

WAC 296-20-220 Special rules for evaluation of permanent bodily impairment. (1) Evaluations of permanent bodily impairment using categories require uniformity in procedure and terminology. The following rules have been enacted to produce this uniformity and shall apply to all evaluations of permanent impairment of an unspecified nature.

(a) Gradations of relative severity shall be expressed by the words "minimal," "mild," "moderate" and "marked" in an ascending scale. "Minimal" shall describe deviations from normal responses which are not medically significant. "Mild," "moderate" and "marked" shall describe ranges of medically significant deviations from normal responses. "Mild" shall describe the least severe third. "Moderate" shall describe the middle third. "Marked" shall describe the most severe third.

(b) "Permanent" describes those conditions which are fixed, lasting and stable, and from which within the limits of medical probability, further recovery is not expected.

(c) "Impairment" means a loss of physical or mental function.

(d) "Total bodily impairment," as used in these rules, is the loss of physical or mental function which is essentially complete short of death.

(e) The examiner shall not assign a percentage figure for permanent bodily impairment described in the categories established herein.

(f) The method of evaluating impairment levels is by selection of the appropriate level of impairment. These descriptive levels are called "categories." Assessments of the level of impairment are to be made by comparing the condition of the injured workman with the conditions described in the categories and selecting the most appropriate category.

These rules and categories for various bodily areas and systems provide a comprehensive system for the measurement of disabling conditions which are not already provided for in the list of specified permanent partial disabilities in RCW 51.32.080(1). Disabilities resulting from loss of central visual acuity, loss of an eye by enucleation, loss of hearing, amputation or loss of function of the extremities will continue to be evaluated as elsewhere provided in RCW 51.32.080.

The categories have been classified in percentages in reasonable proportion to total bodily impairment for the purpose of determining the proper award. Provision has been made for correctly weighing the overall impairment due to particular injuries or occupational disease in cases in which there are preexisting impairments.

(g) The categories of the various bodily areas and systems are listed in the order of increasing impairment except as otherwise specified. Where several categories are given for the evaluation of the extent of permanent bodily impairment, the impairments in the higher numbered categories, unless otherwise specified, include the impairments in the lesser numbered categories. No category for a condition due to an injury shall be selected unless that condition is permanent as defined by these rules.

The examiner shall select the one category which most accurately indicates the overall degree of permanent impairment unless otherwise instructed. Where there is language in more than one category which may appear applicable, the category which most accurately reflects the overall impairment shall be selected.

The categories include appropriate subjective complaints in an ascending scale in keeping with the severity of objective findings, thus a higher or lower category is not to be selected purely on the basis of unusually great or minor complaints.

(h) When the examination discloses a preexisting permanent bodily impairment in the area of the injury, the examiner shall report the findings and any category of impairment appropriate to the worker's condition prior to the industrial injury in addition to the findings and the categories appropriate to the worker's condition after the injury.

(i) Objective physical or clinical findings are those findings on examination which are independent of voluntary action and can be seen, felt, or consistently measured by examiners.

(j) Subjective complaints or symptoms are those perceived only by the senses and feelings of the person being examined which cannot be independently proved or established.

(k) Muscle spasm as used in these rules is an involuntary contraction of a muscle or group of muscles of a more than momentary nature.

(l) An involuntary action is one performed independently of the will.

(m) These special rules for evaluation of permanent bodily impairment shall apply to all examinations for the evaluation of impairment, in accordance with RCW 51.32.080, for the body areas or systems covered by or enumerated in WAC 296-20-230 through 296-20-660.

(n) The rules for evaluation of each body area or system are an integral part of the categories for that body area or system.

(o) In cases of injury or occupational disease of bodily areas and/or systems which are not included in these categories or rules and which do not involve loss of hearing, loss of central visual acuity, loss of an eye by enucleation or loss of the extremities or use thereof, examiners shall determine the impairment of such bodily areas and/or systems in terms of percentage of total bodily impairment.

(p) The words used in the categories of impairments, in the rules for evaluation of specific impairments, the general rules, and the special rules shall be deemed, unless the context indicates the contrary, to have their general and accepted medical meanings.

(q) The rating of impairment due to total joint replacement shall be in accordance with the limitation of motion guidelines as set forth in the "Guides to the Evaluation of Permanent Impairment" of American Medical Association, with department of labor and industries acknowledgement of responsibility for failure of prostheses beyond the seven year limitation.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 51.04.020, 51.04.030, 51.32.112, 51.32.114 and 51.36.015. WSR 97-09-036, § 296-20-220, filed 4/14/97 effective 5/15/97. Statutory Authority: RCW 51.04.030 and 51.16.035. WSR 79-12-086 (Order 79-18), § 296-20-220, filed 11/30/79, effective 1/1/80; Order 74-32, § 296-20-220, filed 6/21/74, effective 10/1/74.]