It’s not a pirate SHIP, but there’s treasure to be had

May 13, 2014

By Amy Ray

Do you have an innovative idea for improving workplace safety and health or a creative solution to help injured workers return to work soon after an injury? If so, L&I would like to hear from you and may help fund your project.

L&I’s Safety and Health Investment Projects (SHIP) grant program offers grants to projects that:

- Help prevent workplace injuries, illnesses, and fatalities.
- Develop and implement effective Return to Work programs that reduce long-term disability.

Port Orchard’s project

In April 2013, the SHIP program funded five grant applicants, including the City of Port Orchard. Awarded a $63,000 grant, the city began work in June 2013 to develop a Return to Work program that specifically addresses the unique needs of public works employees and police officers.

High claims rate signals need for new thinking

The city had experienced a high number of time-loss claims and several large claims in recent years. Deborah Howard, the city’s HR coordinator, saw the SHIP grant as an opportunity to help change the organization’s culture, and reduce claims.

The city knew that the employees most likely to be injured on the job are police officers and public works employees. However, due to the nature of their work, it’s often not possible for these workers
to return to their normal jobs until they are 100% recovered. Traditionally, it's been difficult for the city to provide medically-approved light duty jobs within the limitations set by an injured worker’s doctor.

**Work paying early dividends**

Port Orchard’s work is already producing results. The city has developed a light-duty job bank and a tool that allows medical providers to be specific about what injured workers can do in a light-duty job. Both improvements are helping injured workers get back to work in other roles while they heal.

Says Howard, “The Police Department has been the most supportive. They had three officers on light duty that are now back to full duty doing what they do best – protecting our city.”
Officer Andrew Brandon (left) works a light-duty job at the front desk of the Port Orchard Police Department. Brandon’s colleague, Officer Randy Ernst, is pictured right.

**Materials, and successes, can be replicated**

Port Orchard isn’t the only organization that could benefit from the city’s work. Other organizations will have access to the city’s suite of materials once they are complete. That’s because anything created with SHIP grant funds becomes public domain. It’s an efficient use of state funds that helps ensure the widest possible benefit possible.
Howard is very clear on the benefit to her own organization.

“We want injured workers to know that we want them back to work with the city as quickly as possible and that we will do our best to help them get there,” she says.

You can learn more about the SHIP program on the L&I website.

Tags: Did-you-know; Small-Business; Workers'-Comp; Other;

Know a dedicated nurse? Say thanks during National Nurses’ Week, May 6–12

May 8, 2014

By Teresa Cooper

Nurses have consistently ranked as the most trusted professionals in America. (Well, sometimes they share the top spot with firefighters.)
At the Department of Labor & Industries, there are 40 registered nurses who help keep Washington safe and working. They come from all walks of life and fields of nursing, and have a combined 650 years of nursing experience.

L&I nurses are occupational nurse consultants, referred to as ONCs. Occupational and Environmental Health is a recognized specialty in nursing, with its own organization and certification.

Occupational health nurses work in industrial settings, in health care, or as case managers in private practice. Yes, most nurses work in direct clinical care, but a large number are in places you might not expect, like construction sites or offices.

Most of our nurses work directly with claim managers, helping with medical issues on claims and referrals. Others keep teens and young adults safe at work, review medical care, or develop health policy. The 8 field nurses located across the state coordinate care for injured workers and help them return to work, sometimes even visiting injured workers in the hospital.

We L&I nurses don’t wear scrubs and rarely do CPR, but we use our medical knowledge and experience to help workers every day. It’s great being a part of the L&I team!

Do you know a nurse who deserves to be recognized? We’d love to hear your story.
Adam Normoyle remembered the claim.

“It came in looking like a simple concussion,” he said, “the kind of claim that was usually handled within a short time.”

The claimant, 36-year-old Bradley Bean of Renton, had slipped in the snow and received a head injury while working as a jet center manager.

Adam, who at the time was a claims manager in Unit A, handled the claim from the beginning.

**A simple case becomes worse**

Sadly, this seemingly minor injury kept getting worse. Complications developed, and six months after the accident, Bradley Bean was dead. His parents, Tom and Debra Bean were devastated.

A little over a year after his injury occurred, Tom and Debra were invited to the L&I Worker Memorial. They agreed to attend and indicated they would like to meet Adam at the event.

Adam attended the Memorial and met Tom and Debra. They asked him to sit with them during the ceremonies. A photograph of the three of them was included in several newspaper stories about the event – Tom holding a photograph of their son and Debra carrying a small urn that held his ashes.

**A real connection**

“They felt that I had really helped them through the process,” Adam said. “Because everything had gone smoothly during the claim, they felt that I had helped make things less stressful for them.”

Adam said the Beans sent him a photo of their son early on during the claims process. They shared more photos with him after the Memorial.

“We made a real connection,” he said. “Bradley was about my age. He was their only son and I have just one child. I think I have some understanding of how devastating it would be to lose your only child.”

**Memorial brings it home**
Often times a workers' comp claim can be just a voice on the phone. Adam said the Memorial was always a time for him to “recharge” and remember that claims are about real people who are members of real families.

Adam left L&I late last year to join Strategic Consulting where he is now a vocational counselor, a job he felt would give him more direct client contact. He is enjoying his new job but says he misses friends from L&I.

“It was good to have a reason to return,” he said. “It’s always nice to hear the appreciation. I’m glad I went.”

See Olympian photo gallery of Worker Memorial event. Photo is second one in the gallery.

Welcome to the L&I Blog

May 7, 2014

By Joel Sacks, Director of Labor & Industries

If you came here looking for Nailed, we have expanded that blog to include all 30-plus programs administered by Labor & Industries. Our fraud prevention efforts will be a major component of the L&I Blog and we hope you will find other topics that will interest you as well.
The L&I Blog is designed to give you a different perspective on one of the largest and busiest organizations within Washington state government.

This will be the place to learn about our various workplace safety programs, innovations in workers’ compensation, consumer protection and assistance to small business – as well as our fraud prevention efforts featured in Nailed.

But this blog comes under the umbrella of “social media,” so it’s not just us talking at you. We want to create a dialog with employers, workers, health care providers and consumers.

We want to hear from you!

We want the L&I Blog to be a lively destination for your web browsing. Our goal is to create a lively, entertaining and education place for discussions about L&I and our efforts to keep Washington safe and working.

Your thoughts, suggestions, questions, criticisms and compliments will help us improve our services to the people of this state. So let us know what you think.

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2 Weeks Ago

"Nailed" farewell
April 30, 2014
We have good news for all of you loyal fans of Nailed.

We’re about to undergo a change that will continue to bring you stories about our fraud-busting efforts and much, much more.

Nailed is transitioning to a new blog called The L&I Blog.

As its name implies, the new blog will cover all the topics that the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries touches upon.

For instance, we’ll let you know about:

- Ways to keep safe on the job.
- How employers can save money on their workers’ comp premiums.
- Worker rights in the workplace.
- How injured employees can both heal and return to work faster.

And, as we said, much, much more!

We promise it will be informative, interesting and entertaining.

The L&I Blog debuts next week. The posts for Nailed won’t disappear. You can easily find past posts by searching the Nailed archives in the L&I Blog.

Please take a look. Comment on the posts. Suggest story and photo ideas. Let us know what you think.

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Seattle cabbie must repay Washington state for pension fraud
April 15, 2014

[L&I News Release]

A Seattle cab driver who defrauded Washington state of workers’ compensation benefits must pay back the state and spend 20 days in confinement.

King County Superior Court Judge Carol A. Shapira on Friday sentenced Shahin I. Shahin to 20 days in jail, credited him for one day served and agreed to let him serve the remaining time in electronic home monitoring.

Judge Shapira also ordered Shahin, 53, to repay the Department of Labor & Industries (L&I) more than $14,000 for workers’ comp benefits he received.

Felony theft

Shahin pleaded guilty last month to one felony count of first-degree theft for defrauding the state from October 2008 to May 2012, according to the Washington Attorney General’s Office.

During that period, he was receiving disability pension payments from L&I and signing official documents stating he was not employed and could not work due to a job-related injury.

Changed his name

An L&I investigation, however, revealed that Shahin had legally changed his name from Walid I. Shahin to Shahin I. Shahin, and was using the new name in a job driving taxis.

L&I continued to know him as Walid I. Shahin because he never reported his name change nor his work as a taxi driver to the department. He even passed two medical exams under the new name, clearing him to drive a cab.

Shahin originally filed for workers’ compensation in 1996 after he was struck by a freight elevator door while he worked at a Seattle restaurant.

Report fraud
L&I investigates allegations of fraud involving the state workers’ compensation system, and refers cases for prosecution to the Washington Attorney General and county prosecutors. To report suspected fraud, go to www.lni.wa.gov or call 1-888-811-5974.

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1 Month Ago

Prescription for prison: Bremerton man fakes work injuries, cons hospitals

April 2, 2014

[L&I News Release - March 31, 2014]

A 41-year-old Bremerton man has been sentenced to 26 months in prison for defrauding hospitals to get painkillers.

Robert B. Boyer, Jr., pleaded guilty recently to 10 felony counts of fraudulently obtaining controlled substances, according to the Washington Attorney General’s Office.

51 hospital, clinic visits

Boyer was accused of making 51 visits to more than two dozen emergency rooms and urgent-care clinics throughout Western Washington to get prescriptions for Vicodin, Percocet and other painkillers.
King County Superior Court Judge Monica Benton accepted the plea last week, and ordered Boyer to serve 26 months in prison, repay the hospitals and clinics, and participate in a drug treatment program for drug offenders.

Visible cuts

A Department of Labor & Industries (L&I) investigation found that Boyer showed up with visible cuts and other injuries, seeking painkillers at emergency rooms over a three-month period starting in November 2012.

Boyer claimed he suffered the injuries while working as an ironworker, but held no such job. In addition, charging papers said, he provided false names and false Social Security numbers in an effort to open workers’ compensation claims.

$147,000 in medical bills

L&I covers medical expenses for legitimate workplace injuries. In these cases, however, Boyer left medical facilities with an estimated $147,000 in unpaid fees. The Department of Labor & Industries pays medical costs for legitimate claims, but in these cases, Boyer left hospitals to pick up the tab.

Boyer hit medical providers throughout Western Washington, from small locally owned clinics to multiple facilities in the UW Medicine, MultiCare and Franciscan health systems.

Flagrant example

As part of a plea agreement, the Attorney General's office will dismiss 15 similar counts in Pierce County, but Boyer has agreed to also repay the hospitals in those charges. The specific amount of restitution will be determined at a hearing April 30.

"This was a particularly flagrant example of someone abusing the workers’ comp and health systems to get prescription drugs by fraud," said Elizabeth Smith, L&I assistant director of Fraud Prevention and Labor Standards. "Drug-seekers need to know our investigators will find you and hold you responsible."
Stanwood business owner gets prison time in nearly $300,000 disability fraud

April 1, 2014


A Stanwood business owner must spend a year in prison for a scam that defrauded state and federal disability programs and his union, U.S. Attorney Jenny A. Durkan announced Thursday.

Richard Stalkfleet, 66, of Stanwood, collected more than $295,000 in disability and pension benefits for eight years while running a wood chip distribution company that earned more than a half-million dollars annually, according to a news release from the U.S. Attorney’s office in the Western District of Washington.

Washington State Department of Labor & Industries investigators played a major role in uncovering Stalkfleet’s activities. They conducted surveillance of Stalkfleet, and found him working and driving trucks while receiving Social Security Disability and Teamster Pension Plan benefits and more than $130,000 in L&I workers’ compensation benefits, according to federal prosecutors.

Mother and daughter interpreters charged with overbilling thousands of dollars for mileage
March 27, 2014

[L&I News Release - March 18, 2014]

Two Mount Vernon-area interpreters, who were the Department of Labor & Industries’ top billers for mileage, face felony theft charges alleging they overbilled the state by thousands of dollars.

Gloria Mendoza Garcia, 46, and her daughter, Gloria Del Rocio Gonzalez, 31, each face one count of first-degree theft. The Washington Attorney General’s office filed the charges in Thurston County Superior Court, where the women pleaded not guilty today. Their cases were set for trial on June 9.

The women lived in separate homes and ran separate businesses in the Mount Vernon area, interpreting for Spanish-speaking injured workers at medical appointments. L&I pays for interpretation and interpreters’ mileage as part of worker injury claims.

According to charging papers, Mendoza Garcia claimed in her mileage bills that she started her trips from the address of a Seattle sports clinic.

Though she told L&I investigators she had appointments there, clinic staff told investigators they didn’t recognize her.

Mendoza Garcia often billed L&I for more than 500 miles — and sometimes more than 800 miles — in the same day, charging papers said. On Oct. 17, 2012, for instance, she claimed to make five separate roundtrips from Seattle to Burlington, Mount Vernon and Sedro Wooley — trips that an investigator found would have been impossible to make in the hours she claimed.
In her mileage bills to L&I, Del Rocio Gonzalez claimed to start her trips from Marysville, more than 30 miles away from her home, charging papers said. She told investigators that the Marysville address, where she lived four years earlier, was on a billing template in her iPad, and she never changed it.

Charging papers allege Mendoza Garcia fraudulently received more than $28,000 from March 2012 through February 2013. Her daughter is accused of fraudulently receiving more than $16,000 during that period.

L&I fraud investigators discovered the irregularities while checking to see which interpreters were billing the agency the most for mileage in 2012. Garcia was at the top of the list, billing a total of $38,012. Her daughter was second, billing $24,953.

L&I aggressively investigates fraud involving the workers' compensation system. In 2013, nearly half of all investigations into L&I's service providers focused on interpreters.

“If you commit fraud, the department views it as a harmful act against not only the department and injured workers, but also the taxpayers, and we will prosecute it as such,” said Annette Taylor, L&I’s chief of investigations and the provider fraud unit.

Tags: Nailed; Fraud; interpreter;
A 38-year-old East Wenatchee man faces an April 24 trial on a charge of defrauding the state of workers' compensation benefits in a case that goes back years.

Rodimiro Cardenas Pacheco pleaded not guilty today to a first-degree theft charge in Douglas County Superior Court. He is alleged to have received more than $39,000 in cash benefits from the state Department of Labor & Industries between August 2008 and June 2011 while he was working. The Douglas County Prosecuting Attorney’s office is prosecuting the case.

"Defrauding the state costs everyone and we are committed to finding and cracking down on those who intentionally abuse the workers' comp system," said Elizabeth Smith, L&I assistant director for Fraud Prevention and Labor Standards. "With this case, the investigators followed up on the tips and leads and didn’t give up, and it paid off."

The case goes back more than a decade.

According to court documents, Pacheco filed an industrial injury claim with L&I in April 2000, and began receiving medical treatment and wage-replacement payments the next year.

In 2011, L&I investigators received an anonymous tip that Pacheco was working while still receiving state benefits. The tipster claimed Pacheco wanted to eventually get an L&I pension. Utilizing information from the state departments of Licensing and Employment Security, an L&I investigator found Pacheco working in a Wenatchee orchard. Pacheco later fled the area, and the court issued an arrest warrant, court documents said.

In January, L&I investigators received another tip and found Pacheco working in an Ephrata restaurant. They contacted police, who arrested Pacheco on Feb. 26. He is being held on $25,000 bail.

First-degree theft carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison plus a $20,000 fine and costs.