

RCW 49.84.045 Employee complaint—Department investigation.

(Effective July 1, 2024.) (1) (a) An employee may file a complaint with the department alleging a violation under this chapter or applicable rules, except for violations and enforcement of RCW 49.84.032 and 49.84.040. The department must investigate the complaint.

(b) The department may not investigate any such alleged violation of rights that occurred more than three years before the date that the employee filed the complaint.

(c) If an employee files a timely complaint with the department, the department must investigate the complaint and issue either a citation and notice of assessment or a determination of compliance within 90 days after the date on which the department received the complaint, unless the complaint is otherwise resolved. The department may extend the period by providing advance written notice to the employee and the employer setting forth good cause for an extension of the period and specifying the duration of the extension.

(d) The department must send the citation and notice of assessment or the determination of compliance to both the employer and the employee by service of process or using a method by which the mailing can be tracked or the delivery can be confirmed to their last known addresses.

(2) If the department's investigation finds that the employee's allegation cannot be substantiated, the department must issue a determination of compliance to the employee and the employer detailing such finding.

(3) The director may initiate an investigation without an employee's complaint to ensure compliance with this chapter.

(4) The department may request an employer perform a self-audit of any records relating to chapter 306, Laws of 2023, which must be provided within a reasonable time. Reasonable timelines will be specified in the self-audit request. The department must determine reasonable time based on the number of affected employees and the period of time covered by the self-audit. The records examined by the employer in order to perform the self-audit must be made available to the department upon request.

(5) Upon the department's request, an employer must notify affected employees in writing that the department is conducting an investigation. The department may require the employer to include a general description of each investigation as part of the notification, including the allegations and whether the notified employee may be affected. The employer may consult with the department to provide the information for the description of the notification or investigation.

(6) If the department determines that the employer has violated a requirement of this chapter or any rule adopted under this chapter, the department also may order the employer to pay the department a civil penalty of not less than \$1,000. The first violation may not exceed \$1,000. The department may, at any time, waive or reduce any civil penalty assessed against an employer under this section if the department determines that the employer has taken corrective action to remedy a violation. The department must adopt rules creating a schedule to enhance penalties, not to exceed \$10,000 per violation, based on repeat violations by the employer. Civil penalties must be collected by the department and deposited into the supplemental pension fund established under RCW 51.44.033.

(7) Except as provided under subsection (1) of this section, an employer who is found to have violated a requirement of this chapter and the rules adopted under this chapter resulting in a rest or meal period violation, must pay the employee one additional hour of pay at the employee's regular rate of pay for each day there is a violation.

(8) Upon receiving a complaint, the department may request or subpoena the records of the warehouse distribution center.

(9) For enforcement actions under this section, if any person fails to pay an assessment under this chapter, or under any rule under this chapter, after it has become a final and unappealable order, or after the court has entered final judgment in favor of the agency, the director may initiate collection procedures in accordance with the collection procedures under RCW 49.48.086.

(10) If the department finds that a quota violates chapter 306, Laws of 2023, the department may order the employer to review and provide a corrected written quota to the affected employee or employees within 15 calendar days and place a letter in the employee's personnel file to acknowledge the correction. If the employer fails to do so, the employer may be subject to the penalties under subsection (6) of this section and associated rules.

(11) In addition to any enforcement authority provided in this chapter or applicable rules, the department may enforce any violation under this chapter or applicable rules, except for violations and enforcement of RCW 49.84.032, by filing an action in the superior court for the county in which the violation is alleged to have occurred. If the department prevails, it is entitled to reasonable attorneys' fees and costs, in the amount to be determined by the court. [2023 c 306 § 9.]