

Washington's average wage tops \$50,000 in 2012

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

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OLYMPIA — Washington's average annual wage grew by 3.4 percent in 2012, to \$51,595, surpassing \$50,000 for the first time, according to the state Employment Security Department.

The average weekly wage rose from \$959 to \$992.

These figures include only those wages that are covered by unemployment insurance.

Much of the increase was driven by a 6.1 percent increase in the number of insured workers earning more than \$75,000. Overall, the average number of workers in Washington covered by unemployment insurance grew by 52,519 in 2012, an increase of 1.9 percent, and total earnings grew by nearly \$7.4 billion, an increase of 5.4 percent.

The three industries with the highest wage growth in 2012 were the company management sector, up 17.6 percent; information, up 11.5 percent; and agriculture, up 11.5 percent.

The pattern was similar to 2011, when the company management sector and the information sector also were in the top three for wage growth.

The average annual wage is used to calculate unemployment benefits for jobless workers. The minimum weekly unemployment benefit, calculated at 15 percent of the average weekly wage, will increase by \$5 to \$148, for new claims opened on or after July 7. At the same time, the maximum weekly benefit, calculated at 63 percent of the average weekly wage, will increase by \$20, to \$624.

Currently, about 18 percent of unemployment-insurance claims are paid the maximum benefit amount, and 7 percent receive the minimum.

In addition to unemployment benefits, the average annual wage is used in computing employers' unemployment taxes. Beginning in **2014, employers will pay unemployment taxes on the first \$41,300 paid to each employee, up from \$39,800 in 2013.**

The state average wage also is used by the Department of Labor & Industries in calculating worker's compensation benefits.