a continuous manufacturing certificate when the nature of the property qualifies.	If an order contains exempt and nonexempt purchases, the purchaser designates the taxable items.
Seller assistance	Seller may identify apparent taxable or exempt items as a customer-service practice, but that practice does not replace the purchaser's exemption analysis.	Purchaser retains responsibility for the exemption claim and for tax due on nonqualifying purchases.

IMPORTANT LEGAL DISTINCTION: Operationally, a vendor may mark an account exempt after receiving a continuous certificate. Legally, the certificate does not make every item exempt. For manufacturing certificates, Tax 11.14(7)(a) specifically ties tax-free treatment to qualifying property and requires the purchaser to designate taxable items on a mixed order.

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Examples show how certificate scope changes seller and purchaser responsibilities

5	APPLICATION EXAMPLES		
Example	Seller treatment	Purchaser treatment	Confidence
Manufacturer - continuous certificate	Vendor retains the certificate and may process qualifying manufacturing purchases without collecting tax. On a mixed order, Tax 11.14(7)(a) says the purchaser designates taxable items.	Manufacturer supports qualifying machinery, parts, or consumables and reports tax or use tax on office furniture, break-room items, janitorial supplies, or other nonqualifying purchases bought without tax.	High for rule; item taxability remains fact-sensitive.
Manufacturer - single invoice	Vendor applies the certificate only to the identified machinery invoice. Unrelated purchases remain taxable unless another certificate applies.	Manufacturer uses the single-purchase method when only the identified machinery purchase should be exempt.	High for scope; exemption eligibility requires separate review.
Contractor - specific project	Vendor applies the certificate only to materials identified with the qualifying project, invoice, or purchase order.	Contractor retains project, property, ownership, transfer, and exemption support; tax or use tax is due when the project or property does not qualify.	Moderate; project exemptions are fact-specific.
Nonprofit / exempt entity - continuous	Seller applies the certificate to covered direct purchases of the organization.	Organization ensures purchases are made directly by and used by the qualifying entity and addresses any nonqualifying use.	Moderate; entity and use requirements vary.
Purchaser wants selective treatment	Seller taxes normal purchases and exempts only the invoice, purchase order, or project identified by the Single Purchase certificate.	Purchaser avoids blanket vendor treatment and reduces later use-tax accrual work.	High as administrative practice; underlying exemption remains fact-specific.

6	SELLER RELIEF OF LIABILITY	
Timing / condition	Result	
Before sale or within 90 days	A seller is relieved if it obtains a fully completed certificate indicating exempt use, subject to the exceptions in Tax 11.14(3)(b). No separate good-faith test applies to a certificate timely obtained within this rule.	
No certificate, but data captured within 90 days	Relief may be available if the seller captures the purchaser name and business address, required identification, business type, and exemption reason.	
Department request - 120-day cure	The seller may obtain a fully completed certificate in good faith or otherwise prove the transaction was exempt within 120 days after the Department request.	
Relief denied	Relief is unavailable for fraudulent failure to collect, solicitation of an unlawful exemption, and the specified facially unavailable entity-exemption situation.	
Good faith	The defined good-faith test belongs to the late-certificate cure under Tax 11.14(4)(b), not to the separate continuous-certificate rule in Tax 11.14(5).	

GOOD-FAITH TEST FOR THE 120-DAY CURE: The exemption was authorized on the transaction date, could apply to the property or service, and is reasonable for the purchaser's business. Relief can still be lost if the seller knew or had reason to know the information was materially false or knowingly participated in intentional tax evasion.

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Maintain the certificate file so the exemption remains defensible

7	CONTINUOUS-CERTIFICATE MAINTENANCE	
	Control	Compliance treatment
	No prescribed expiration	Continuous certificates do not expire and need not be renewed at a prescribed interval.
	Periodic review	Seller should periodically confirm that the person claiming the exemption is the person who furnished the certificate.
	Renewal triggers	Renew at reasonable intervals when there is a business change, registration-number change, or discontinuance of the business claiming the exemption.
	Written rescission	Purchaser must notify the seller in writing to rescind a continuous certificate. A "taxable" purchase-order notation is not enough.
	Changed use	If exemptly purchased property is later used in a way that makes the purchase ineligible, the purchaser is liable for the applicable tax or use tax.
	Improper use	Knowing misuse may trigger misdemeanor exposure and other return penalties; prohibited or inconsistent use or incorrect exemption information may trigger a \$250 penalty for each related invoice or bill of sale under the cited rule extract.

8	2022 EXEMPT-ENTITY ACCOUNT-NUMBER CHANGE
	CITATION INCOMPLETE - REQUIRES VERIFICATION: The materials reviewed for this publication do not provide verified official language explaining the specific 2022 Wisconsin exempt-entity account-number conversion. Do not state a conversion rule, effective date, or replacement-number procedure without the applicable Wisconsin Department of Revenue notice, form instruction, or other official source. Retain the current entity documentation and confirm the current identification used for the transaction.

9	AUDIT-DEFENSE CHECKLIST	
	Legally important records	Recommended audit-defense records
	Fully completed certificate; required identification; invoice or purchase-order link; written rescission when applicable.	Certificate receipt date; reviewer; vendor-account setup record; purchaser communications; scope notes; exception handling.
	For resale: purchaser identity, business description, exemption basis, and applicable permit or alternative statement.	Item-level use analysis; use-tax accrual records; general-ledger mapping; periodic certificate review log.
	For project claims: certificate plus exemption-specific project facts and documents.	Contract, project number, delivery records, ownership and final-use support, photographs or specifications when relevant.

10	AUTHORITY AND CONFIDENCE	
	Authority	Type / proposition
	Wis. Admin. Code Tax 11.14	Administrative rule extract. Supports acceptable forms, required data, timely certificate relief, 120-day cure and good faith, continuous certificates, manufacturing certificate treatment, purchaser liability, and penalties.
	Wis. Stat. §§ 77.52(13)-(17), 77.53(10)-(13)	Statutory provisions identified by Tax 11.14 as governing sales- and use-tax exemption certificate status. Current text and amendment history should be checked before final reliance.
	Publication 202 Appendix H extract	Internal OneDrive copy reproducing Tax 11.14. The file title says May 2017; current status of every provision was not independently verified in retrieved official web content.
	Overall confidence	High for propositions expressly reproduced in Tax 11.14. Moderate or unresolved where underlying exemption eligibility, project facts, current form revisions, or the 2022 account-number issue require additional verification.

INTERNAL REFERENCE ONLY: Educational issue-spotting and general tax information, not legal advice or a legal opinion. Verify current Wisconsin statutes, administrative rules, forms, Department guidance, exemption eligibility, and transaction facts before relying on a conclusion.