

AS INTRODUCED

An Act relating to workers' compensation; authorizing certain persons to represent an employer before the Workers' Compensation Court; requiring written authorization; requiring the employer to be bound by the actions and agreements of its authorized representatives; amending 85 O.S. 1991, Section 3.4, as amended by Section 3, Chapter 349, O.S.L. 1993 (85 O.S. Supp. 1999, Section 3.4), which relates to commencement of claims pursuant to the Worker's Compensation Act; specifying persons permitted to sign documents on behalf of respondent, insurer, or agent; providing for codification; and providing an effective date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA:

SECTION 1. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 3.3a of Title 85, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

A. An employer may be represented in all proceedings before the Workers' Compensation Court by the following parties:

1. Counsel licensed to practice law in this state;
2. An employee of the employer, who need not be licensed to practice law, other than the claimant;
3. An insurance adjuster licensed by the Insurance Commissioner; or
4. Any person having written authorization from the employer to represent the employer.

B. All parties representing an employer, other than counsel, must provide the Administrator of the Workers' Compensation Court with written authorization from the employer. The authorization shall be on a form prescribed by the Administrator.

C. The employer shall agree to be bound by all actions taken by and agreements made by the employer's authorized representative.

SECTION 2. AMENDATORY 85 O.S. 1991, Section 3.4, as amended by Section 3, Chapter 349, O.S.L. 1993 (85 O.S. Supp. 1999, Section 3.4), is amended to read as follows:

Section 3.4 A. 1. All claims for any compensation or benefits under the Workers' Compensation Act shall be commenced with the filing of a notice of injury with the Administrator. All claims filed for workers' compensation benefits shall contain a statement that all matters stated therein are true and accurate, and shall be signed by the claimant and his agent, if any. Any person who signs this statement or causes another to sign this statement knowing the statement to be false shall be guilty of perjury. An individual who signs on behalf of a claimant may be presumed to have the authorization of the claimant and to be acting at his direction.

2. All answers and defenses to claims or other documents filed on behalf of a respondent or the respondent's insurer in a workers' compensation case shall contain a statement that all matters stated therein are true and accurate, and shall be signed by the respondent, the insurer, or their respective agents, if any. Any person who signs such a statement or causes another to sign such a statement, knowing the statement to be false, shall be guilty of perjury. An individual authorized pursuant to Section 1 of this act who signs on behalf of a respondent, its insurer, or its agent may be presumed to have the authorization of the respondent, its insurer and agent to be acting at their direction.

3. All matters pertaining to ~~such claims~~ a claim shall be presented to the Administrator until such time as the Administrator is notified in writing by a party that there is a controverted issue that cannot be resolved by the parties or that the parties have received an agreed final order from the Court. The Administrator shall, within seven (7) days of the receipt of ~~such~~ the notification, set the matter for hearing at the earliest available time to be heard by the Court in the appropriate judicial district

as provided in Section 3.5 of this title. The Administrator shall assign a member of the Court to hear a docket in each judicial district of the state at least once each calendar month when there has been a request for a hearing in the judicial district.

4. The Administrator shall assign Judges to the state judicial districts on a rotating basis for the purpose of holding prehearing conferences and hearing cases.

5. At the request of either party, a prehearing conference shall be held before the member of the Court assigned to the case within forty-five (45) days of the filing of a claimant's request for a hearing. The purpose of the prehearing conference shall be to mediate and encourage settlement of the case or determine issues in dispute.

6. The Court shall be vested with jurisdiction over all claims filed pursuant to the Workers' Compensation Act. The Court shall determine the lawfulness of any claim for compensation under the Workers' Compensation Act based on the weight of evidence; provided, however, any claim, and subsequent disability, that has as its source a physical condition resulting from incremental damage or injury or a gradual deterioration of physical health, which is caused by a condition arising out of and in the course of employment, must be proven by a preponderance of the evidence presented to the Court.

B. All claims so filed shall be heard by the Judge sitting without a jury. All petitions for final orders or awards filed pursuant to the provisions of Section 84 of this title must be approved by the Court having jurisdiction before a final order or award may be entered. All matters relating to a claim for benefits under the Workers' Compensation Act shall be filed with the Administrator.

SECTION 3. This act shall become effective November 1, 2000.

