

## CHAPTER 246

## (HB 488)

AN ACT relating to reorganization.

*Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky:*

Section 1. KRS 342.120 is amended to read as follows:

- (1) There is created the Division of ***Workers' Compensation Funds***~~[the Special Fund]~~ in the Department of Workplace Standards which shall be responsible for the administration ***and***~~[of the]~~ legal representation of the ***special fund and the coal workers' pneumoconiosis fund*** and the maintenance of records regarding the payment of claims by ***these funds***~~[the fund]~~. The Division of ***Workers' Compensation Funds***~~[the Special Fund]~~ shall be headed by a director appointed by the commissioner, with the prior written approval of the Governor pursuant to KRS 12.050. The director shall be responsible for overseeing the administration ***and***~~[of the]~~ legal representation of the ***funds***~~[fund]~~ and the maintenance of records regarding the payment of claims by the ***funds***~~[fund]~~.
- (2) The special fund shall have no liability upon any claim in which the injury occurred, or for cumulative trauma, the disability became manifest, or, for occupational disease, if the date of injury or last exposure occurred, after December 12, 1996.
- (3) Where the employer has settled its liability for income benefits and thereafter a determination has been made of the special fund's liability, the special fund portion of the benefit rate shall be paid over the maximum period provided for by statute for that disability, with the period of payment beginning on the date settlement was approved by an administrative law judge. This provision is remedial and shall apply to all pending and future claims.

Section 2. KRS 342.1242 is amended to read as follows:

- (1) There is created~~[the Division of]~~ the Kentucky Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis Fund~~[in the Department of Workplace Standards]~~ which shall ***have one-half (1/2) of the liability for income benefits, including retraining benefits, payable for claims brought under KRS 342.732 for last exposure incurred on or after December 12, 1996. Income benefit payments by the Kentucky coal workers' pneumoconiosis fund shall be made contemporaneous with the payments made by the employer, except that the employer shall make all payments due under a final award or approved settlement until the liability of the Kentucky coal workers' pneumoconiosis fund is established under subsection (2) of this section and the coal workers' pneumoconiosis fund shall reimburse the employer for such payments to the extent of its liability***~~[be headed by a director appointed by the commissioner, with the prior written approval of the Governor pursuant to KRS 12.050. The director shall be responsible for overseeing the administration and legal representation of the fund and the maintenance of records regarding the payment of claims by the fund]~~.
- (2) The employer shall defend any claim brought under KRS 342.732 and upon conclusion shall seek participation in payment of the final award or settlement by the Kentucky coal workers' pneumoconiosis fund by making written request upon the director in the manner prescribed by administrative regulation to be promulgated by the commissioner of the Department of Workers' Claims.

- ~~(3)~~ The Kentucky coal workers' pneumoconiosis fund shall have one half (1/2) of the liability for income benefits, including retraining benefits, payable for claims brought under KRS 342.732 for last exposure incurred on or after December 12, 1996. Income benefit payments by the Kentucky coal workers' pneumoconiosis fund shall be made contemporaneous with the payments made by the employer, except that the employer shall make all payments due under a final award or approved settlement until the liability of the Kentucky coal workers' pneumoconiosis fund is established under subsection (4) of this section and the coal workers' pneumoconiosis fund shall reimburse the employer for such payments to the extent of its liability.
- ~~(4)~~ (a) For the purpose of funding and prefunding the liabilities of the Kentucky coal workers' pneumoconiosis fund and financing the administration and operation of the Kentucky coal workers' pneumoconiosis fund, as reflected in the budget of the Commonwealth enacted by the General Assembly, a Kentucky coal workers' pneumoconiosis fund assessment at the rate of three percent (3%) is hereby imposed upon the amount of workers' compensation premiums received on and after January 1, 1997, through December 31, 1997, by every insurance carrier writing workers' compensation insurance in the Commonwealth and by every group of self-insurers operating under the provisions of KRS 342.350(4), from employers engaged in the severance or processing of coal. Likewise, on and after January 1, 1997, through December 31, 1997, an assessment at the rate of three percent (3%) of premium shall be paid by every employer engaged in the severance or processing of coal who is carrying his or her own risk.
- (b) In addition to the assessment imposed in paragraph (a) of this subsection, an additional Kentucky coal workers' pneumoconiosis fund assessment at the rate of two and one-half cents (\$0.025) per ton is hereby imposed upon the total annual amount of tons of coal severed on or after January 1, 1997, through December 31, 1997, by every entity engaged in the severance of coal as required pursuant to KRS Chapter 143.
- (c) As of September 1, 1997, and each year thereafter, the funding commission shall determine the assets of the fund and the claim and administrative expense liability incurred by the fund for all previous years and shall establish the rates under the provisions of paragraphs (a) and (b) of this subsection necessary as of January 1 of the next year to fully fund and prefund all claim liabilities and administrative expenses through December 31 of the next year of operations. The assessment rate authorized by this section for premiums received and tons of coal severed shall be set so as to receive fifty percent (50%) of the needed revenue from each assessment. Notice of any rate changes shall be provided no later than December 1 of the year preceding the rate change.
- ~~(4)~~~~(5)~~ All assessments imposed by this section shall be paid to the Kentucky Workers' Compensation Funding Commission and shall be credited to a separate account within the benefit reserve fund within the Kentucky Workers' Compensation Funding Commission. In addition, the powers and responsibilities of the Kentucky Workers' Compensation Funding Commission including its fiduciary duties and responsibilities relating to assessments collected for the special fund pursuant to KRS 342.122, 342.1222, 342.1223, 342.1226, 342.1229, and 342.1231 shall apply to assessments collected for the Kentucky coal workers' pneumoconiosis fund created pursuant to this section. Each entity subject to assessments for the Kentucky coal workers' pneumoconiosis fund shall provide any and all information

requested by the Kentucky Workers' Compensation Funding Commission necessary to carry out its powers and responsibilities relating thereto.

- (5)~~(6)~~ These assessments shall be paid quarterly not later than the thirtieth day of the month following the end of the quarter in which the premium is received or the coal is processed or severed. Receipt shall be considered timely through actual physical receipt or by postmark by the United States Postal Service. Employers carrying their own risk and employers defined in KRS 342.630(2) shall pay the annual assessments in four (4) equal quarterly installments. Penalty and interest penalties imposed pursuant to KRS 342.1221 and the authority of the Kentucky Workers' Compensation Funding Commission to waive part or all of the penalty shall apply to assessments for the Kentucky coal workers' pneumoconiosis fund in the same manner and amount as they are imposed on assessments for the special fund under KRS 342.122.
- (6)~~(7)~~ Notwithstanding any other provisions of this section or this chapter to the contrary, the total amount of funds collected pursuant to the assessment rates adopted by the funding commission shall not be limited to the provisions of this section.
- (7)~~(8)~~ Claims for benefits by reason of the development of coal workers' pneumoconiosis shall be maintained pursuant to KRS 342.732, and the Kentucky coal workers' pneumoconiosis fund shall be liable for payment of a part of the liability only for employees of employers engaged in the severance or processing of coal as defined in KRS 342.0011(23)(a) and (b).

Section 3. KRS 342.232 is amended to read as follows:

- (1) The boards of directors of the following funds shall make quarterly reports according to generally-accepted accounting principles of all money received and disbursed by the listed funds during each quarter to the Legislative Research Commission. The funds which shall be reported are:
  - (a) Kentucky individual self-insurance guaranty fund;
  - (b) Kentucky group self-insurance fund; and
  - (c) Kentucky coal employers self-insurance fund.
- (2) The director of the Division of *Workers' Compensation Funds*~~[the Kentucky Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis Fund]~~ shall make quarterly reports according to generally-accepted accounting principles of all money received and disbursed by the *coal workers' pneumoconiosis* fund~~[during each quarter]~~ to the Legislative Research Commission.
- (3) The Department of Workers' Claims shall make quarterly reports to the Legislative Research Commission on the status of the provisions of this chapter.

Section 4. KRS 342.265 is amended to read as follows:

- (1) If the employee and employer and special fund or any of them reach an agreement conforming to the provisions of this chapter in regard to compensation, a memorandum of the agreement signed by the parties or their representatives shall be filed with the commissioner, and, if approved by an administrative law judge, shall be enforceable pursuant to KRS 342.305. Where all parties have not joined in the settlement agreement, it shall not be approved unless it is certified that the party not participating in the settlement has been served with a copy of the agreement not less than ten (10) days prior to submission of the agreement for approval. This provision shall not be construed to prevent the voluntary

payment of compensation for the periods and in the amounts prescribed by this chapter, but nothing shall operate as a final settlement except a memorandum of agreement filed with the commissioner and approved by the administrative law judge. Upon claims settled after December 12, 1996, the special fund shall have the option of settling its liability for income benefits on the same terms as those reached between the employee and employer. Notice of the special fund exercise of the option granted in this subsection shall be made by letter of the director of the *Division of Workers' Compensation Funds* ~~{special fund}~~ mailed to the parties within ten (10) days of receipt by the director of a copy of the agreement.

- (2) Settlement agreements concluded after July 14, 2000, providing for commuted lump-sum payment of future income benefits which would otherwise be payable in amounts greater than one hundred dollars (\$100) per week shall not be approved unless there is reasonable assurance that the worker will have an adequate source of income during disability. This subsection is remedial and applies to all pending and future claims.
- (3) Upon lump-sum settlement of future periodic payments, the discount rate used in the calculation of the settlement amount shall not exceed a reasonable amount fixed by the commissioner. For settlements approved after December 12, 1996, until December 31, 1997, the true discount rate shall be six percent (6%) compounded annually on each payment. Before January 1 of each year commencing in 2001, the commissioner shall fix the discount rate to be utilized in the succeeding year based at one-half of one percent (0.5%) below the interest rate paid upon ten (10) year United States Treasury Notes as of August 1 of the preceding year.
- (4) If the parties have previously filed an agreement which has been approved by the administrative law judge, and compensation has been paid or is due in accordance therewith and the parties thereafter disagree, either party may invoke the provisions of KRS 342.125, which remedy shall be exclusive.
- (5) An application for resolution of claim shall be held in abeyance during any period voluntary payments of income benefits are being made under any benefit sections of this chapter to the maximum which the employee's wages shall entitle unless it shall be shown that the prosecution of the employee's claim would be prejudiced by delay.

Section 5. KRS 342.320 is amended to read as follows:

- (1) All fees of attorneys and physicians, and all charges of hospitals under this chapter, shall be subject to the approval of an administrative law judge pursuant to the statutes and administrative regulations.
- (2) In an original claim, attorney's fees for services under this chapter on behalf of an employee shall be subject to the following maximum limits:
  - (a) Twenty percent (20%) of the first twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000) of the award, fifteen percent (15%) of the next ten thousand dollars (\$10,000), and five percent (5%) of the remainder of the award, not to exceed a maximum fee of twelve thousand dollars (\$12,000). This fee shall be paid by the employee from the proceeds of the award or settlement.
  - (b) Attorney-client employment contracts entered into and signed after July 14, 2000, shall be subject to the conditions of paragraph (a) of this subsection.
- (3) In approving an allowance of attorney's fees, the administrative law judge shall consider the extent, complexity, and quality of services rendered, and in the case of death, the

Remarriage Tables of the Dutch Royal Insurance Institute. An attorney's fee may be denied or reduced upon proof of solicitation by the attorney. However, this provision shall not be construed to preclude advertising in conformity with standards prescribed by the Kentucky Supreme Court.

- (4) No attorney's fee in any case involving benefits under this chapter shall be paid until the fee is approved by the administrative law judge, and any contract for the payment of attorney's fees otherwise than as provided in this section shall be void. The motion for approval of an attorney's fee shall be submitted within thirty (30) days following finality of the claim. Except when the attorney's fee is to be paid by the employer or carrier, the attorney's fee shall be paid in one (1) of the following ways:
  - (a) The employee may pay the attorney's fee out of his personal funds or from the proceeds of a lump-sum settlement; or
  - (b) The administrative law judge, upon request of the employee, may order the payment of the attorney's fee in a lump sum directly to the attorney of record and deduct the attorney's fee from the weekly benefits payable to the employee in equal installments over the duration of the award or until the attorney's fee has been paid, commuting sufficient sums to pay the fee.
- (5) At the commencement of the attorney-client relationship, the attorney shall explain to the employee the methods by which this section provides for the payment of the attorney's fee, and the employee shall select the method in which his attorney's fee is to be paid. His selection and statement that he fully understands the method to be used shall be submitted by his attorney, on a notarized form signed by the employee, at the time the motion for approval of the attorney's fee is submitted. The commissioner shall develop the format and content of the form to be used pursuant to this section. The form to be used shall list on its face all options permitted in this section for the payment of an attorney's fees and contain an explanation in nontechnical language of each method.
- (6) The General Assembly declares that by the enactment of KRS 342.316(3), it is the legislative intent to encourage settlement and prompt administrative handling of those claims and thereby reduce expenses to claimants for compensation under the provisions of KRS 342.316, and the administrative law judge shall give due regard to this legislative intent in the handling of uncontested claims and the allowance of attorney's fees therein.
- (7) In a claim that has been reopened pursuant to the provisions of this chapter, an attorney's fee may be awarded by the administrative law judge subject to the limits set forth in subsection (2) of this section. In awarding the attorney's fee, the administrative law judge shall consider the factors set forth in subsection (3) of this section. If no additional amount is recovered upon reopening, no attorney's fee shall be awarded. No attorney's fee shall be allowed or approved exceeding the amounts provided in subsection (2)(a) of this section applicable to any additional amount recovered.
- (8) Attorney's fees for representing employers in proceedings under this chapter pursuant to contract with the employer shall be subject to approval of the administrative law judge in the same manner as prescribed for attorney representation of employees. Employer attorney's fees are subject to the limitation of twelve thousand dollars (\$12,000) maximum fees except that fees for representing employers shall not be dependent upon the result achieved. Employer attorney's fees may be paid on a periodic basis while a claim is adjudicated and the payments need not be approved until the claims resolution process is completed. Fees for

legal services in presenting a claim for reimbursement ~~from the director of~~ the Kentucky coal workers' pneumoconiosis fund shall not exceed one thousand dollars (\$1,000). All such approved fees shall be paid by the employer and in no event shall exceed the amount the employer agreed by contract to pay.

Section 6. KRS 336.020 is amended to read as follows:

- (1) The Department of Workplace Standards shall be headed by a commissioner and shall be divided for administrative purposes into the Divisions of Employment Standards, Apprenticeship and Training; **Workers' Compensation Funds** ~~Special Fund~~; Occupational Safety and Health Compliance; and Education and Training for Occupational Safety and Health.
- (2) The Department of Workers' Claims shall be administered by a commissioner and shall be divided for administrative purposes into the Divisions of Claims Processing and Appeals, Information and Research, Security and Compliance, Administrative Law Judges, and Insurance.

Section 7. KRS 342.1241 is amended to read as follows:

- (1) The General Assembly finds and declares that the awards of workers' compensation benefits for coal workers' pneumoconiosis (black lung) have placed a substantial financial burden on all employers of the Commonwealth through the special fund assessments imposed on all employers to cover the liabilities of the special fund.
- (2) The General Assembly finds and declares that the purpose of creating the Kentucky Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis Fund in KRS 342.1242 is to assure that liabilities incurred as a result of workers' compensation awards for coal workers' pneumoconiosis with dates of last exposure after December 12, 1996, shall be the financial responsibility of employers engaged in severance and processing of coal.
- (3) Therefore, it is the intent of the General Assembly in imposing the assessments required in KRS 342.1242(3)~~(4)~~(a) and (b) to assure that liabilities incurred as a result of workers' compensation awards for coal workers' pneumoconiosis with dates of last exposure after December 12, 1996, shall be the financial responsibility of employers engaged in the severance and processing of coal.

Section 8. The General Assembly hereby confirms Executive Order 2001-1294, dated October 17, 2001, which abolishes the Division of the Kentucky Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis Fund; transfers the duties, personnel, funds, equipment and records of the Division of the Kentucky Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis Fund to the Division of the Special Fund, and changes the name of the Division of the Special Fund to the Division of Workers' Compensation Funds, to the extent it is not otherwise confirmed by this Act.

**Approved April 8, 2002**