

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

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

**PENALTY ASSESSMENT: TV-200152
PENALTY AMOUNT: \$900**

Backbreakers NW, LLC
P.O. Box 521
Freeland, WA 98249

The Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (Commission) believes Backbreakers NW, LLC, (Backbreakers 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 March 3, 2020, Commission Motor Carrier Investigator Wayne Gilbert completed a routine safety investigation of Backbreakers 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.** Backbreakers failed to conduct criminal background checks for employees Andrew Christiansen, Carter Snelling, Dane Guetlin, Jeff Strong, and Rory Stewart.
- **Two violations of 49 CFR § 391.51(b)(2) – Failing to maintain inquiries into driver's driving record in driver's qualification file.** The Company failed to ensure that a driver's abstract was maintained for drivers Jeff Strong and Rory Stewart.
- **Ninety violations of 49 CFR § 395.8(a)(1) – Failing to require a driver to prepare a record of duty status using the appropriate method.** Backbreakers failed to maintain a record of duty status for Jeff Hansen, Jeff Strong, and Rory Stewart on 90 occasions between January 1 and January 30, 2020.
- **Two violations of 49 CFR § 396.3(b) – Failing to keep minimum records of inspection and vehicle maintenance.** The Company failed to keep the minimum required vehicle maintenance records for its two commercial motor vehicles.

- **Two violations of 49 CFR § 396.17(a) – Using a commercial motor vehicle not periodically inspected.** Backbreakers failed to have an annual inspection performed on its two 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 maintain inquiries into drivers' driving records, (3) fail to maintain records of duty status, (4) fail to keep minimum records of inspection and vehicle maintenance, and (5) use commercial motor vehicles that have not been inspected put their customers, their customers' belongings, and the traveling public at risk. These violations present significant 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 7, 2018, the Commission received the Company's application for household goods moving authority. In the application, Backbreakers acknowledged its responsibility to understand and comply with applicable motor carrier safety regulations.

On August 15, 2018, Jeff Hansen, owning member of Backbreakers, attended household goods training provided by Staff. On December 18, 2019, Jeff Hansen and Jeff Strong, co-owner of Backbreakers, attended household goods training provided by Staff. On both occasions the Company's representatives 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.** Backbreakers did not self-report these violations.
4. **Whether the Company was cooperative and responsive.** The Company was cooperative throughout the safety investigation, and expressed a desire to come into compliance.
5. **Whether the Company promptly corrected the violations and remedied the impacts.** Backbreakers corrected all violations during the safety investigation.
6. **The number of violations.** Staff identified 11 violation types with a total of 111 individual occurrences.

7. **The number of customers affected.** The Company employs three drivers and operates two commercial motor vehicles. Backbreakers traveled 12,000 miles 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, and expressed a desire to come into compliance. In light of these factors, Staff believes the likelihood of recurrence is low.
9. **The Company's past performance regarding compliance, violations, and penalties.** Backbreakers has no history of violations or penalties with the Commission.
10. **The Company's existing compliance program.** Kris Hansen, office manager of Backbreakers, is responsible for the Company's safety compliance program.
11. **The size of the Company.** Backbreakers currently operates two commercial motor vehicles and employs three drivers. The Company reported \$239,242 in gross revenue for 2018.

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 Backbreakers \$900, 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.
- Two violations of 49 CFR § 391.51(b)(2) – Failing to maintain inquiries into driver's driving record in driver's qualification file. The Commission assesses a "per category" penalty of \$100 for these first-time violations.

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

- Ninety 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.
- Two 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.
- Two 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 March 16, 2020.

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

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
PENALTY ASSESSMENT TV-200152

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 \$900 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**):

We take full responsibility for these violations. We have since fixed all these violations and are in the process of requesting an upgrade to conditional status and filing a Safety Management Plan.

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: 3/18/20 [month/day/year], at Freeland, WA [city, state]

Backbreakers NW LLC
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 B felony.”