

# **ADMINISTRATION AND ENFORCEMENT OF THE CONSTRUCTION WORKPLACE MISCLASSIFICATION ACT IN 2015**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Construction Workplace Misclassification Act, 43 P.S. §§ 933.1 - 933.17 (“Act 72” or “Act”), went into effect on February 10, 2011. The Act prohibits employers from misclassifying construction workers as independent contractors who do not satisfy all of the definitional criteria of an independent contractor. The Act establishes a definition of “independent contractor” for purposes of workers’ compensation, unemployment compensation, and Act 72.

Act 72 grants administrative enforcement powers to the Secretary of Labor & Industry (“Secretary”). The Department of Labor & Industry’s (“Department”) Bureau of Labor Law Compliance (“BLLC” or “Bureau”) enforces the Act on behalf of the Secretary. The Office of Attorney General and local district attorneys have concurrent jurisdiction for the prosecution of the Act’s criminal provisions.

Act 72 provides for the imposition of criminal and administrative penalties against employers, or officers or agents thereof, which are found to have committed violations. Additionally, the Act empowers the Secretary to petition a court to issue a stop-work order mandating the partial or complete cessation of work at the site of an ongoing intentional misclassification.

Section 4(c) of the Act authorizes the Secretary to undertake remedial action if she receives evidence establishing that a person has violated the Act. Section 10(a) explicitly prohibits an employer from discriminating in any manner or taking adverse action against any person for exercising any right protected by the Act, including the filing of a complaint with the Department or informing any person about an employer’s noncompliance. Section 10(b) makes clear that a complainant’s failure to prevail on the merits on allegations of employer noncompliance does not remove the retaliation prohibition set forth in subsection (a), so long as the complainant’s allegations were made in good faith. Finally, section 10(c) creates a rebuttable presumption that the taking by an employer of adverse action against a person within 90 days of that person’s exercise of rights protected by the Act constitutes prohibited retaliation.

Section 14 of the Act requires the Department to submit annually, by March 1, a report to Pennsylvania’s General Assembly “detailing, to the maximum extent possible, data on the previous calendar year’s administration and enforcement of [Act 72].”<sup>1</sup> The Department is permitted to include in the report all relevant facts and statistics that it believes to be necessary.

Section 17 of the Act provides that “[t]he [D]epartment shall not be required to enforce this [A]ct until adequate funding is appropriated.” The Bureau continues to enforce the provisions of Act 72, and collect penalties, despite never receiving any additional funding for the administration of the Act.

In 2015, the Department collected \$217,450 in administrative penalties from Act 72 enforcement efforts. This 2015 figure represents a 1,612% increase in penalties collected from the 2014 penalty amount. These collections were either the product of an

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<sup>1</sup> For this reason, references to “2015” (or any other year) in this report are to the calendar year, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

investigation conducted by the Bureau or the product of the Bureau’s settlement efforts with employers referred by the Department’s Office of Unemployment Compensation Tax Services (OUCTS) for misclassification.

OUCTS uses the Act 72 criteria for its audits of employers concerning the proper collection and calculation of unemployment compensation insurance. The Department’s Bureau of Workers’ Compensation (BWC) also uses the Act 72 criteria for its investigations of employers who did not include certain workers under their workers’ compensation insurance plans. BLLC works with OUCTS and BWC to identify potential violators of Act 72 for further prosecution under the Act.

In order to protect the confidentiality of complainants and the integrity of open investigations, this report contains general geographic, temporal, and substantive information regarding complaints, referrals, and collections.

**Bureau of Labor Law Compliance Overview**

The BLLC enforces and administers the following 13 laws: the Construction Workplace Misclassification Act (Act 72), the Prevailing Wage Act, the Wage Payment and Collection Law, the Minimum Wage Act, the Child Labor Act, the Underground Utility Line Protection Law (“One Call Law”), the Apprenticeship and Training Act, the Prohibition of Excessive Overtime in Health Care Act (Act 102), the Seasonal Farm Labor Act, the Industrial Homework Law, the Personnel File Inspection Act, the Employer to Pay Employment Medical Examination Fee Act, and the Equal Pay Law.

**Current BLLC Complement**

To complete these tasks, the Bureau has a staff complement of 43. The Director’s office includes the Director, program managers, and clerical support. Each of BLLC’s regional offices includes a supervisor and investigative team. The Bureau currently has 29 investigators on staff; each is responsible for all 13 labor and safety laws. The staff complement breakdown is as follows:

	TOTAL	FILLED	VACANT
Director's Office	7	7	0
Harrisburg/ Altoona	10	8	2
Philadelphia	9	9	0
Pittsburgh	10	9	1
Scranton	7	7	0
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>3</b>

## **Enforcement Issues**

Act 72 prohibits contractors from treating construction employees as independent contractors. The Act provides that in order for a worker to be deemed an independent contractor, the worker must: (1) have a written contract to perform services, (2) be free from control or direction over the performance of work under contract, and (3) be customarily engaged in an independently established trade or business.

There are six factors that establish an independent trade or business: (1) Worker possesses his/her own essential tools and equipment; (2) Worker realizes profit or loss through services; (3) Worker has a proprietary interest in business through which services are performed; (4) Worker has a business location separate from contractor; (5) Worker previously performed similar services for others, holds himself/herself out to do work for others, and is free from direction or control of the contractor; and (6) Worker maintains liability insurance of at least \$50,000.

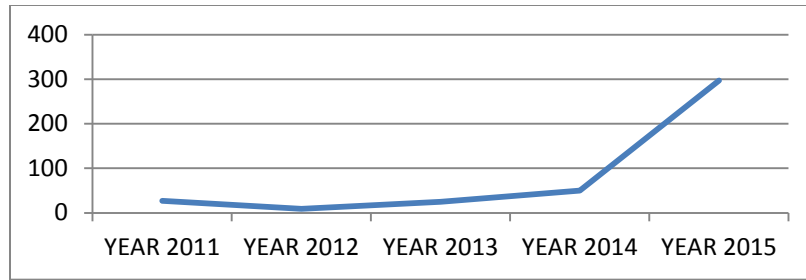
## **How the Department Enforces Act 72**

Act 72 is primarily enforced by BLLC, which has 29 investigators in four district offices throughout the Commonwealth. There are three mechanisms for finding alleged Act 72 violations: (1) complaints filed with the Bureau, (2) findings made during construction job site visits, and (3) referrals from OUCTS.

Alleged violations are assigned to an investigator who interviews the contractor and workers, and requests all pertinent documentation, such as a copy of the contract or the insurance certificate. If there is evidence of a violation, the case is referred to the Department's Office of Chief Counsel for prosecution, unless there is a settlement. If there is no or little evidence of a violation, the investigation is closed after review by a supervisor.

The following graphics represent an historical accounting of Act 72 cases the Bureau investigated since the inception of the law in February 2011:

YEAR 2011	27 CASES
YEAR 2012	9 CASES
YEAR 2013	25 CASES
YEAR 2014	50 CASES
YEAR 2015	297 CASES



### Cases filed with BLLC in 2015

In 2015, the Bureau far exceeded the number of complaints, investigations, and cases closed in any year since the inception of Act 72. With awareness of the Act and increased enforcement, a significant number of cases were filed in the second half of 2015. In addition, the Bureau’s central office is conducting a review of over 100 cases that may result in further action, including warnings, fines, or penalties. A breakdown of the district office caseload is as follows:

Office	Claims Opened	Claims Closed
Harrisburg/ Altoona	64	51
Scranton	20	18
Pittsburgh	15	14
Philadelphia	198	72
TOTALS	297	155

### 2015 Construction Site Visits

Bureau of Labor Law Compliance conducted over 40 on-site investigations during the construction season in 2015. During those visits, Bureau investigators distributed educational materials, interviewed workers on the construction sites, and reviewed payroll information when deemed appropriate. Several of these visits triggered follow up correspondence or investigations under Act 72.

The Bureau intends on regularly visiting job sites, performing outreach for various laws, including Act 72, and auditing contractors in violation of Act 72 in 2016, while balancing the workload of complaints being sent, and reviewing cases sent by OUCTS.

## Unemployment Compensation Tax Referrals

In 2015, the Bureau advanced its process for sharing information on worker misclassification with OUCTS. OUCTS performs unemployment compensation tax audits on many Pennsylvania businesses, including construction companies. These audits reveal whether such businesses have misidentified employees as independent contractors. BLLC personnel meet regularly with OUCTS personnel. As a result of these meetings, the Bureau has both received information on potential violations and shared a number of cases with OUCTS.

Since July 1, 2015, OUCTS referred 165 cases to the Bureau. The following chart represents actions that have taken place regarding these referrals.

PAYMENT PLANS	2
PENALTIES PAID BY VIOLATING PARTY	79
AWAITING MORE INFORMATION FROM OUCTS	11
SENT TO LEGAL FOR ORDER TO SHOW CAUSE AND FULL FINE	43
AWAITING FURTHER INVESTIGATION AND FOLLOW UP	28
NO VIOLATION	2
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>165</b>

## Adjudications of Act 72 complaints

The Department had its first Act 72 adjudication issued on February 24, 2015. Clark Mechanical was determined to be in violation of the Act when it misclassified an employee as an independent contractor and was fined \$500. Prior to that, all Act 72 violations had been settled between the Department and the contractors.

## Shut-Down Orders under the Act

The process for the Secretary to shut down a job site is as follows: (1) the Department must receive information that there is a potential violation; (2) the Bureau must conduct an investigation into the allegation; (3) the Department must issue an administrative Order to Show Cause; (4) the employer is afforded 20 days to file an answer in writing; (5) the employer is then provided notice and a hearing is conducted; (6) if evidence presented at the hearing establishes the finding of a violation, the Secretary must petition a court of competent jurisdiction for an Order; and (7) the employer must be served the Order so it may take effect. As of December 31, 2015, the Secretary had not initiated proceedings to issue a shut-down order on a job site.

### **Administrative Penalties in 2015**

The Department collected \$217,450 in administrative penalties during 2015. By contrast, in 2014, the Department collected \$12,700. In 2013, the Bureau collected \$2,500 in penalties.

The 2015 collections represent a greater enforcement role and more proactive approach to Act 72 violations, along with a dramatic increase in collections when compared to previous years.

### **Penalty Distribution**

The Bureau enforces 13 labor laws, several of which provide for settlements, administrative penalties, and enforcement actions. In very limited circumstances, statutory authority allows the Bureau to keep fines and penalties it collects for future enforcement activities (e.g., Underground Utility Line Protection Law).

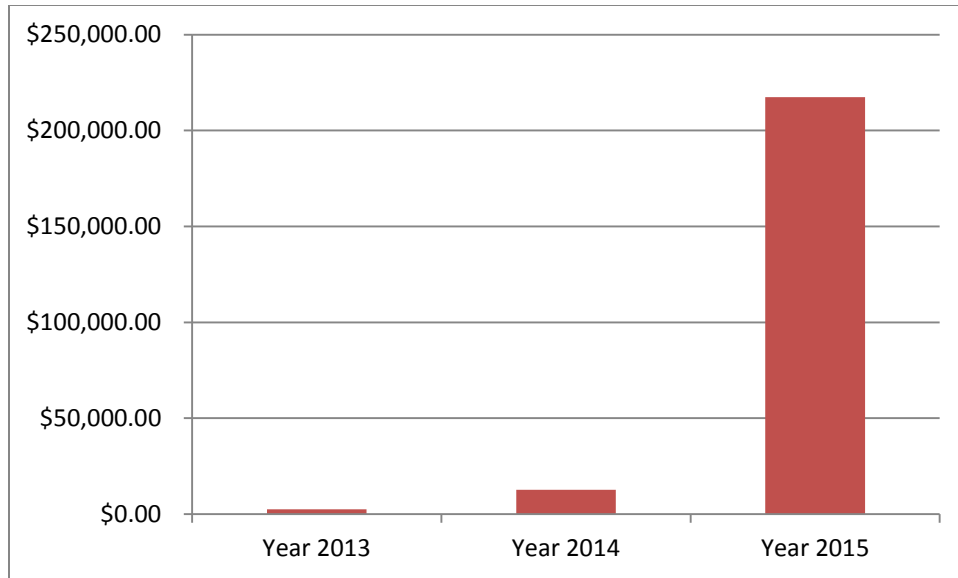
The Bureau's collection of penalties under Act 72 is different. By statute, any fines or penalties collected under Act 72 are deposited into a fund that is administered and utilized by either OUCTS or BWC for auditing and enforcement actions.

### **Analysis of Complaint Dispositions in 2015**

The Bureau closed 155 cases in 2015. Throughout the 2015 calendar year, the Bureau collected \$217,450.00 in fines from 128 entities that violated Act 72. This dollar amount represents a significantly higher degree of enforcement of the Act, and a massive percentage increase when compared to 2014 collections (1,612%), or any previous year since enforcement began in 2011.

#### **History of Administrative Penalties under Act 72**

Year 2011	\$ -
Year 2012	\$ -
Year 2013	\$ 2,500.00
Year 2014	\$ 12,700.00
Year 2015	\$217,450.00
All years totaled	\$232,650.00

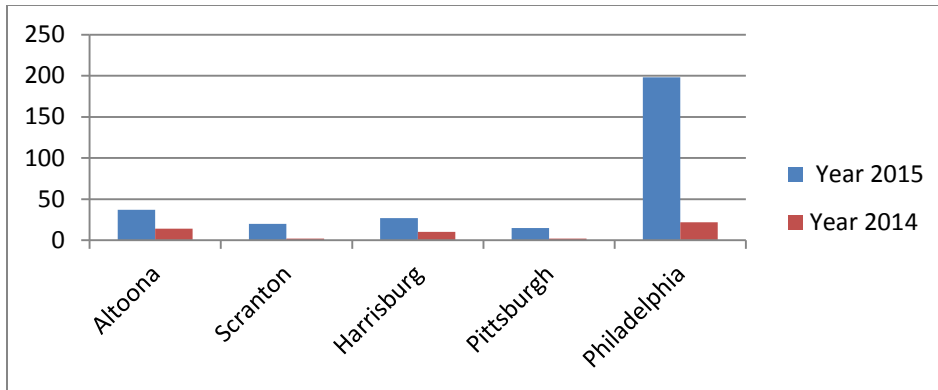


### Analysis of Complaints by Region

The spread of cases in calendar year 2015 was more diverse than previous years. For example, in 2014, both the Pittsburgh and Scranton offices received 4% each of the overall caseload; both offices experienced a caseload increase in 2015. The biggest surge in the number of cases occurred at the Philadelphia office, which was due to a combination of complaints filed and audits of multiple subcontractors on various projects. The following graph and chart compares investigations performed in 2015 to 2014.

Office	Year		Percent Change
	2015	2014	
Harrisburg/ Altoona	64	24	166%
Scranton	20	2	900%
Pittsburgh	15	2	650%
Philadelphia	198	22	800%
Totals	297	50	494%





**Conclusion: Future Enforcement Efforts under Act 72**

Increased enforcement will help vulnerable workers, who are unaware of the Act or fear retaliation if they file a complaint, to better understand their rights under the law. Therefore, the Bureau will continue its educational efforts by proactively engaging industry organizations and workers through informative presentations, as well as making Act 72 posters available at construction sites (in both English and Spanish) and other locations where day laborers may be looking for work. Moreover, BLLC investigators will continue job site visits to include reviews of all labor laws, including Act 72. Through these enhanced compliance and enforcement efforts, the Department will send a strong message to contractors that it is enforcing the Act. As a result of these efforts, it is anticipated that next year's penalties will surpass 2015's collections.

In addition, the Bureau will continue working closely with other agencies, accepting referrals, and conducting joint investigations. Specifically, the Bureau will improve its cooperative collaboration with OUCTS. For example, OUCTS referred over 200 cases to the Bureau in 2015, and the Bureau continues to receive referrals as of this report. As a result of those referrals, the Bureau already collected \$45,250 in January 2016. The Bureau foresees between 200 and 300 OUCTS referrals per year to be the norm. As the relationship between both enforcement agencies develops, plans will be refined to include on-site audits with both Bureau personnel and OUCTS auditors to combine efforts. The cooperative referral process will continue to be groomed to ensure proper education and proactive enforcement are accomplished. In addition, the Bureau plans to increase its collaborative efforts with the Bureau of Workers' Compensation throughout 2016.