

State forces property assessor to give up certification for 6 months

In rare crackdown, misconduct in work in Germantown cited

By Kevin Crowe and Raquel Rutledge of the Journal Sentinel
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In a step not taken in recent memory, the Wisconsin Department of Revenue has forced a property assessor with one of the state's **largest assessment firms** to relinquish his certification for at least six months after finding continued misconduct relating to assessment practices in the Village of Germantown.

The department said it found problems when it reviewed the work assessor James Danielson of Accurate Appraisal LLC did for the village's 2014 property assessments. Danielson agreed to voluntarily relinquish his certification after the department said it had enough information **to file charges with the secretary of revenue**, a process that could result in complete revocation.

A **Milwaukee Journal Sentinel investigation** last year found assessors in dozens of communities across the state are doing "poor" work by the state's own standards. Until now, the state had taken little action in disciplining assessors.

"We expect assessors to follow state law and defined assessment practices," department spokeswoman Stephanie Marquis wrote in an email. "If they do not, we will investigate thoroughly and take the appropriate enforcement steps."

It is unclear what effect the punishment will have on Accurate's clients — the company's website lists 97 cities, towns and villages around the state.

Danielson and Accurate's owner, Lee De Groot, declined to be interviewed for this story, but issued a statement through a public relations company saying:

"We stand by our company's core values to always put our clients first, with the best possible service in a professional way. The temporary voluntary relinquishment of partner Jim Danielson's license will not slow us down from delivering on that promise."

Accurate's [contract with the Village of Germantown](#) lasts through Dec. 31. The Village Board's president, Dean Wolter, and administrator, David Schornack, did not return calls or emails seeking comment.

The state started investigating Accurate's assessment practices in the Village of Germantown after a property owner filed a complaint against the company in 2013. That year, the department examined the assessor's 2012 work and [found misconduct](#). According to the department, Danielson failed to validate property sales according to the state's assessment manual, and [changed values of individual properties](#) during a maintenance year when property owners presented sales information about their properties.

Changing the value of one property during a maintenance year, a time when most values should not change, upsets uniformity and can unfairly lower one property's assessment and taxes, shifting the tax burden to other property owners.

The Journal Sentinel analysis of 2013 statewide property sales data also found that among the state's three largest assessment firms, Accurate In a step not taken in recent memory, the Wisconsin Department of Revenue has forced a property assessor with one of the state's [largest assessment firms](#) to relinquish his certification for at least six months after finding continued misconduct relating to assessment practices in the Village of Germantown.

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