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## Scientists file 11 suits to get access to IRS audit records

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TAMPA — Scientists filed 11 federal lawsuits Wednesday against the Internal Revenue Service seeking information about agency audits of them.

The group claims the IRS has ignored its requests to obtain the records filed under the federal Freedom of Information Act and is asking the court to force the agency to turn over the documents.

Among the things the lawsuits

are seeking are the IRS audits and any instructions, memorandums or directives by the agency relating to the treatment of Scientists.

The lawsuits are the outgrowth of an attempt by the IRS to enforce a 1989 subpoena for 47 categories of an elite division of the Church of Scientology — Flag Service Org Inc. — to determine if it was entitled to tax-exempt status.

U.S. Magistrate Elizabeth A. Jenkins ruled in April that the church had to turn over extensive financial

and organizational documents. But she refused to allow the IRS access to everything it sought, saying some of the information was unnecessary and would intrude on the privacy of church members.

During the hearings on the controversy, an IRS agent testified he obtained the personal income tax returns on between 80 and 100 members. Such personal returns were among the items the magistrate said did not have to be released.

After the ruling, according to the lawsuit, more than 100 church members were told their tax returns for years 1986 and 1987 were being audited. This is the action that spurred Wednesday's lawsuits.

The lawsuit contends the IRS refused to provide the bulk of the information the members wanted, saying its release would compromise ongoing investigations or the information was exempted from the act.