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Shopping will cost you more

Consumers are shelling out a record-high level of sales tax at the cash register, says a study by Vertex, a tax technology company. States and cities grappling with the effects of federal tax cuts and a struggling economy are looking at sales tax revenue to help pay their bills.

The average combined sales tax levied by states, counties, and cities reached 8.5 percent in 2003, the highest rate since the company started tracking the data in 1981. That's up from 8.4 percent the previous year. Shoppers in Arab, AL, pay the highest combined sales tax at 11 percent. Wrangell, AK, has the highest city tax, at 7 percent. Mississippi, Rhode Island, and Tennessee have the highest state sales tax, also 7 percent.