

2003-2004

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

WORKERS' COMPENSATION COMMISSION

AUGUST 1, 2004

HISTORICAL AND STATISTICAL DATA FOR THE ANNUAL REPORT

DATA AS OF JUNE 30, 2004

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 124.

Recurring operating expenditures, 2003-2004 - \$11,974,270.13.

Capital outlay - \$10,597.54.

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 2004, 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, 2003 to June 30, 2004, Safety Program Officers visited 1,462 employer sites. In total, 13,462 employer sites have been visited, and more than

4,800 safety and health committees, covering more than 950,000 employees, have been approved. 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 2003-2004

During the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2004, 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 135. Meanwhile, there were 150 dispositions, including 81 written opinions.

During FY 2004, 3,017 individual cases were provided rehabilitation services. Initial interviews numbered 1,661. Through guidance, counseling and cost-effective short-term training programs, 482 injured workers returned to the workforce.

This high success rate was achieved despite the reduction of most of the program's staff in January 2003, and the retirement of the remaining staff in May 2003. (During the course of fiscal year 2004, one-third of the staff was re-hired.) 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. To

date, 4,332 employers with 498,959 employees have approved plans.

A steadily increasing percentage of on-line reporting of workplace injuries has resulted in more accurate data at lower cost.

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.

During FY 2004 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".

The Commission's computer network was integrated into the executive domain of the Department of Information Technology's centralized system.

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 2004

Injuries/Illnesses - 56,292

Fatalities - 70

Informal Hearings - 39,941

Formal & Pre-formal Hearings - 9,496

Stipulations - 6,495

Voluntary Agreements - 22,516

Awards - 2,050

Dismissals - 104

Education Services Information
Responses - 73,916

Website - 444,748 visits; 1,927,264 page views; and, 195,402
forms and publications downloaded