

2007-2008

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

WORKERS' COMPENSATION COMMISSION

AUGUST 31, 2008

HISTORICAL AND STATISTICAL DATA FOR THE ANNUAL REPORT

DATA AS OF JUNE 30, 2008

Workers' Compensation Commission  
(Title of Agency)

*Administrative Head* ---- John A. Mastropietro, Chairman  
(Name and Title)

*Established* -- 1913

*Statutory Authority* -- Chapter 568, General Statutes

*Central Office* -- 21 Oak St., Hartford, CT 06106  
(Address) (Zip Code)

*Telephone No.* -- 860-493-1500

*Average number of full-time employees* 129.

*Recurring operating expenditures, 2007-2008* - \$14,158,489.00

*Capital outlay* - \$15,656

*Organization Structure* -- Organizational Structure - Chairman, Chief Administrative Officer, Compensation Review Board, Business, Personnel, Information Systems, Education, Rehabilitation, and Statistical units are located in the Chairman's Office. Fifteen additional trial Commissioners preside over dispute resolution hearings at the eight district offices.

## **Mission**

The Workers' Compensation Commission administers the workers' compensation laws of the State of Connecticut with the ultimate goal of ensuring that workers injured on the job receive prompt payment of lost work time benefits and attendant medical expenses. To this end, the Commission facilitates voluntary agreements, adjudicates disputes, makes findings and awards, hears and rules on appeals, and closes out cases through full and final stipulated settlements.

## **Statutory Authority**

Since the Workers' Compensation Act (Chapter 568, C.G.S.) was adopted in 1913, numerous enhancements and modifications in coverage and benefits have been made by the Legislature. With few exceptions, all workers and employers are now covered by the workers' compensation laws. When a worker has suffered a job-related injury or illness, he or she is entitled to certain well-defined wage replacement and medical benefits. The mission of the Workers' Compensation Commission is to ensure injured employees' rights are fully protected, and that workers and

employers fully carry out their legal responsibilities. There are fifteen At-Large Commissioners who serve in eight district offices throughout the state. They are appointed by the Governor with legislative approval. A sixteenth Commissioner serves as Chairman of the Commission. The Chairman is responsible for administration of the entire Commission. The Chairman also serves as Chief of the Compensation Review Board (CRB) along with two other Commissioners appointed by him for one-year terms to hear appeals of cases decided by the Commissioners. The Commission also educates employees about their legal rights and helps rehabilitate and return injured workers to gainful employment. During FY 2008, the Commission's Safety Program Officers worked hard and effectively to monitor worker safety committees throughout the state. Prevention, education and rehabilitation are integral to the Commission's statutory responsibilities. A Statistical Division measures and monitors the caseload and performance of the Commission.

In recent years, two landmark reform bills were enacted.

The first, (Public Act 91-339) centralized administrative duties and powers in the person and Office of the Chairman to more effectively implement enforcement of the law. Twenty-three specific duties were assigned to the Chairman, including budgetary and personnel matters, assignment of Commissioners,

and regulation of attorneys, physicians, and preferred provider organizations. The Chairman and his staff implement these responsibilities, guided by an Advisory Board composed of business and labor representatives, including an injured worker.

The second, (Public Act 93-228) effected historic reforms of the Connecticut workers' compensation laws effective July 1, 1993. The benefit modifications and related reforms contained in this Act, combined with the efficiencies engendered by Public Act 91-339, have resulted in reduced payouts. Cumulative savings over these past years are over \$750 million dollars compared to what costs would have been without the 1993 reforms.

### **Public Service**

The Commission constantly strives to upgrade service to its clientele. Two key goals are: expediting disputed claims settlement, and returning injured workers to productive jobs. These goals are closely monitored by the Commission through manual and automated reporting systems.

Safety Program Officers work cooperatively and confidentially with employers to devise and implement safety programs resulting in reduced accidents, injuries, medical costs

and lost workdays. During the period of July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008, Safety Program Officers visited 2,358 employer sites. In total, 20,963 employer sites have been visited, and more than 5,000 safety and health committees, covering more than 913,956 employees, have been approved. A reduction of 2,667 employees occurred due to a combination of business closings and non-compliant companies. Medical care plans, including preferred provider organizations, are also reviewed for compliance with workplace safety and health laws.

The Commission participates in the Connecticut Licensing Information Center, providing one-stop licensing information to state employers via the Internet.

#### **Improvements/Achievements 2007-2008**

During the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2008, the Commission moved aggressively to provide more effective and efficient service delivery.

All duties and responsibilities continue to be executed effectively and punctually with fewer full-time employees than in the last several years.

Continual monitoring of hearing backlogs at the eight district offices, and reassignment of resources to meet heavy workloads, have resulted in a major decrease in time between initial hearing request and the date the hearing is actually held. Hearing backlog is down dramatically for both informal and formal hearings. The Chairman actively monitors cases ensuring that no cases are unnecessarily delayed.

The Compensation Review Board continues to process cases expeditiously. This year, new appeals numbered 118. Meanwhile, there were 127 dispositions, including 78 written opinions.

During FY 2008, 1,065 initial interviews for rehabilitation assistance were completed. An additional 1,362 individuals received various types of rehabilitation services. Through guidance, counseling and cost-effective short-term training programs, 468 injured workers returned to the workforce, including 203 who received funding for re-training. The program saved a total of \$183,153 by utilizing Pell grants as first dollar.

This high success rate was achieved despite a major reduction of the program's staff and budget authorization. The staff, which had numbered thirteen professional counselors, including a director, and a clerical worker, now numbers just seven employees, six professional and one clerical. Worker

Rehabilitation vocational education coordinators have been assigned to specific district offices, allowing greater familiarity with client needs and resources available in various geographic areas of the state. Highly cost effective on-the-job training programs have replaced an earlier emphasis on formal education programs. The clients of worker's rehabilitation services who return to work can now support themselves and their families, and are paying taxes as a direct result of workers' rehabilitation programs.

To help monitor medical costs, (comprising more than 40 percent of total workers' compensation payments), the Commission reviews and approves applications for managed care plans. As of June 30, 2008, 3,771 employers with 509,271 employees have approved plans.

A steadily increasing percentage of on-line reporting of workplace injuries has resulted in more accurate data at lower cost. During Fiscal Year 2008, the implementation of an injury reporting system facilitating web-based as well as value added network submission of first reports continued to attract additional fully-automated trading partners resulting in greater accuracy and cost effectiveness in injury reporting. The Commission, will soon mandate that all such first reports are transmitted through value added networks or web-based reporting.



Injured workers now routinely receive information packets detailing their rights and responsibilities within five days of receipt of the initial report of injury.

The Commission's web site has expanded vastly, providing vital, up-to-date information on all aspects of the Commission's resources and services including the law, CRB decisions and late-breaking news. Additionally, the Commission's major forms are now available in fill-able PDF format.

The Commission offers an enhanced capability to its online fillable PDF-formatted forms which enables customers to not only fill them in online, but also to save them along with their input data (a technical first which saves customers from having to spend hundreds of dollars per computer to buy special software to perform this task) and this new capability is now provided free to the public.

During FY 2008 the Commission continued major upgrades, affecting most of the Commission's core functions, including claims processing, rehabilitation services, and health and safety programs. Operating systems and office mail are currently "state of the art". Additionally, planning neared completion during FY 2008 on the acquisition of powerful new servers, and the migration of data and applications to a

Department of Information Technology based standard. All aspects of the Commission's operations are being addressed with an eye toward increased efficiency and responsiveness to the needs of injured workers and the general public.

Committees on the claims process, forms design, and intra-office communications, established in prior years continue their productive work. The Commission's strategic planning goals are:

- shortening the claims process in order to get benefits to injured workers as soon as possible;
- elimination of duplicate claims;
- identification of non-insured employers;
- quick retrieval of records, saving personnel costs;
- sophisticated data analysis to identify trouble spots before they become serious, thus affording greatly enhanced service to Connecticut workers; and,
- worker rehabilitation case tracking for Connecticut workers.

Information Reported As Required by State Statute

The Commission's Affirmative Action Plan is currently in compliance. While the commission has no full time Affirmative Action Officer, its Affirmative Action Plan and Program are prepared by its personnel officer. The commission continues its commitment to the state Affirmative Action Program.

Key Performance Measures

FY 2008

Injuries/Illnesses - 67,358

Fatalities - 34

Informal Hearings - 49,960

Formal Hearings - 1,232

Pre-formal Hearings - 9,424

Voluntary Agreements - 21,783

Stipulations - 6,747

Awards - 1,229

Dismissals - 153

Education Services Information

Responses - 87,676

Website - 1,066,313 visits; 3,031,339 page views; and, 224,912 forms, publications and news feeds downloaded