

No. 2023-7828

**Official Order
of the
Texas Commissioner of Workers' Compensation**

Date: 2/28/2023

Subject Considered:

City of Fort Worth
1000 Throckmorton Street
Fort Worth, Texas 76102-6312

Consent Order
DWC Enforcement File No. 29851

General remarks and official action taken:

This is a consent order with the City of Fort Worth (Respondent). The commissioner of the Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation (DWC) considers whether DWC should take disciplinary action against Respondent.

Waiver

Respondent acknowledges that the Texas Labor Code and other applicable laws provide certain rights. Respondent waives all of these rights, and any other procedural rights that apply, in consideration of the entry of this consent order.

Findings of Fact

1. Respondent is a self-insured government entity that provides workers' compensation benefits to its employees in accordance with Tex. Lab. Code Ch. 504.
2. Respondent was classified as "high" tier in the 2007, 2010, 2012, and 2018 Performance Based Oversight (PBO) assessments. Respondent was classified as "average" tier in the 2014, 2016, and 2020 PBO assessments. Respondent was not selected to be tiered in the 2009 PBO assessment.

DWC Audit No. IBA-22-106

3. On [REDACTED] DWC initiated DWC Audit No. IBA-22-106 to determine whether Respondent complied with the Texas Labor Code and related rules on the timely payment of lifetime income benefits (LIBs) and death benefits, as well as timely submitting claim data to DWC.
4. The audit examined death benefit payments that Respondent reported issuing between [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] DWC identified 30 initial death benefit claims for audit. A total of 22 initial death benefit claims failed to meet selection criteria and were dropped from the audit sample. The remaining eight claims were reviewed to determine Respondent's compliance. Of the remaining eight claims, three involved LIBs and five involved death benefits.
5. The audit focused on the accuracy of Respondent's payment of LIBs and death benefits, as well as timely submitting claim data to DWC. The electronic data interchange (EDI) portion of the audit focused on timely reporting death benefit terminations and LIB terminations.

Failure to Timely Pay Accurate Death Benefits

6. Respondent failed to timely pay accurate death benefits for 60% of examined payments (3 out of 5).
7. Specifically, Respondent issued inaccurate payments to beneficiaries over the course of 956 weeks for a total underpayment of [REDACTED]

Failure to Timely Pay Accurate LIBs

8. Respondent failed to timely pay accurate LIBs for 100% of examined payments (3 out of 3).
9. Respondent issued inaccurate payments, to beneficiaries in the examined claims, for a total underpayment of [REDACTED]

Failure to Timely Report Claim Data to DWC

10. Respondent failed to timely report the total number of death benefit terminations for 20% of examined payments (1 out of 5).
11. Specifically, Respondent failed to timely report the true death benefit terminations of examined payments in one instance.
12. Respondent failed to timely report the total number of LIB annual increases paid for 50% of the examined claims. (6 out of 12).
13. Respondent failed to timely report the total number of LIB terminations for 33% of the examined claims. (1 out of 3).

Assessment of Sanction

1. Failure to provide death benefits in a timely and cost-effective manner is harmful to injured employees, their beneficiaries, and the Texas workers' compensation system.
2. DWC relies on claims information insurance carriers submit for many purposes, including, but not limited to, providing required information and reports to the Legislature, ensuring that insurance carriers comply with the Texas Labor Code and DWC rules, and detecting patterns and practices in actions insurance carriers take on claims.
3. In assessing the sanction for this case, DWC fully considered the following factors in Tex. Lab. Code § 415.021(c) and 28 Tex. Admin. Code § 180.26(e):
 - the seriousness of the violation, including the nature, circumstances, consequences, extent, and gravity of the prohibited act;
 - the history and extent of previous administrative violations;
 - the violator's demonstration of good faith, including actions it took to rectify the consequences of the prohibited act;
 - the penalty necessary to deter future violations;
 - whether the administrative violation had a negative impact on the delivery of benefits to an injured employee or their beneficiaries;
 - the history of compliance with EDI requirements;

- to the extent reasonable, the economic benefit resulting from the prohibited act; and
 - other matters that justice may require, including, but not limited to:
 - PBO assessments;
 - prompt and earnest actions to prevent future violations;
 - self-report of the violation;
 - the size of the company or practice;
 - the effect of a sanction on the availability of health care; and
 - evidence of heightened awareness of the legal duty to comply with the Texas Workers' Compensation Act and DWC rules.
4. DWC found the following factors in Tex. Lab. Code § 415.021(c) and 28 Tex. Admin. Code § 180.26(e) to be aggravating: the seriousness of the violation, including the nature, circumstances, consequences, extent, and gravity of the prohibited act; the history and extent of previous administrative violations; the penalty necessary to deter future violations; and whether the administrative violation had a negative impact on the delivery of benefits to an injured employee or their beneficiaries.
5. DWC found the following factors in Tex. Lab. Code § 415.021(c) and 28 Tex. Admin. Code § 180.26(e) to be mitigating: the violator's demonstration of good faith, including actions it took to rectify the consequences of the prohibited act; and other matters that justice may require, specifically Respondent's status as a municipality and lack of economic benefit from the underpayments and steps the third party administrator has implemented to prevent similar violations in the future.
6. Respondent acknowledges communicating with DWC about the relevant statute and rule violations alleged; that the facts establish that the administrative violation(s) occurred; and that the proposed sanction is appropriate, including the factors DWC considered under Tex. Lab. Code § 415.021(c) and 28 Tex. Admin. Code § 180.26(e).
7. Respondent acknowledges that, in assessing the sanction, DWC considered the factors in Tex. Lab. Code § 415.021(c) and 28 Tex. Admin. Code § 180.26(e).

Conclusions of Law

1. The commissioner has jurisdiction over this matter pursuant to Tex. Lab. Code §§ 402.001, 402.00114, 402.00116, 402.00128, 409.021, 414.002, and 414.003.
2. The commissioner has the authority to dispose of this case informally pursuant to Tex. Gov't Code § 2001.056, Tex. Lab. Code §§ 401.021 and 402.00128(b)(6)-(7), and 28 Tex. Admin. Code § 180.26(h) and (i).
3. Respondent has knowingly and voluntarily waived all procedural rights to which it may have been entitled regarding the entry of this order, including, but not limited to, issuance and service of notice of intent to institute disciplinary action, notice of hearing, a public hearing, a proposal for decision, a rehearing by the commissioner, and judicial review.
4. Pursuant to Tex. Lab. Code § 415.021, the commissioner may assess an administrative penalty against a person who commits an administrative violation.
5. Pursuant to Tex. Lab. Code §§ 408.081, 409.023, and 415.002(a)(16), an insurance carrier must pay benefits weekly, as and when the benefits accrue, without order from the commissioner.
6. Pursuant to Tex. Lab. Code § 415.002(a)(16), an insurance carrier or its representative commits an administrative violation each time the carrier fails or refuses to pay benefits from week to week as and when due directly to the person entitled to the benefits.
7. Pursuant to Tex. Lab. Code § 415.002(a)(20) and (22), an insurance carrier or its representative commits an administrative violation each time it violates a DWC rule or a provision of the Texas Workers' Compensation Act.

Failure to Timely Pay Accurate Death Benefits

8. Pursuant to Tex. Lab. Code § 408.061(d), a weekly death benefit may not exceed 100% of the state average weekly wage rounded to the nearest whole dollar.

9. Pursuant to Tex. Lab. Code § 408.181(a) and (b), an insurance carrier must pay accurate death benefits to a legal beneficiary. The amount of a death benefit is equal to 75% of the employee's average weekly wage.
10. Pursuant to Tex. Lab. Code § 409.021 and 28 Tex. Admin. Code §§ 124.3 and 124.7, an insurance carrier is required to initiate payment of death benefits no later than the 15th day after it receives written notice of the injury or the seventh day after the accrual date. It must also notify DWC in writing of its initiation of income or death benefit payments in the manner DWC rules prescribe.
11. Pursuant to 28 Tex. Admin. Code § 124.2(e)(4)-(6), the insurance carrier must notify DWC and the claimant of any changes, resumptions, or terminations involving death benefits.
12. Pursuant to 28 Tex. Admin. Code § 132.17(f), an insurance carrier must initiate payment of death benefits to eligible claimants. If the insurance carrier believes a claimant is not eligible, it must file a notice of dispute of eligibility in the form and manner DWC prescribes.
13. Respondent violated Tex. Lab. Code §§ 408.181; 409.021; 415.002(a)(16), (20), and (22); and 28 Tex. Admin. Code §§ 124.3; 124.7; and 132.17 each time Respondent failed to timely pay accurate death benefits.

Failure to Timely Pay Accurate LIBs

14. Pursuant to Tex. Lab. Code § 408.161(a) and (b), an insurance carrier must pay accurate LIBs to the employee until his or her death. Under Tex. Lab. Code § 408.161(c), the amount of LIBs is equal to 75% percent of the employee's average weekly wage and increased 3% each year.
15. Pursuant to 28 Tex. Admin. Code § 131.1(a) and (c), the insurance carrier must initiate the payment of LIBs without a final decision or order from the commissioner if the employee is eligible. The insurance carrier must initiate the first payment of LIBs on or before the 15th day after the date it reasonably believes the injured employee is eligible.


16. Respondent violated Tex. Lab. Code §§ 408.161(a) - (b), 409.023, 415.002(a)(16), (20), and (22) and 28 Tex. Admin. Code § 131.1(a) and (c), by failing to pay accurate LIBs.

Failure to Timely Report Claim Data to DWC

17. Pursuant to 28 Tex. Admin. Code § 124.2(a) and (b), insurance carriers are required to notify DWC and the injured employee of actions taken or events occurring in a claim, as specified by rule in the form and manner DWC prescribes. Inherent in this duty is the requirement that insurance carriers report this information accurately.
18. Respondent violated Tex. Lab. Code § 415.002(a)(20) and 28 Tex. Admin. Code § 124.2(a) - (b), each time Respondent failed to timely or accurately notify DWC and the injured employee of actions it took or events that occurred in a claim, as specified by rule in the form and manner DWC prescribed.

Order

It is ordered that the City of Fort Worth must pay an administrative penalty of \$15,000 within 30 days from the date of this order. The City of Fort Worth must pay the administrative penalty by company check, cashier's check, or money order and make it payable to the "State of Texas." Mail the administrative penalty to the Texas Department of Insurance, Attn: DWC Enforcement Section, MC AO-9999, P.O. Box 12030, Austin, Texas 78711-2030.



Jeff Nelson
Commissioner
TDI, Division of Workers' Compensation

Approved Form and Content:



Staff Attorney, Enforcement
Compliance and Investigations
TDI, Division of Workers' Compensation

Commissioner's Order
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Unsworn Declaration

STATE OF Texas §
COUNTY OF Tarrant §

Pursuant to the Tex. Civ. Prac. and Rem. Code § 132.001(a), (b), and (d), my name is Chris Lam. I hold the position of Work Comp Mgr and am the authorized representative of City of Fort Worth. My business address is:

200 Texas St, Ft Worth, Tarrant TX 76102
(Street) (City) (County) (State) (ZIP Code)

I am executing this declaration as part of my assigned duties and responsibilities. I declare under penalty of perjury that the facts stated in this document are true and correct.

Chris Lam

Declarant

Executed on 2-22, 2023

Confidential Information Redacted Texas
Labor Code §§402.083 and 402.092