

State of Delaware Department of Labor

6th Annual Report on the Status of Workers' Compensation Case Management

February 12, 2004

Six years ago the "Workers' Compensation Improvement Act" was signed into law. The intent of the Act was to provide for an expedient resolution in workers' compensation cases.

The Department of Labor is proud of the continuing progress in the processing of workers' compensation cases despite another record high number of petitions being filed. The department wants to thank the members of the Industrial Accident Board for their hard work in adjudicating cases, the Workers' Compensation Advisory Council for their contributions and the members of the Delaware General Assembly for their ongoing support.

*James G. Cagle, Jr., Director
Division of Industrial Affairs*

*John F. Kirk, III, Administrator
Office of Workers' Compensation*

Year in Review 2003

The Department of Labor and the Industrial Accident Board (IAB) continue to reduce the pending case inventory despite another record high number of petitions filed. For the first time in the history of the office the number of petitions filed for CY 2003 surpassed 6,700, (a 6% increase from CY 2002.), and a 11% increase from CY 2001.) The actual number of petitions was 6,765.

The Office of Workers' Compensation continues to maintain its "no backlog" status. A "backlog" is defined as more than four months' worth of petitions. As of January 1, 2004, that number would have been 2,255 but only 670 were pending.

The workers' compensation specialist assisted 1,285 injured workers (as compared to 1,245 in CY 2002, 1,410 in CY 2001 and 1,290 in CY 2000) in processing their claims for benefits. She also provided technical assistance to 2,891 callers (up from 2,192 in CY 2002, 2,046 in CY 2001 and 1,741 in CY 2000). The other contacts included attorneys, insurance carriers and employers.

Hearing officers conducted hearings in 1,386 cases which would otherwise had to have been heard by the IAB, an increase of 28% from CY 2002.

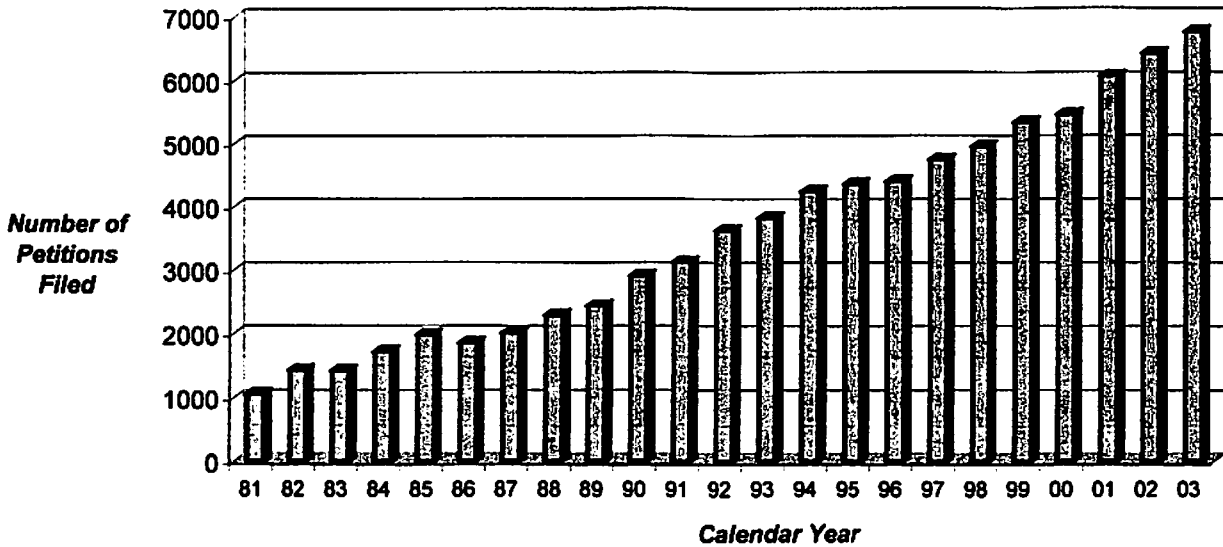
During the last legislative session no amendments were made to Title 19 §23 (the Workers' Compensation Statute.)

The Office of Workers' Compensation and the Office of Labor Law Enforcement expanded their offices located in the Windsor Building, 24 N. W. Front Street, Milford in 2003 thereby increasing customer service efforts for Kent and Sussex County customers.

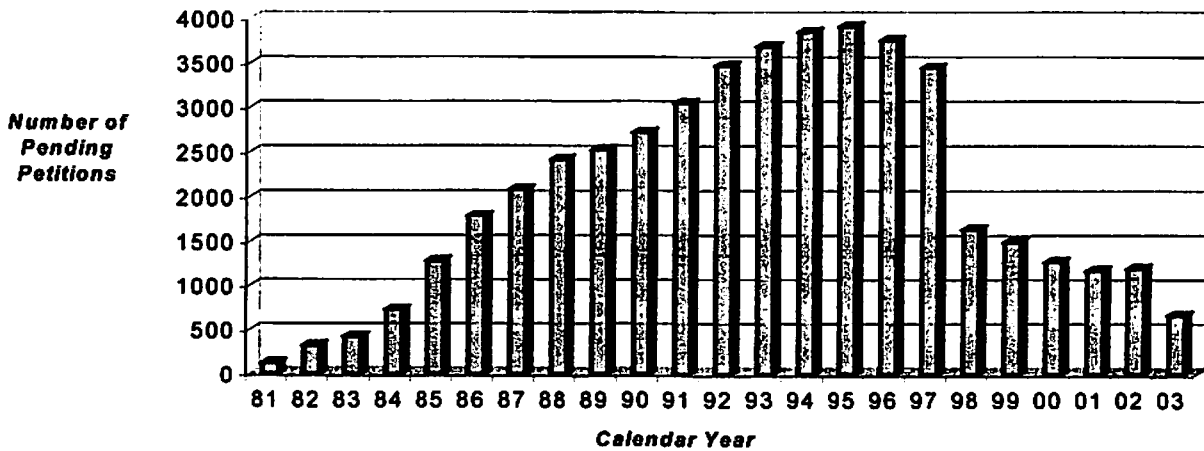
The Worker's Compensation Advisory Council met one time in 2003.

Despite a record number of petitions filed in 2003 (more than 6,700), the agency continues to maintain a "no backlog" of cases.

Workers' Compensation Petitions Filed Annually



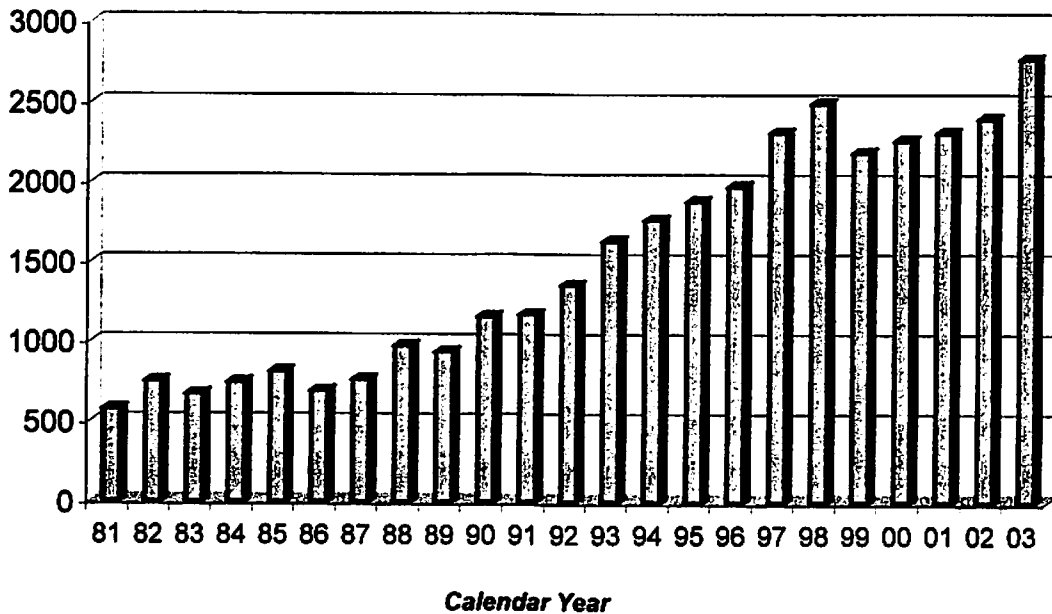
Pending Petitions



Petitions Heard by the Board/Hearing Officers

The number of petitions heard by the Board or by Hearing Officers increased as shown on the graph below. The number of settlements prior to hearing also continues to increase.

Petitions Heard by Board or Hearing Officer



Continuances

During calendar year 2003, a total of 255 continuances were granted (compared with 193 continuances in 2002, 201 continuances in 2001, 176 continuances in 2000 and 179 continuances in 1999).

The grounds for the continuances were as follows:

- The unavailability of a party, attorney, material witness or medical witness for reasons beyond their control (illness, conflicting court appearance, emergency) 192

- A justifiable substitution of counsel for a party 2

- Any unforeseen circumstances beyond the control of the parties:
 - Employee missed employer-scheduled medical exam 26
 - Records unavailable for review by parties prior to hearing 10
 - Defendant(s)/issues added prior to hearing 8
 - Overbooked calendar 1
 - Additional medical testing needed 5
 - Settlement negotiations 2
 - Offices closed due to State of Emergency 9

Board Member Activities*

During 2003, individual board members were scheduled to conduct hearings on the following number of days:

| | Days Scheduled |
|-------------|-----------------------|
| Barber | 172 |
| Daniello | 123 |
| Epolito | 175 |
| Groundland | 154 |
| Levitt | 132 |
| Mitchell, A | 138 |
| Mitchell, J | 100 |
| Murowany | 147 |
| Seward | 121 |
| Wilson | 126 |

Individual board members actually conducted hearings on the following number of days:

| | Days |
|-------------|-------------|
| Barber | 62 |
| Daniello | 75 |
| Epolito | 59 |
| Groundland | 92 |
| Levitt | 53 |
| Mitchell, A | 72 |
| Mitchell, J | 36 |
| Murowany | 69 |
| Seward | 42 |
| Wilson | 65 |

Available for hearings:

* Scheduled days versus actual days differ due to case settlements and continuances

Caseload of Individual Hearing Officers

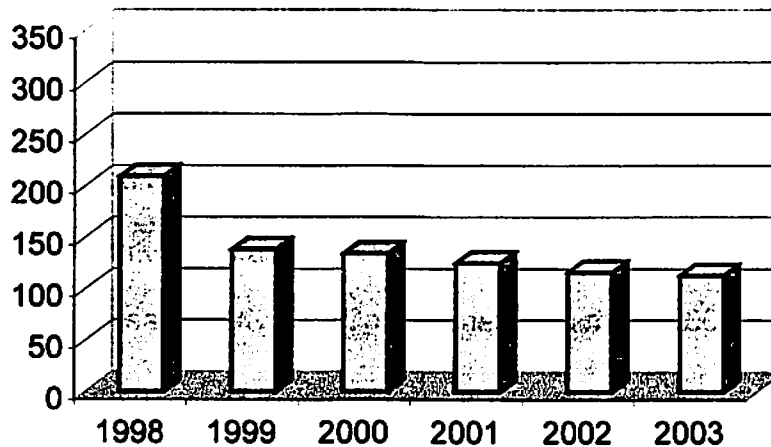
| Hearing Officer: | Number of Decisions & Orders Written: |
|-------------------------|--|
| C. Baum | 99 |
| J. Bucklin | 87 |
| M. Ripple | 69 |
| J. Schneikart | 106 |
| P. Schwartz | 112 |
| K. Starr | 99 |
| [J. Polk, Chief] | 34 |

Compliance with Hearing & Decisional Deadlines

- **3,596** petitions requiring a hearing within 120 days were filed in 2003. Of those, 97% were heard or settled within the statutory timeframe. The remaining 3% were not heard within the 120 days due to continuances granted for valid reasons.
- **440** cases requiring a written decision within 14 days from the Board or hearing officers' decision were heard in 2003. The statutory requirements were met in 98% of those cases.

Analysis of Dispositional Speed

The 2003 average dispositional speed for processing all petitions (from the filing of the petition to the issuance of the decision) was 113 days (down from 116 days in 2002, 125 days in 2001, 134 days in 2000, 138 days in 1999 and 209 in 1998).



Summary of Appeals

(Status of appeals taken as of December, 2003)

Since the Workers' Compensation Improvement Act of 1997 took effect, the Board (or Hearing Officers) have rendered 2632 decisions on the merits. 558 of those decisions (21.2%) were appealed (an average of 93 per year). 489 of those appeals have been resolved. Only 82 have been reversed and/or remanded, in whole or in part. This represents a "reversal rate" of only 3.12% of all decisions rendered.

| <u>Year Appeal Taken In</u> | <u>1998</u> | <u>1999</u> | <u>2000</u> | <u>2001</u> | <u>2002</u> | <u>2003</u> |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <u>Total Number of Decisions:</u> | 520 | 442 | 406 | 402 | 422 | 440 |
| <u>Total Number of Appeals:</u> | 85 | 103 | 83 | 92 | 108 | 87 |
| <u>Affirmed:</u> | 42 | 56 | 35 | 44 | 14 | 10 |
| <u>Reversed and/or Remanded:</u> | 8 | 19 | 15 | 16 | 5 | 3 |
| <u>Dismissed/Withdrawn:</u> | 35 | 28 | 33 | 27 | 31 | 16 |
| <u>Pending:ⁱ</u> | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 58 | 58 |

CUMULATIVE

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| <u>Total Number of Decisions:</u> | 2632 |
| <u>Total Number of Appeals:</u> | 558 |
| <u>Affirmed:</u> | 229 |
| <u>Reversed and/or Remanded:</u> | 82 |
| <u>Dismissed/Withdrawn:</u> | 178 |
| <u>Pending:</u> | 69 |

¹ For purposes of these statistics, an appeal is no longer considered "Pending" once a Superior Court decision has been issued. Some Superior Court decisions have been appealed to the Delaware Supreme Court. If a Supreme Court decision is different from that given by the Superior Court, the statistics will be updated to reflect the final holding. Therefore, for example, while no cases are "Pending" from 2000, some of those appeal results may change in the future because of decisions by the Supreme Court.

**Departmental Recommendations for Legislative Action
or Board Rule Change**

Legislation

The Department of Labor proposes no legislative change at this time.