

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

**NOTICE OF PENALTIES INCURRED AND DUE
FOR VIOLATIONS OF LAWS AND RULES**

PENALTY ASSESSMENT: TV-200668

PENALTY AMOUNT: \$18,500

Uplift Movers, LLC
10303 20th St. E Apt. N203
Edgewood, WA 98372

The Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (Commission) believes Uplift Movers, LLC, (Uplift Movers or Company) violated Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 480-15-555, Criminal Background Checks for Prospective Employees; WAC 480-15-560, Equipment Safety Requirements, which adopts Title 49 Code of Federal Regulations (49 CFR) Part 396 – Inspection, Repair and Maintenance; and WAC 480-15-570, Driver Safety Requirements, which adopts 49 CFR Part 391 – Qualification of Drivers and 49 CFR Part 395 – Hours of Service of Drivers.

Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 81.04.405 allows penalties of \$100 for each violation. In the case of an ongoing violation, every day's continuance is considered a separate and distinct violation.

On July 20, 2020, Commission Motor Carrier Investigator Edward Steiner completed a routine safety investigation of Uplift Movers and documented the following violations:

- **Five violations of WAC 480-15-555 – Failing to conduct, or retain paperwork containing, criminal background check for a household goods carrier in the state of Washington as required.** Uplift Movers failed to obtain a criminal background check for prospective employees Radu Bujoreanu, Denis Vareaghin, Max Savchuk, Artur Nitika, and Semion Vlah.
- **One hundred seventy-six violations of 49 CFR § 391.45(a) – Using a driver not medically examined and certified.** The Company allowed drivers Catalin Creanga, Radu Bujoreanu, Artur Nitika, and Semion Vlah to operate a commercial motor vehicle without having been medically examined and certified on 176 occasions between December 5, 2019, and June 6, 2020.
- **Four violations of 49 CFR § 391.51(a) – Failing to maintain driver qualification file on each driver employed.** Uplift Movers failed to maintain driver qualification files for drivers Catalin Creanga, Radu Bujoreanu, Artur Nitika, and Semion Vlah.
- **Thirty-five violations of 49 CFR § 395.8(a)(1) – Failing to require a driver to prepare a record of duty status using the appropriate method.** The Company failed to require drivers Artur Nitika and Semion Vlah to prepare a record of duty status on 35 occasions between May 25 and June 16, 2020.

- **Three violations of 49 CFR § 396.3(b) – Failing to keep minimum records of inspection and vehicle maintenance.** The Company failed to maintain the required inspection and vehicle maintenance records for its three commercial motor vehicles.
- **Three violations of 49 CFR § 396.17(a) – Using a commercial motor vehicle not periodically inspected.** Uplift Movers failed to have an annual inspection performed on its three commercial motor vehicles.

The Commission considered the following factors in determining the appropriate penalties for these violations:

1. **How serious or harmful the violations are to the public.** The violations noted are serious and potentially harmful to the public. Household goods moving companies that: (1) fail to conduct criminal background checks on their employees, (2) fail to require their drivers to be medically examined and certified, (3) fail to maintain driver qualification files, (4) fail to require drivers to make a record of duty status, (5) fail to keep minimum records of inspection and vehicle maintenance, and (6) fail to periodically inspect vehicles, put their customers, their customers' belongings, and the traveling public at risk. These violations present serious safety concerns.
2. **Whether the violations were intentional.** Considerations include:
 - Whether the company ignored Commission staff's (Staff) previous technical assistance; and
 - Whether there is clear evidence through documentation or other means that shows the company knew of and failed to correct the violation.

On August 15, 2018, the Commission received the Company's application for household goods moving authority. In the application, Catalin Creanga, owner of Uplift Movers, acknowledged the Company's responsibility to understand and comply with applicable safety laws and regulations.

On November 7, 2018, Catalin Creanga attended household goods training provided by Staff, and acknowledged receiving training pertaining to motor carrier safety regulations.

The Company knew or should have known about these requirements.

3. **Whether the Company self-reported the violations.** The Company did not self-report these violations.
4. **Whether the Company was cooperative and responsive.** Uplift Movers was cooperative throughout the investigation.
5. **Whether the Company promptly corrected the violations and remedied the impacts.** Uplift Movers has provided Staff with evidence that some of the violations have been corrected.

6. **The number of violations.** Staff identified 11 violation types with a total of 236 individual occurrences.
7. **The number of customers affected.** Uplift Movers employs four drivers, operates three commercial motor vehicles, and reported 42,500 miles traveled in 2019. These safety violations present a public safety risk.
8. **The likelihood of recurrence.** Staff provided technical assistance with specific remedies to help the Company assess how well its safety management controls support safe operations and how to begin improving its safety performance. The Company was cooperative with Staff. In light of these factors, Staff believes that the likelihood of recurrence is low.
9. **The Company's past performance regarding compliance, violations, and penalties.** Uplift Movers has no history of violations or penalties.
10. **The Company's existing compliance program.** Catalin Creanga is responsible for the Company's safety compliance program.
11. **The size of the Company.** Uplift Movers currently operates three commercial motor vehicles and employs four drivers. The Company reported \$109,445 in gross revenue for 2019.

The Commission's Enforcement Policy provides that some Commission requirements are so fundamental to safe operations that the Commission will issue mandatory penalties for each occurrence of a first-time violation.¹ The Commission generally will assess penalties per type of violation, rather than per occurrence, for first-time violations of those critical regulations that do not meet the requirements for mandatory penalties. The Commission will assess penalties for any equipment violation meeting the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's "out-of-service" criteria and also for repeat violations of critical regulations, including each occurrence of a repeat violation.

The Commission has considered these factors and determined that it should penalize Uplift Movers \$18,500, calculated as follows:

- Five violations of WAC 480-15-555 – Failing to conduct or retain paperwork containing criminal background check for a household goods carrier in the state of Washington as required. The Commission assesses a penalty of \$100 for each occurrence of this violation, for a total of \$500.
- One hundred seventy-six violations of 49 CFR § 391.45(a) – Using a driver not medically examined and certified. The Commission assesses a penalty of \$100 for each occurrence of this violation, for a total of \$17,600.

¹ Docket A-120061 – Enforcement Policy of the Washington Utilities & Transportation Commission – Section V.

- Four violations of 49 CFR § 391.51(a) – Failing to maintain driver qualification file on each driver employed. The Commission assesses a “per category” penalty of \$100 for these first-time violations.
- Thirty-five violations of 49 CFR § 395.8(a)(1) – Failing to require a driver to prepare a record of duty status using the appropriate method. The Commission assesses a “per category” penalty of \$100 for these first-time violations.
- Three violations of 49 CFR § 396.3(b) – Failing to keep minimum records of inspection and vehicle maintenance. The Commission assesses a “per category” penalty of \$100 for these first-time violations.
- Three violations of 49 CFR § 396.17(a) – Using a commercial motor vehicle not periodically inspected. The Commission assesses a “per category” penalty of \$100 for these first-time violations.

This information, if proven at a hearing and not rebutted or explained, is sufficient to support the penalty assessment.

Your penalty is due and payable now. If you believe any or all of the violations did not occur, you may deny committing the violation(s) and contest the penalty through evidence presented at a hearing or in writing. Alternatively, if there is a reason for any or all of the violations that you believe should excuse you from the penalty, you may ask for mitigation (reduction) of the penalty through evidence presented at a hearing or in writing. The Commission will grant a request for hearing only if material issues of law or fact require consideration of evidence and resolution in a hearing. Any request to contest the violation(s) or for mitigation of the penalty must include a written statement of the reasons supporting that request. Failure to provide such a statement will result in denial of the request. *See* RCW 81.04.405.

If you properly present your request for a hearing and the Commission grants that request, the Commission will review the evidence supporting your dispute of the violation(s) or application for mitigation in a Brief Adjudicative Proceeding before an administrative law judge. The administrative law judge will consider the evidence and will notify you of their decision.

You must act within 15 days after receiving this notice to do one of the following:

- Pay the amount due.
- Contest the occurrence of the violation(s).
- Admit the violations but request mitigation of the penalty amount.

Please indicate your selection on the enclosed form and submit it electronically through the Commission’s web portal **within FIFTEEN (15) days** after you receive this notice. If you are unable to use the web portal, you may submit it via email to records@utc.wa.gov. If you are unable to submit the form electronically, you may send a paper copy to the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission, PO Box 47250, Olympia, Washington 98504-7250.

If you do not act within 15 days, the Commission may take additional enforcement action, including but not necessarily limited to suspending or revoking your certificate to provide regulated service, assessing additional penalties, or referring this matter to the Office of the Attorney General for collection.

DATED at Lacey, Washington, and effective August 18, 2020.

/s/ Rayne Pearson
RAYNE PEARSON
Director, Administrative Law Division

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
PENALTY ASSESSMENT TV-200668

PLEASE NOTE: You must complete and sign this document, and send it to the Commission within 15 days after you receive the penalty assessment. Use additional paper if needed. I have read and understand RCW 9A.72.020 (printed below), which states that making false statements under oath is a class B felony. I am over the age of 18, am competent to testify to the matters set forth below and I have personal knowledge of those matters. I hereby make, under oath, the following statements.

1. **Payment of penalty.** I admit that the violations occurred and enclose \$18,500 in payment of the penalty.

2. **Contest the violation(s).** I believe that the alleged violation(s) did not occur for the reasons I describe below (**if you do not include reasons supporting your contest here, your request will be denied**):

a) I ask for a hearing to present evidence on the information I provide above to an administrative law judge for a decision.

OR b) I ask for a Commission decision based solely on the information I provide above.

3. **Application for mitigation.** I admit the violations, but I believe that the penalty should be reduced for the reasons set out below (**if you do not include reasons supporting your application here, your request will be denied**):

a) I ask for a hearing to present evidence on the information I provide above to an administrative law judge for a decision.

OR b) I ask for a Commission decision based solely on the information I provide above.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Washington that the foregoing, including information I have presented on any attachments, is true and correct.

Dated: _____ [month/day/year], at _____ [city, state]

Name of Respondent (company) – please print

Signature of Applicant

RCW 9A.72.020:

“Perjury in the first degree. (1) A person is guilty of perjury in the first degree if in any official proceeding he makes a materially false statement which he knows to be false under an oath required or authorized by law. (2) Knowledge of the materiality of the statement is not an element of this crime, and the actor’s mistaken belief that his statement was not material is not a defense to a prosecution under this section. (3) Perjury in the first degree is a class