

RCW 39.12.065 Investigation of complaints—Notice of violation—Hearing—Exception—Remedies—Penalties—Waiver or reduction. (1) Upon complaint by an interested party, the director of labor and industries shall cause an investigation to be made to determine whether there has been compliance with this chapter and the rules adopted hereunder, and if the investigation indicates that a violation may have occurred, the department of labor and industries may issue a notice of violation for unpaid wages, penalties, and interest on all wages owed at one percent per month. A hearing shall be held following a timely appeal of the notice of violation in accordance with chapter 34.05 RCW. The director shall issue a written determination including his or her findings after the hearing unless a notice of violation is not timely appealed. A notice of violation not timely appealed is final and binding, and not subject to further appeal. A judicial appeal from the director's determination may be taken in accordance with chapter 34.05 RCW, with the prevailing party entitled to recover reasonable costs and attorneys' fees.

A complaint concerning nonpayment of the prevailing rate of wage shall be filed with the department of labor and industries no later than 60 days from the acceptance date of the public works project. The department may not charge a contractor or subcontractor with a violation of this section when responding to a complaint filed after the 60-day limit. The failure to timely file such a complaint does not prohibit the department from investigating the matter and recovering unpaid wages for the worker(s) within two years from the acceptance of the public works contract. The department may not investigate or recover unpaid wages if the complaint is filed after two years from the acceptance of a public works contract. The failure to timely file such a complaint also does not prohibit a claimant from pursuing a private right of action against a contractor or subcontractor for unpaid prevailing wages. The remedy provided by this section is not exclusive and is concurrent with any other remedy provided by law.

(2) To the extent that a contractor or subcontractor has not paid the prevailing rate of wage under a determination issued as provided in subsection (1) of this section, the director shall notify the agency awarding the public works contract of the amount of the violation found, and the awarding agency shall withhold, or in the case of a bond, the director shall proceed against the bond in accordance with the applicable statute to recover, such amount from the following sources in the following order of priority until the total of such amount is withheld:

(a) The retainage or bond in lieu of retainage as provided in RCW 60.28.011;

(b) If the claimant was employed by the contractor or subcontractor on the public works project, the bond filed by the contractor or subcontractor with the department of labor and industries as provided in RCW 18.27.040, 18.106.410, and 19.28.041;

(c) A surety bond, or at the contractor's or subcontractor's option an escrow account, running to the director in the amount of the violation found; and

(d) That portion of the progress payments which is properly allocable to the contractor or subcontractor who is found to be in violation of this chapter. Under no circumstances shall any portion of the progress payments be withheld that are properly allocable to a contractor, subcontractor, or supplier, that is not found to be in violation of this chapter.

The amount withheld shall be released to the director to distribute in accordance with the director's determination.

(3) A contractor or subcontractor that is found, in accordance with subsection (1) of this section, to have violated the requirement to pay the prevailing rate of wage is subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$5,000 or an amount equal to 50 percent of the total prevailing wage violation found on the contract, whichever is greater, interest on all wages owed at one percent per month, and is not permitted to bid, or have a bid considered, on any public works contract until such civil penalty has been paid in full to the director. If a contractor or subcontractor is found to have participated in a violation of the requirement to pay the prevailing rate of wage for a second time within a five-year period, the contractor or subcontractor is subject to the sanctions prescribed in this subsection and as an additional sanction is not allowed to bid on any public works contract for two years. Civil penalties shall be deposited in the public works administration account. If a previous or subsequent violation of a requirement to pay a prevailing rate of wage under federal or other state law is found against the contractor or subcontractor within five years from a violation under this section, the contractor or subcontractor shall not be allowed to bid on any public works contract for two years. The two-year period runs from the date of notice by the director of the determination of noncompliance. When an appeal is taken from the director's determination, the two-year period commences from the date the notice of violation becomes final. A contractor or subcontractor is not barred from bidding on any public works contract if the contractor or subcontractor relied upon written information from the department to pay a prevailing rate of wage that is later determined to be in violation of this chapter. The civil penalty and sanctions under this subsection do not apply to a violation determined by the director to be an inadvertent filing or reporting error. The burden of proving, by a preponderance of the evidence, that an error is inadvertent rests with the contractor or subcontractor charged with the error. To the extent that a contractor or subcontractor has not paid the prevailing wage rate under a determination issued as provided in subsection (1) of this section, the unpaid wages constitute a lien against the bonds and retainage as provided herein and in RCW 18.27.040, 18.106.410, 19.28.041, 39.08.010, and 60.28.011.

(4) The director may waive or reduce a penalty or additional sanction under this section including, but not limited to, when the director determines the contractor or subcontractor paid all wages and interest or there was an inadvertent filing or reporting error. The director may not waive or reduce interest. The department of labor and industries shall submit a report of the waivers made under this section, including a justification for any waiver made, upon request of an interested party.

(5) If, after the department of labor and industries initiates an investigation and before a notice of violation of unpaid wages, the contractor or subcontractor pays the unpaid wages identified in the investigation, interest on all wages owed at one percent per month, and penalties in the amount of \$1,000 or 20 percent of the total prevailing wage violation determined by the department of labor and industries, whichever is greater, then the violation is considered resolved without further penalty under subsection (3) of this section.

(6) A contractor or subcontractor may only utilize the process outlined in subsection (5) of this section if the department of labor

and industries has not issued a notice of violation that resulted in final judgment under this section against that contractor or subcontractor in the last five-year period. If a contractor or subcontractor utilizes the process outlined in subsection (5) of this section for a second time within a five-year period, the contractor or subcontractor is subject to the sanctions prescribed in subsection (3) of this section and may not be allowed to bid on any public works contract for two years. [2023 c 88 s 5; 2019 c 242 s 4; 2009 c 219 s 4; 2001 c 219 s 2; 1994 c 88 s 1; 1985 c 15 s 2.]

Effective date—Findings—2019 c 242: See notes following RCW 39.12.010.

Severability—1985 c 15: "If any provision of this act or its application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the remainder of the act or the application of the provision to other persons or circumstances is not affected." [1985 c 15 s 4.]