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WCDToday

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WCDToday

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Sally Coen

Administrator's notebook: Looking forward

By Sally Coen, WCD administrator.



Happy New Year! Welcome back to another issue of WCD Today. We've been hard at work adapting to a new way of doing business and meeting the needs of Oregon's workers' compensation community. We have a [new portal application](#) for stakeholders to upload documents, we're expanding our [modernization efforts](#), and we're working on proposals for the legislative session that recently began.

The beginning of 2023 also brings changes to some of our workers' compensation laws. House Bills (HB) 4086 and 4113, and Senate Bill (SB) 1560 became effective Jan. 1. [HB 4086](#) expands who may qualify for death benefits eligibility after a relative's compensable death. The division published an [industry notice](#) in November outlining some of these changes. [HB 4113](#) adds occupational disease presumptions for certain firefighters to include additional cancer types including gynecologic cancers. Finally, [SB 1560](#) replaces the term "alien" to "noncitizen" in over a dozen statutes, including ORS chapter 656.

WCD has geared up for another legislative

session. For the 2023 session, we'll be keeping an eye on workers' compensation bills.

[SB 214](#) is the division's regulatory streamlining bill that will address two areas in the workers' compensation law which are inconsistent with industry practice. First, is a change to ORS 656.204(7) which references average weekly wage when calculating fatality benefits. The bill will align the statute with the correct reference to the state's average weekly wage on the date of injury, bringing the reference in line with current industry practice and other parts of the statute. Second, the bill amends ORS 656.445 to clarify that benefits may be advanced to beneficiaries as well as the injured worker when the insurer does not make payments due to a default.

The division also proposed [SB 213](#), which changes worker leasing coverage reporting. Due to the early deadlines for agencies to submit legislation, we were not able to fully discuss all the changes with affected stakeholders before the bill was filed. To make sure updates to the law are beneficial for all parties, the division is

pausing this concept for the 2023 session. We are fully committed to continuing the conversation to ensure that we have a concept that is fair and balanced for all affected parties.

We announced late last year that workers' compensation pure premium rates are decreasing in 2023 for the tenth year in a row. The Department of Consumer and Business Services (DCBS) released its [premium rate ranking study](#) in November, and Oregon continues to have some of the lowest rates in the nation. DCBS has released this nationally recognized study every two years since 1986 when Oregon had some of the highest workers' compensation premium rates in the nation.

After the eventful last few years, WCD is looking forward to focusing on planned improvements and being a resource for those we serve in 2023. If you have ideas about how we can work together to make a great system even better, please reach out to me at sally.c.coen@dcbs.oregon.gov. ■

Modernization Program updates

By Heather Williamson, Modernization Program manager.



Heather Williamson

The Modernization Program welcomes you to 2023!

We spent 2022 working hard to bring promised updates to fruition.

Our team has grown to support the growth we're working toward. We've added IT positions, a project manager, and a change management analyst. We have also made significant progress on process improvements.

The program added two dedicated IT positions to our team. Nate Johnson, a longtime DCBS employee, has shifted his main focus to creating the data framework that will support the technology needs of future improvements. Dan Myrick joined our team last summer after a long career in process improvements and modernizing IT systems for private and public entities. Dan helps us with system design.

Early this month, Steve Unwin and Darcy Crisp became the newest members of our growing

team. Steve will be the program's project manager, helping us keep track of the many initiatives going on within the program and making sure they all work together to fulfill our goals. Darcy is our change management analyst who will engage and work with stakeholders to make sure the division's goals align with theirs and that they are aware of any updates that will affect them.

Our team is currently working on three process improvement projects. You may have already heard about the expansion of WCD's Web portal to support uploading certain PDF documents to program areas within WCD. Our Operations manager, Shawn Haywood, has been [leading that project](#) and can tell you more about it.

We have created a process, including a self-assessment, to help our managers determine if a report can be transitioned to an electronic format, as opposed to a manual, paper process. We used our Quarterly Claims Processing Performance report to make sure that the process and assessment was valid and would work for any

program area. We look forward to sharing more about this project as it continues to progress.

We've also been working hard on creating an internal program to cross-train within the division. This will allow us to share institutional knowledge and create a solid succession plan. This project will lend continuity to the division's long-term goals and ensure that we can support stakeholders at every level.

2022 was a year where we focused on our foundations. Looking ahead at 2023 will be where we get to build on those foundations and expand our work even further. The Modernization Program is very excited to share our work with you. Please stay in touch: [Follow us on social media](#), sign up for [email updates](#), and visit our [website](#).

Our progress doesn't mean much if it's not what stakeholders need, so please reach out to me with your feedback at heather.h.williamson@dcbs.oregon.gov. Our team is excited for what the new year will bring! ■

Electronic document upload application: A step forward in the digital age

By Shawn Haywood, Operations manager.



Shawn Haywood

As we reflect on the pandemic, it's easy to think of the negative impacts COVID had on our families, communities,

and industry. However, positive outcomes have occurred also as a result of the sudden change in business processes. For example, the Workers' Compensation Division (WCD) quickly transitioned to a hybrid work environment allowing us to continue providing important services for injured workers and all stakeholders.

In response to our quickly changing work environment, WCD recognized the need to provide additional resources for insurers, self-insured employers, and service companies. These organizations also had to quickly decentralize and switch to electronic documents. As a result, WCD's Modernization Program Manager Heather Williamson collaborated with the Information

Technology & Research (IT&R) team to identify a tool that would allow stakeholders to quickly transfer certain requested documents in a secure, digital environment.

The electronic document upload application is a new feature of WCD's Web portal. This application allows portal users to transfer certain requested documents to WCD. Once a user is created in the portal there are only five simple steps required to upload a document. This includes logging into the portal, selecting the document upload tab, filling in a couple of required fields, attaching a PDF file, and hitting the upload button.

This project was a collaboration between many people. A group of dedicated WCD employees worked hard to identify documents that would be best suited for inclusion. The DCBS technology team helped us bridge gaps in current processes to implement the new application. Managers and staff helped with testing and identifying issues before the application was launched for stakeholder use. The next time you interact with someone using the application, please pass on

your thanks to everyone that worked so tirelessly on this project.

While the electronic document upload application doesn't replace other options available to stakeholders to send us documents, the new application is an additional tool that is quick and easy to use. And these efforts will move us closer to discontinuing more difficult means such as secure email through Biscom. Biscom requires a one-to-one connection between specific WCD employees and stakeholders, while the electronic document upload application allows stakeholders to submit documents which can be accessed by a group of approved WCD employees. This allows multiple users in an organization to submit documents while ensuring there will always be someone available to access the uploaded documents and answer questions at WCD.

If your organization would like help getting started with the application, please contact WCD at 503-947-7565. ■

Preferred Worker Program success story: Two septuagenarian truck drivers, a husband and wife, use the Preferred Worker Program to continue life-long careers

By Bob Williams, MA, worksite modification consultant



Bob Williams

This past year, I helped two exceptional truck drivers continue their careers by providing worksite modifications to overcome several job obstacles that would

have otherwise ended their driving days.

Billy “Mikey” Mohr and Martha “Georgie” McClanahan have well over a hundred years of truck driving experience between them. Mikey was brought home from the hospital as a baby in a tow truck. Georgie writes poetry, often about driving truck (“Detours here, detours there. Is life a detour everywhere? Or are detours in life maybe what we all can share?”). The couple was recognized by the American Truck Historical Society on its [Wall of Fame](#), Mikey in 2013 and Georgie in 2019. To say that truck driving is life for this husband-and-wife couple is an understatement.

In mid-2022, both Georgie and Mikey were hired to drive wood chip trucks for Quicksilver Contracting Company in Bend, Oregon. Wood chip trucks are among the largest trucks on the road in Oregon, with trailers 13-feet high and extending 55-feet long behind a very large tractor truck.

Several times a day, drivers are required to manually crank tarps spanning the length of the trailers over the top to prevent wood chips from blowing out onto following traffic. This is done with a very long crank handle that the worker can reach from the ground and that extends up to the top of the trailer. These long tarps that already exceed 50 pounds, can sometimes bow or sag in the middle of the trailer, greatly adding to the force required to roll the tarp from side to side. Working in Central Oregon also meant Georgie and Mikey had to put 90-pound steel snow chains on both of their trucks and the rear axle of the trailers several times a day.



Preferred workers Mikey Mohr and Georgie McClanahan.





Working in Central Oregon means taking snow chains on and off several times a day.

Both Georgie and Mikey had previous on-the-job shoulder injuries resulting in permanent weight limits for what they are able to lift, carry, push, and pull. Georgie could handle ten pounds and Mikey 25 pounds. Neither was able to do the daily manual tarping themselves nor handle and carry the steel snow chains when the winter weather came.

In June 2022, they told their employer, Quicksilver, about the Preferred Worker Program (PWP) resources, including the premium exemption insurance benefit, employment purchase benefits for work clothes, and, of course, the worksite modification benefit of up to \$35,000 for big equipment modifications that would eliminate the high-force tasks of tarping and chaining that are beyond their physical limitations. This was the first time their employer had ever heard about the program but they enthusiastically cooperated in the process of modifying two trucks.

The Preferred Worker Program was able to purchase the bulk of hardware and labor from local Bend businesses and equip the trucks with powered automatic trailer tarps and automatic OnSpot snow chains for the trucks and



A flip of a switch engages the snow chains.

trailer axles. Through the program's benefits, they were able to lower the trucks' cab steps to ease the entry and exit from the cabs and installed powered air-release fifth wheel couplings so the trucks can be disconnected from the trailers with the push of a button. Georgie and Mikey were also provided with long-handled window cleaning tools so the drivers could stay on the ground and still clear their windshields and mirrors.

Now, these two preferred workers are set up for continued, successful driving careers for as long as they wish. The big manual tasks that used to require too much force for them to be able to perform, that would have ended their livelihoods,



Each truck now has automatic snow chains.

have been mechanized and now are completed with the push of a button inside their heated cabs. The program has been a significant help to a small Bend business, allowing it to get and keep great employees in a very tight labor market, flourish with zero-cost workers' compensation insurance for three years, cut its labor costs in half with wage subsidies for six months, and receive \$52,230 in capital fleet improvements on two of its trucks that will serve the workers and the company for years to come. By using local vendors, it helped boost those businesses' bottom lines as well.

Quicksilver stated it was very happy with the



Lowering the steps next to the cab allow easy entry and exit.

outcomes for the company and their drivers. Georgie recently reported that she was able to take her truck to and from La Pine to White City, twice, without having to worry about chaining up over the snowy mountain passes. Since this worksite modification was completed, the Bend-area vendor for the powered automatic tarps and snow chains has referred other Bend-area trucking companies to the Preferred Worker Program to access similar modification equipment for their drivers. A virtuous circle of helping workers, employers, and vendors. ■



Barbra Anderson

New Ombuds for Oregon Workers: Barbra Anderson succeeds Jennifer Flood

By Autumn Blake, communications coordinator.

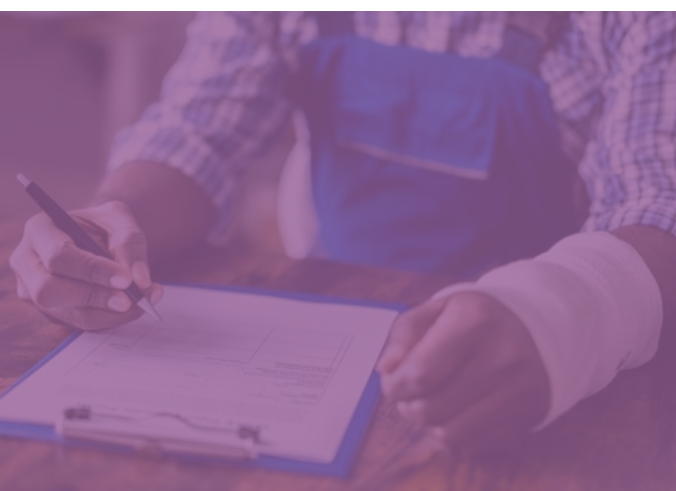
After 44 years of public service, Jennifer Flood retired as the Ombuds for Oregon Workers on Dec. 31, 2022. Jennifer was an incredible asset to Oregon's workers and a valuable resource to everyone involved in the workers' compensation and safe employment systems.

Jennifer started in state service in 1978 with the Executive Department but quickly moved to the Department of Commerce, what is now known as the Department of Consumer and Business Services, in what was the Workers' Compensation Department. She became the ombudsman for injured workers 17 years ago. The position and office work as an independent advocate for Oregon's workers as they navigate the workers' compensation system. When the office changed its name in January 2022 to the Ombuds Office for Oregon Workers, it also expanded its role to help workers protect their rights under the Oregon Safe Employment Act.

DCBS Director Andrew Stolfi, with the approval of former Gov. Brown, selected Barbra Anderson

as the new ombuds. Barbra started her career in public service in 1999 with WCD. She began as an office specialist in the Investigations and Managed Care Organization Program. She was then promoted to reimbursement specialist in the Self-Insurance, Registration, and Reimbursements unit. After working in that position for several years and becoming the lead specialist, she became manager of the unit. Barbra moved to the Employer Compliance unit as the manager of their team. She has also served on rotation as the Audit manager. Most recently, Barbra was the Employment Services Team manager.

Barbra has a strong commitment to service outside of office hours as well. She has been a court-appointed special advocate for children in Marion County, a program that helps children find safe and permanent homes. She raised money and volunteered her time building fences (in her wedding dress!) with the nonprofit Fences for Fido. Barbra's latest endeavor is serving on the board of directors for Kids Chance of Oregon, which provides financial support to further the education of the children of Oregon workers



who have been severely injured, totally disabled, or killed as a result of a work-related injury or occupational disease.

All of us at WCD are excited to see Barb take this new position and see the way she carries on the legacy Jennifer established as well as the new vision she has for the office. ■

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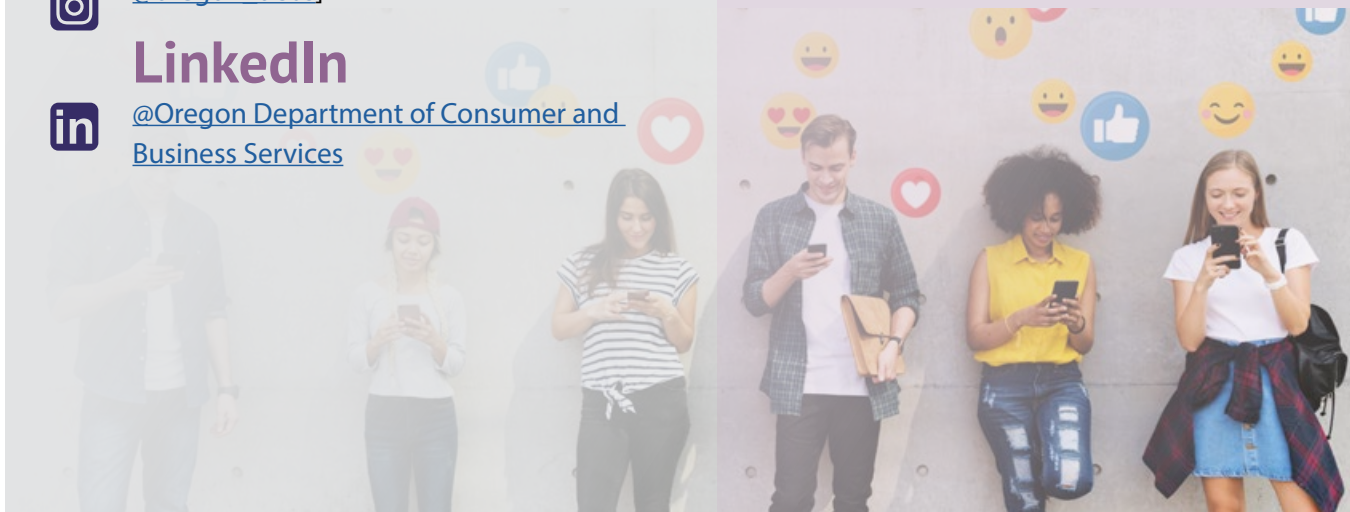


[@Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services](#)

Social media has been around for decades. But did you know there are regular updates about WCD on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram?

You can get timely and relevant news about our division by following DCBS on your favorite platforms; WCD has its own pages you can follow, too, on YouTube and Facebook.

You can also do a search within Facebook, LinkedIn, or Instagram for #OregonWCD to see just our division's posts on those pages. We share updates on the Modernization Program's projects, team member profiles, up-to-date information about services offered by WCD, and much more. Just click one of the icons on the left to start following. ■



2022 Virtual Workers' Compensation Educational Conference Win!

By Jennifer Hlad, conference and training coordinator.



Jennifer Hlad

If you have suggestions or comments, call Conference and Training Coordinator Jennifer Hlad at 503-947-7515 or email jennifer.l.hlad@oregon.gov.

The 20th annual Workers' Compensation Educational Conference was hosted virtually this year.

The conference broadcast live Nov. 1-3, 2022, and streamed on demand to over 130 attendees until Nov. 21, 2022.

WCD hosted the virtual conference in partnership with the International Workers' Compensation Foundation (IWCF). IWCF is a nonprofit organization established in 1988 dedicated to workers' compensation education and outreach. The foundation sponsors conferences in 11 states, including Oregon.

The conference provided over nine hours of continuing education units (CEU), providing up-to-date information to those who play a part in the Oregon workers' compensation system. With the conference streaming online over the span of several weeks, attendees were able to watch classes on their schedule while still receiving professional credits for their time. Attendees noted they enjoyed how WCD worked to make the virtual conference interactive by featuring live video question-and-answer sessions after each class. We would

like to thank all the attendees who joined us for our live sessions, participated in the live Q&A, and visited the virtual exhibitor hall.

"This event was a great opportunity for the community to come together and learn more about the Oregon workers' compensation system," said Chris Sutter, the 2022 conference project manager. "We couldn't have accomplished our goals without our amazing staff and knowledgeable subject matter experts."

The virtual conference included many interesting topics, such as:

- Workers' compensation basics
- Recordables and reportables, a collaboration between Oregon OSHA and Oregon WCD
- Case law update from the Workers' Compensation Board
- Return-to-work topics
- Oregon workers' compensation system overview with the National Council on Compensation Insurance (NCCI)
- How to find rules and statutes

The success of our virtual conference was due to the tireless work of the entire project team. It was a pleasure to share the knowledge of our talented presenters with all of the virtual attendees.

If you have topic ideas or suggestions for our upcoming 2023 annual Workers' Compensation Educational Conference, please contact Jenn at 971-719-6023 or email Jennifer.L.Hlad@DCBS.Oregon.gov. ■

