Chapter 51.24 RCW
ACTIONS AT LAW FOR INJURY OR DEATH

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RCW 51.24.020 Action against employer for intentional injury. If injury results to a worker from the deliberate intention of his or her employer to produce such injury, the worker or beneficiary of the worker shall have the privilege to take under this title and also have cause of action against the employer as if this title had not been enacted, for any damages in excess of compensation and benefits paid or payable under this title. [1984 c 218 s 2; 1977 ex.s. c 350 s 31; 1973 1st ex.s. c 154 s 94; 1961 c 23 s 51.24.020. Prior: 1957 c 70 s 24; prior: 1927 c 310 s 5, part; 1919 c 131 s 5, part; 1911 c 74 s 6, part; RRS s 7680, part.]

Severability—1973 1st ex.s. c 154: See note following RCW 2.12.030.

RCW 51.24.030 Action against third person—Election by injured person or beneficiary—Underinsured motorist insurance coverage. (1) If a third person, not in a worker's same employ, is or may become liable to pay damages on account of a worker's injury for which benefits and compensation are provided under this title, the injured worker or beneficiary may elect to seek damages from the third person.

(2) In every action brought under this section, the plaintiff shall give notice to the department or self-insurer when the action is filed. The department or self-insurer may file a notice of statutory interest in recovery. When such notice has been filed by the department or self-insurer, the parties shall thereafter serve copies of all notices, motions, pleadings, and other process on the department or self-insurer. The department or self-insurer may then intervene as a party in the action to protect its statutory interest in recovery.

(3) For the purposes of this chapter, "injury" shall include any physical or mental condition, disease, ailment or loss, including death, for which compensation and benefits are paid or payable under this title.

(4) Damages recoverable by a worker or beneficiary pursuant to the underinsured motorist coverage of an insurance policy shall be subject to this chapter only if the owner of the policy is the employer of the injured worker.

(5) For the purposes of this chapter, "recovery" includes all damages except loss of consortium. [1995 c 199 s 2; 1987 c 212 s 1701; 1986 c 58 s 1; 1984 c 218 s 3; 1977 ex.s. c 85 s 1.]

Severability—1995 c 199: See note following RCW 51.12.120.

RCW 51.24.035 Immunity of design professional and employees. (1) Notwithstanding RCW 51.24.030(1), the injured worker or beneficiary may not seek damages against a design professional who is a third person and who has been retained to perform professional services on a construction project, or any employee of a design professional who is assisting or representing the design professional in the performance of professional services on the site of the construction project, unless responsibility for safety practices is specifically assumed by contract, the provisions of which were mutually negotiated, or the design professional actually exercised control over the portion of the premises where the worker was injured.

(2) The immunity provided by this section does not apply to the negligent preparation of design plans and specifications.

(3) For the purposes of this section, "design professional" means an architect, professional engineer, land surveyor, or landscape architect, who is licensed or authorized by law to practice such profession, or any corporation organized under chapter 18.100 RCW or authorized under RCW 18.08.420 or 18.43.130 to render design services through the practice of one or more of such professions. [1987 c 212 s 1801.]

RCW 51.24.040 Election or recovery no bar to compensation or benefits. The injured worker or beneficiary shall be entitled to the full compensation and benefits provided by this title regardless of any election or recovery made under this chapter. [1977 ex.s. c 85 s 2.]

RCW 51.24.050 Assignment of cause of action—Disposition of recovered amount. (1) An election not to proceed against the third person operates as an assignment of the cause of action to the department or self-insurer, which may prosecute or compromise the action in its discretion in the name of the injured worker, beneficiary or legal representative.

(2) If an injury to a worker results in the worker's death, the department or self-insurer to which the cause of action has been assigned may petition a court for the appointment of a special personal representative for the limited purpose of maintaining an action under this chapter and chapter 4.20 RCW.

(3) If a beneficiary is a minor child, an election not to proceed against a third person on such beneficiary's cause of action may be exercised by the beneficiary's legal custodian or guardian.

(4) Any recovery made by the department or self-insurer shall be distributed as follows:

(a) The department or self-insurer shall be paid the expenses incurred in making the recovery including reasonable costs of legal services;

(b) The injured worker or beneficiary shall be paid twenty-five percent of the balance of the recovery made, which shall not be subject to subsection (5) of this section: PROVIDED, That in the event of a compromise and settlement by the parties, the injured worker or beneficiary may agree to a sum less than twenty-five percent;

(c) The department and/or self-insurer shall be paid the compensation and benefits paid to or on behalf of the injured worker or beneficiary by the department and/or self-insurer; and

(d) The injured worker or beneficiary shall be paid any remaining balance.

(5) Thereafter no payment shall be made to or on behalf of a worker or beneficiary by the department and/or self-insurer for such injury until the amount of any further compensation and benefits shall equal any such remaining balance. Thereafter, such benefits shall be paid by the department and/or self-insurer to or on behalf of the worker or beneficiary as though no recovery had been made from a third person.

(6) When the cause of action has been assigned to the self-insurer and compensation and benefits have been paid and/or are payable from state funds for the same injury:

(a) The prosecution of such cause of action shall also be for the benefit of the department to the extent of compensation and benefits paid and payable from state funds;

(b) Any compromise or settlement of such cause of action which results in less than the entitlement under this title is void unless made with the written approval of the department;

(c) The department shall be reimbursed for compensation and benefits paid from state funds;

(d) The department shall bear its proportionate share of the costs and reasonable attorneys' fees incurred by the self-insurer in obtaining the award or settlement; and

(e) Any remaining balance under subsection (4)(d) of this section shall be applied, under subsection (5) of this section, to reduce the obligations of the department and self-insurer to pay further compensation and benefits in proportion to which the obligations of each bear to the remaining entitlement of the worker or beneficiary. [1995 c 199 s 3; 1984 c 218 s 4; 1983 c 211 s 1; 1977 ex.s. c 85 s 3.]

Severability—1995 c 199: See note following RCW 51.12.120.

Applicability—1983 c 211: "Sections 1 and 2 of this act apply to all actions against third persons in which judgment or settlement of the underlying action has not taken place prior to July 24, 1983." [1983 c 211 s 3.] "Sections 1 and 2 of this act" consist of the 1983 amendments of RCW 51.24.050 and 51.24.060.

Severability—1983 c 211: "If any provision of this act or its application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the

remainder of the act or the application of the provision to other persons or circumstances is not affected." [1983 c 211 s 4.]

RCW 51.24.060 Distribution of amount recovered—Lien. (1) If the injured worker or beneficiary elects to seek damages from the third person, any recovery made shall be distributed as follows:

(a) The costs and reasonable attorneys' fees shall be paid proportionately by the injured worker or beneficiary and the department and/or self-insurer: PROVIDED, That the department and/or self-insurer may require court approval of costs and attorneys' fees or may petition a court for determination of the reasonableness of costs and attorneys' fees;

(b) The injured worker or beneficiary shall be paid 25 percent of the balance of the award: PROVIDED, That in the event of a compromise and settlement by the parties, the injured worker or beneficiary may agree to a sum less than 25 percent;

(c) The department and/or self-insurer shall be paid the balance of the recovery made, but only to the extent necessary to reimburse the department and/or self-insurer for benefits paid;

(i) The department and/or self-insurer shall bear its proportionate share of the costs and reasonable attorneys' fees incurred by the worker or beneficiary to the extent of the benefits paid under this title: PROVIDED, That the department's and/or self-insurer's proportionate share shall not exceed 100 percent of the costs and reasonable attorneys' fees;

(ii) The department's and/or self-insurer's proportionate share of the costs and reasonable attorneys' fees shall be determined by dividing the gross recovery amount into the benefits paid amount and multiplying this percentage times the costs and reasonable attorneys' fees incurred by the worker or beneficiary;

(iii) The department's and/or self-insurer's reimbursement share shall be determined by subtracting their proportionate share of the costs and reasonable attorneys' fees from the benefits paid amount;

(d) Any remaining balance shall be paid to the injured worker or beneficiary; and

(e) Thereafter no payment shall be made to or on behalf of a worker or beneficiary by the department and/or self-insurer for such injury until the amount of any further compensation and benefits shall equal any such remaining balance minus the department's and/or self-insurer's proportionate share of the costs and reasonable attorneys' fees in regards to the remaining balance. This proportionate share shall be determined by dividing the gross recovery amount into the remaining balance amount and multiplying this percentage times the costs and reasonable attorneys' fees incurred by the worker or beneficiary. Thereafter, such benefits shall be paid by the department and/or self-insurer to or on behalf of the worker or beneficiary as though no recovery had been made from a third person.

(2) The recovery made shall be subject to a lien by the department and/or self-insurer for its share under this section.

(3) The department or self-insurer has sole discretion to compromise the amount of its lien. In deciding whether or to what extent to compromise its lien, the department or self-insurer shall consider at least the following:

(a) The likelihood of collection of the award or settlement as may be affected by insurance coverage, solvency, or other factors relating to the third person;

(b) Factual and legal issues of liability as between the injured worker or beneficiary and the third person. Such issues include, but are not limited to, possible contributory negligence and novel theories of liability; and

(c) Problems of proof faced in obtaining the award or settlement.

(4) In an action under this section, the self-insurer may act on behalf and for the benefit of the department to the extent of any compensation and benefits paid or payable from state funds.

(5) It shall be the duty of the person to whom any recovery is paid before distribution under this section to advise the department or self-insurer of the fact and amount of such recovery, the costs and reasonable attorneys' fees associated with the recovery, and to distribute the recovery in compliance with this section.

(6) The distribution of any recovery made by award or settlement of the third party action shall be confirmed by department order pursuant to RCW 51.52.050. In the event the order of distribution becomes final under chapter 51.52 RCW, the director or the director's designee may file with the clerk of any county within the state a warrant in the amount of the sum representing the unpaid lien plus interest accruing from the date the order became final. The clerk of the county in which the warrant is filed shall immediately designate a superior court cause number for such warrant and the clerk shall cause to be entered in the judgment docket under the superior court cause number assigned to the warrant, the name of such worker or beneficiary mentioned in the warrant, the amount of the unpaid lien plus interest accrued and the date when the warrant was filed. The amount of such warrant as docketed shall become a lien upon the title to and interest in all real and personal property of the injured worker or beneficiary against whom the warrant is issued, the same as a judgment in a civil case docketed in the office of such clerk. The sheriff shall then proceed in the same manner and with like effect as prescribed by law with respect to execution or other process issued against rights or property upon judgment in the superior court. Such warrant so docketed shall be sufficient to support the issuance of writs of garnishment in favor of the department in the manner provided by law in the case of judgment, wholly or partially unsatisfied. The clerk of the court shall be entitled to a filing fee under RCW 36.18.012(10), which shall be added to the amount of the warrant. A copy of such warrant shall be mailed to the injured worker or beneficiary within three days of filing with the clerk.

(7) The director, or the director's designee, may issue to any person, firm, corporation, municipal corporation, political subdivision of the state, public corporation, or agency of the state, a notice and order to withhold and deliver property of any kind if he or she has reason to believe that there is in the possession of such person, firm, corporation, municipal corporation, political subdivision of the state, public corporation, or agency of the state, property which is due, owing, or belonging to any worker or beneficiary upon whom a warrant has been served by the department for payments due to the state fund. The notice and order to withhold and deliver shall be served by the sheriff of the county or by the sheriff's deputy; by a method for which receipt can be confirmed or tracked; or by any authorized representatives of the director. Any person, firm, corporation, municipal corporation, political

subdivision of the state, public corporation, or agency of the state upon whom service has been made shall answer the notice within 20 days exclusive of the day of service, under oath and in writing, and shall make true answers to the matters inquired of in the notice and order to withhold and deliver. In the event there is in the possession of the party named and served with such notice and order, any property which may be subject to the claim of the department, such property shall be delivered forthwith to the director or the director's authorized representative upon demand. If the party served and named in the notice and order fails to answer the notice and order within the time prescribed in this section, the court may, after the time to answer such order has expired, render judgment by default against the party named in the notice for the full amount claimed by the director in the notice together with costs. In the event that a notice to withhold and deliver is served upon an employer and the property found to be subject thereto is wages, the employer may assert in the answer to all exemptions provided for by chapter 6.27 RCW to which the wage earner may be entitled. [2026 c 77 s 28; 2011 c 290 s 4; 2001 c 146 s 9; 1995 c 199 s 4; 1993 c 496 s 2; 1987 c 442 s 1118; 1986 c 305 s 403; 1984 c 218 s 5; 1983 c 211 s 2; 1977 ex.s. c 85 s 4.]

Severability—1995 c 199: See note following RCW 51.12.120.

Effective date—Application—1993 c 496: See notes following RCW 4.22.070.

Preamble—Report to legislature—Applicability—Severability—1986 c 305: See notes following RCW 4.16.160.

Applicability—Severability—1983 c 211: See notes following RCW 51.24.050.

RCW 51.24.070 Required election—Procedures—Right of reelection. (1) The department or self-insurer may require the injured worker or beneficiary to exercise the right of election under this chapter by serving a written demand by mail, or if the injured worker or beneficiary chooses, the department may send by secure electronic means.

(2) Unless an election is made within 60 days of the receipt of the demand, and unless an action is instituted or settled within the time granted by the department or self-insurer, the injured worker or beneficiary is deemed to have assigned the action to the department or self-insurer. The department or self-insurer shall allow the worker or beneficiary at least 90 days from the election to institute or settle the action. When a beneficiary is a minor child the demand shall be served upon the legal custodian or guardian of such beneficiary.

(3) If an action which has been filed is not diligently prosecuted, the department or self-insurer may petition the court in which the action is pending for an order assigning the cause of action to the department or self-insurer. Upon a sufficient showing of a lack of diligent prosecution the court in its discretion may issue the order.

(4) If the department or self-insurer has taken an assignment of the third party cause of action under subsection (2) of this section, the injured worker or beneficiary may, at the discretion of the

department or self-insurer, exercise a right of reelection and assume the cause of action subject to reimbursement of litigation expenses incurred by the department or self-insurer. [2026 c 77 s 29; 1984 c 218 s 6; 1977 ex.s. c 85 s 5.]

RCW 51.24.080 Notice of election or copy of complaint to department or self-insurer—Filing notice. (1) If the injured worker or beneficiary elects to seek damages from the third person, notice of the election must be given to the department or self-insurer using an electronic or nonelectronic method by which the notice can be tracked or the delivery can be confirmed. If an action is filed by the injured worker or beneficiary, a copy of the complaint must be mailed to the department or self-insurer using an electronic or nonelectronic method by which the notice can be tracked or the delivery can be confirmed.

(2) A return showing service of the notice on the department or self-insurer shall be filed with the court but shall not be part of the record except as necessary to give notice to the defendant of the lien imposed by RCW 51.24.060(2). [2026 c 77 s 30; 1977 ex.s. c 85 s 6.]

RCW 51.24.090 Compromise or settlement less than benefits. (1) Any compromise or settlement of the third party cause of action by the injured worker or beneficiary which results in less than the entitlement under this title is void unless made with the written approval of the department or self-insurer. For a state fund claim, the department shall provide reasonable ongoing notice to the employer of the status of any compromise or settlement negotiations between the injured worker or beneficiary and the department, for the employer's information. For a state fund claim, notice to the employer is not required if the costs of the claim or claims are no longer included in the calculation of the employer's experience factor used to determine premiums; or if the employer cannot be located, is no longer in business, or requests that they not receive ongoing notice after the department provides timely notice of the settlement process to the employer. For the purposes of this chapter, "entitlement" means benefits and compensation paid and estimated by the department to be paid in the future.

(2) If a compromise or settlement is void because of subsection (1) of this section, the department or self-insurer may petition the court in which the action was filed for an order assigning the cause of action to the department or self-insurer. If an action has not been filed, the department or self-insurer may proceed as provided in chapter 7.24 RCW. [2017 c 145 s 1; 1995 c 199 s 5; 1984 c 218 s 7; 1977 ex.s. c 85 s 7.]

Severability—1995 c 199: See note following RCW 51.12.120.

RCW 51.24.100 Right to compensation not pleadable or admissible—Challenge to right to bring action. The fact that the injured worker or beneficiary is entitled to compensation under this title shall not be pleaded or admissible in evidence in any third party action under this chapter. Any challenge of the right to bring such

action shall be made by supplemental pleadings only and shall be decided by the court as a matter of law. [1977 ex.s. c 85 s 8.]

RCW 51.24.110 Assigned cases—Special assistant attorneys general. (1) Actions against third persons that are assigned by the claimant to the department, voluntarily or by operation of law in accordance with chapter 51.24 RCW, may be prosecuted by special assistant attorneys general.

(2) The attorney general shall select special assistant attorneys general from a list compiled by the department and the Washington state bar association. The attorney general, in conjunction with the department and the Washington state bar association, shall promulgate rules and regulations outlining the criteria and the procedure by which private attorneys may have their names placed on the list of attorneys available for appointment as special assistant attorneys general to litigate third party actions under subsection (1) of this section. [1984 c 218 s 1.]

RCW 51.24.120 Rules. The department may adopt, amend, and rescind under chapter 34.05 RCW such rules as may be necessary to the administration of this chapter. [1984 c 218 s 8.]

RCW 51.24.900 Application—1977 ex.s. c 85. This 1977 amendatory act shall apply only to causes of action which arise on or after its effective date. [1977 ex.s. c 85 s 9.]

RCW 51.24.902 Application—1984 c 218. This act applies to all causes of action against third persons in which judgment or settlement of the underlying action has not taken place before June 7, 1984. [1984 c 218 s 9.]