

RCW 34.05.110 Violations of state law or agency rule by small businesses—Notice requirements—Waiver of penalty for first-time paperwork violations. (1) Agencies must provide to a small business a copy of the state law or agency rule that a small business is violating and a period of at least seven calendar days to correct the violation before the agency may impose any fines, civil penalties, or administrative sanctions for a violation of a state law or agency rule by a small business. If no correction is possible or if an agency is acting in response to a complaint made by a third party and the third party would be disadvantaged by the application of this subsection, the requirements in this subsection do not apply.

(2) Except as provided in subsection (4) of this section, agencies shall waive any fines, civil penalties, or administrative sanctions for first-time paperwork violations by a small business.

(3) When an agency waives a fine, penalty, or sanction under this section, when possible it shall require the small business to correct the violation within a reasonable period of time, in a manner specified by the agency. If correction is impossible, no correction may be required and failure to correct is not grounds for reinstatement of fines, penalties, or sanctions under subsection (5) (b) of this section.

(4) Exceptions to requirements of subsection (1) of this section and the waiver requirement in subsection (2) of this section may be made for any of the following reasons:

(a) The agency head determines that the effect of the violation or waiver presents a direct danger to the public health, results in a loss of income or benefits to an employee, poses a potentially significant threat to human health or the environment, or causes serious harm to the public interest;

(b) The violation involves a knowing or willful violation;

(c) The violation is of a requirement concerning the assessment, collection, or administration of any tax, tax program, debt, revenue, receipt, a regulated entity's financial filings, or insurance rate or form filing;

(d) The requirements of this section are in conflict with federal law or program requirements, federal requirements that are a prescribed condition to the allocation of federal funds to the state, or the requirements for eligibility of employers in this state for federal unemployment tax credits, as determined by the agency head;

(e) The small business committing the violation previously violated a substantially similar requirement; or

(f) The owner or operator of the small business committing the violation owns or operates, or owned or operated a different small business which previously violated a substantially similar requirement.

(5) (a) Nothing in this section prohibits an agency from waiving fines, civil penalties, or administrative sanctions incurred by a small business for a paperwork violation that is not a first-time offense.

(b) Any fine, civil penalty, or administrative sanction that is waived under this section may be reinstated and imposed in addition to any additional fines, penalties, or administrative sanctions associated with a subsequent violation for noncompliance with a substantially similar paperwork requirement, or failure to correct the previous violation as required by the agency under subsection (3) of this section.

(6) Nothing in this section may be construed to diminish the responsibility for any citizen or business to apply for and obtain a permit, license, or authorizing document that is required to engage in a regulated activity, or otherwise comply with state or federal law.

(7) Nothing in this section shall be construed to apply to small businesses required to provide accurate and complete information and documentation in relation to any claim for payment of state or federal funds or who are licensed or certified to provide care and services to vulnerable adults or children.

(8) Nothing in this section affects the attorney general's authority to impose fines, civil penalties, or administrative sanctions as otherwise authorized by law; nor shall this section affect the attorney general's authority to enforce the consumer protection act, chapter 19.86 RCW.

(9) As used in this section:

(a) "Small business" means a business with two hundred fifty or fewer employees or a gross revenue of less than seven million dollars annually as reported on its most recent federal income tax return or its most recent return filed with the department of revenue.

(b) "Paperwork violation" means the violation of any statutory or regulatory requirement that mandates the collection of information by an agency, or the collection, posting, or retention of information by a small business. This includes but is not limited to requirements in the Revised Code of Washington, the Washington Administrative Code, the Washington State Register, or any other agency directive.

(c) "First-time paperwork violation" means the first instance of a particular or substantially similar paperwork violation. [2011 c 18 § 1; 2010 c 194 § 1; 2009 c 358 § 1.]