

Another Billion Back For employers and worker safety

Building on the momentum of last year's Billion Back plan, Another Billion Back, proposes to inject an additional \$1 billion into Ohio's economy while making an unprecedented commitment to safe workplaces and a healthy, productive workforce.

The proposal:

- Provides a one-time rebate of \$1 billion for private employers and public-taxing districts.
- Increases BWC's commitment to safety by up to \$35 million over the next two years.
- Creates several new safety initiatives that leverage BWC's occupational health and safety expertise to create innovative solutions for improving the safety, health and wellness of Ohio's workforce.

\$1 billion rebate

During its August meeting, the BWC Board of Directors will discuss the proposal to extend a \$1 billion rebate for private employers and public-taxing districts paying into Ohio's workers' compensation system.

BWC's investments continue to perform well above expectations as a result of prudent management and a careful, conservative investment strategy. BWC's preliminary annualized return of investments was 8.9 percent over the last three fiscal years, including 13.3 percent in 2014. The State Insurance Fund net assets stand at \$7.7 billion and a funding ratio above the target guidelines set by the BWC Board of Directors.

If approved by the board, each rebate would equal 60% of the employers' annual premium and checks will be distributed beginning in October. Private employers and public-taxing districts that pay premium into the State Insurance Fund and have active, up-to-date policies will be eligible for the rebate. Each employer's rebate will reflect 60% of what they were billed during the last policy period (July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013 for private employers; January 1, 2012 to December 31, 2012 for public taxing districts).

To be eligible, private employers must have been in an active, reinstated, combined or debtor in possession status as of September 5; public taxing districts must also have been in an active or reinstated status as of September 5.

Employers with an outstanding BWC balance will have their rebate first applied to that balance.

Employers who report through a Professional Employer Organization should receive their rebate from their PEO, which is required to pass a portion of the rebate on to their members.

Safety Initiatives

We know the best workers' comp claim is the one that never happens and businesses that benefitted from the safety intervention grant program reduced the frequency of claims in the area of the intervention by 66%. Investments in safety create safer workplaces, prevent costly accidents and ultimately result in lower premiums for employers; this year's rebate plan includes several safety elements:

- **Advanced research to practice in workplace safety and health** for higher-education institutions and research organizations to promote innovation in areas of workplace safety and health such as overexertion; slips, trips, and falls; and musculoskeletal disorders. BWC expects to fund 10-15 projects a year at an annual cost of approximately \$2 million.

- **Expansion of the Safety Council Program to incorporate health and wellness.** BWC currently sponsors and provides funding for more than 80 safety councils with 9,000 participating employers. With this proposal, BWC will require more training and seminars directed at improving the health and wellness of Ohio's workforce.

Several studies demonstrate the need for employers to focus on overall wellness. Obese employees file two times the amount of workers' comp claims and are 25% more likely to have an accident (Northeast Business Group on Health); and, a study published in the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine found that other co-morbidities like heart disease, diabetes, depression and asthma also increase injury risk.

- **Firefighter safety training.** Ohio Emergency Medical Services and the State Fire Marshal provide \$500,000 to fund Fire Fighter I Training, a 120-hour class, to improve their safety, preparedness and response time during emergencies. BWC will commit another \$1 million.
- **Safety Intervention Grant Program:** The popular Safety Grants Program provides matching funds up to \$40,000 for employers to purchase equipment that will substantially reduce or eliminate injuries and illnesses. The program was expanded last year and has gained significant popularity and a record \$15 million in grants was awarded to 535 employers over the last year. The most previously granted through the program in one year was \$4 million. BWC already approved another \$15 million for the fiscal year that began July 1, and will propose additional commitments of \$15 million for each of the next two years (fiscal years 2016 and 2017).
- **Development of safety curricula and funding for skilled labor training programs.** BWC will collaborate with business, labor and higher education to create, implement and fund safety programming as part of required training in high-risk specialties such as carpentry, welding and plumbing. Under the program, BWC will incent two-year universities and trade schools to include the developed safety programming as part of the education provided to those looking to attain skilled labor positions. BWC's financial commitment to this program will be \$1 million.