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On the Web: <http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dwd/news.htm>

Wisconsin's Pioneering Worker's Compensation Law Turns 100!

Measure Commemorated as Nation's 1st Constitutional Worker's Compensation Law

**By Secretary Manny Perez
Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development**

Whether you work behind a desk, drive a truck, or walk beams on high rise construction sites, your life and your family are far more secure because of the dream of a few bold Wisconsinites with the vision to create a new way of responding to work injury. Wisconsin pioneered a system of financial protection so solid and certain that many workers often take for granted the safety net of worker's compensation that protects them and their families.

Worker's compensation stands as one of the most important pieces of pioneering legislation enacted in the history of modern industrial society. It remains one of Wisconsin's most respected contributions to the nation's laws.

Today, Wisconsin has the fourth lowest worker's compensation average cost per case in the nation, the lowest worker's compensation premiums in the Midwest, a nationally recognized return to work program, and an effective alternative dispute resolution process. The commitment by Wisconsin's private sector to safety as a mindset in the workplace has led to the Wisconsin average modification rate to be 0.96 across all industries. These help Wisconsin companies to stay competitive, which in turn contributes to job creation.

One hundred years ago on May 3, 1911, Wisconsin Governor Francis E. McGovern signed into law the United States' first constitutional worker's compensation law. This ground breaking law passed the Legislature with token opposition: four nay votes recorded in the state Senate and 14 in the Assembly.

Few chapters in Wisconsin legislative history have produced a more exemplary law. Employers as well as employees took an active and constructive part in submitting information and observations to the legislature, and the legislature itself discharged its duties with both common sense and dispatch. In its 1911 report on worker's compensation, the Wisconsin Industrial Insurance Committee appointed by the 1909 legislature stated that the objectives of the Wisconsin Worker's Compensation Act were to:

- 1) Furnish certain, prompt and reasonable compensation to the injured employee.
- 2) Utilize for injured employees a large portion of the great amount of money wasted under the present (liability) system.

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- 3) Provide a tribunal where disputes between employer and employee in regard to compensation may be settled promptly, cheaply and summarily.
- 4) Provide means of minimizing the number of accidents in industrial pursuits.

This ambitious vision has grown to practical reality in 100 years of worker's compensation in Wisconsin, as we have faced squarely the constant challenge to improve the system and keep pace with the changing workplace.

Wisconsin's enduring tradition of collaboration between employers and employees through the Worker's Compensation Advisory Council (WCAC) dates back to 1911. The WCAC consisting of five labor and five management representatives, plus three representatives of the insurance industry, provides a forum for labor and management to work together toward continuous improvement of the worker's compensation system.

In its first 100 years Wisconsin has made tremendous strides in improving our worker's compensation system: extending the statute's coverage, enhancing benefits, encouraging safety, and updating its procedures, rules and law. The Advisory Council system has helped build one of the premier worker's compensation systems globally – a system widely regarded as a model for other states.

As we mark the centennial year of our pioneering worker's compensation law, Wisconsin citizens justifiably take satisfaction and pride in continuing the work of those imaginative and inspired men and women, who one-hundred years ago, gave impetus to this effective system of social insurance that is now universally accepted.

For more information: <http://www.workerscomp100.org/>
<http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/wc/>