

*Working Together
for Vermont*

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Commissioner's Message

Patricia A. McDonald, VDOL Commissioner

Vosha Reaches Out to the Business and Education Communities

The Vermont Occupational Safety and Health Administration (VOSHA) is a highly regulatory program that inspects Vermont businesses to make sure they are complying with the safety and health regulations adopted by the state. A large percentage of Vermont employers strive to provide their workers with a safe and healthy workplace. They do this to maintain a stable experienced work force, maintain employee morale, control Workers' Compensation costs, and become more profitable.

On October 1, 2005, VOSHA added a position to proactively work with these employers, employees, and their trade associations to assist them in complying with VOSHA standards, reducing injuries and illnesses, and lowering Workers' Compensation costs. This position, called a Compliance Assistance Specialist (CAS), works with organizations to provide training materials that assist in making workplaces safer.

In addition, VOSHA is reaching out to employers in high hazard industries to provide them with industry specific information on how they can make their workplace safer. VOSHA will highlight the benefits of a safe workplace as an incentive for businesses.

Just recently, the VOSHA division contracted with Norman James to continue his highway safety program aimed at reducing injuries and fatalities due to motor vehicle accidents. Norm is publishing a monthly on-line newsletter called Project Roadsafe. This newsletter provides current information, statistics, and tips on safe driving behaviors.

To further the VOSHA/WorkSAFE strategic goals (reduce injuries and fatalities in construction and general industry), VOSHA is working with Associated General Contractors (AGC) to provide defensive driving information to construction management and safety personnel. The plan is to have the safety officers provide the training to the workers through formal training, weekly toolbox talks, and distribution of safe driving pamphlets. This will be done under the VOSHA alliance with AGC.

VOSHA will reach out to employers in general industry to provide the same training to their employees, particularly those that have employees who drive vehicles as part of their job.

Compliance Assistance Specialist Dan Whipple conducted a ten-hour course for construction VOTECH students at the North Country Career Center in Newport. Also participating in the course was a local construction company that provided a portion of the training. At the end of the session, Dan arranged for the students to go through an active construction site in Newport to see the issues the training covered.

VOSHA signed an alliance with the North Country Career Center to continue the training for their construction students and the students in the other trades taught at the school.

Currently, VOSHA is working with AGC and the Vermont Department of Education to conduct training for vocational education instructors. This training will educate the instructors in the VOSHA safety rules so they can train the students to work safely in order to prevent injuries to themselves or other workers when they enter the workforce.

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The Edge

Workplace Traffic Safety Program Created

Vermont's Commissioner of Labor, Patricia McDonald, has announced that a workplace traffic safety program, an outreach program to Vermont employers about the benefits of traffic safety in the workplace, has been created in the Vermont Department of Labor.

Citing U.S. Department of Labor statistics showing that the number one cause of death and injury in the workplace are traffic crashes, Commissioner McDonald said, "This program will speak to that issue by advising Vermont employers that workplace traffic safety is just as vital to their bottom line as traditional, inside-the-building workplace safety."

The new program, located in the Workers' Compensation and Safety Division of the Department of Labor, will create partnerships with other state agencies and private employer groups to distribute information and traffic safety materials to Vermont employers.

Commissioner McDonald also said regional conferences, organized through local employer groups will enhance program efforts to meet employer traffic safety needs. She said it is critical that employers know that traffic crashes are often the hidden cost of doing business.

"Businesses incur enormous costs from traffic crashes and increased medical costs," she noted. "We want to help businesses reduce the cost of doing business with effective traffic safety programs."

Employers interested in more information should contact:

Norman James, State Coordinator
Workplace Traffic Safety Program
Vermont Department of Labor
P.O. Box 488, Montpelier, VT 05601
802-828-4172
njames@labor.state.vt.us

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Commissioner's Message –

(continued from front page)

VOSHA is working to sign an alliance with the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program to provide basic safety and health training for new workers with limited English skills. VOSHA will provide the training and the resettlement program will provide translation.

VOSHA and WorkSAFE are providing safety and health training for the Vermont Registered Apprentice Program. Each apprentice class is receiving training on the safety and health hazards they will be exposed to on the work site. This work will continue next year with the new apprenticeship classes. Safety training, especially machine guarding, electrical, lock out/tag out, and fall protection will be a part of the apprentice curriculum for ski lift mechanics.

VOSHA is recognizing employers with superior safety and health programs and high level of management commitment and employee involvement. These companies are awarded the Green Mountain Voluntary Protection Program Star status. This recognizes their commitment to a safe and healthful workplace and places them in an elite group of employers that numbers less than 1300 nationwide.

VOSHA has formed alliances with several organizations to further the outreach and training efforts of the division. These alliances, which include AGC, Vermont Nursing Home Assn, Vermont Utilities for Electrical Education and the Vermont Department of Transportation, work cooperatively with VOSHA to provide information and training on industry specific hazards. The organizations disseminate the information to their constituents.

Lastly, VOSHA is working with the Vermont Safety and Health Council to develop a method of increasing awareness of safety and health in all business regardless of size. We will be working to develop a public training

calendar that will list safety and health training opportunities in Vermont and New Hampshire. We will also work to increase the availability of safety and health information.

Patricia A. McDonald

The Edge - (continued from front page)

Employer Guidebook to Reduce Traffic Crashes - The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), and Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS) have joined forces to create the 32-page **Guidelines for Employers to Reduce Motor Vehicle Crashes**. The guidebook offers useful information to help employers design an effective driver safety program in their workplace. It features a 10-step program outlining what an employer can do to improve traffic safety performance and minimize the risk of motor vehicle crashes. The document includes success stories from employers who have benefited from effective driver safety programs. For more information, visit: http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=NEWS_RELEASE&p_id=11845

Vermont Construction Firm Highlighted in New Workplace Traffic Safety Guidebook - Pike Industries, of Barre, Vermont, is one of only four firms across the country, used as a case study for safe driving in the workplace in the new **Guidelines for Employers to Reduce Motor Vehicle Crashes** that has just been published and distributed nationally. The guidebook is offered as a key to a successful workplace traffic safety program for any company of any size delivering products and services on the nation's highways using either company or private vehicles.

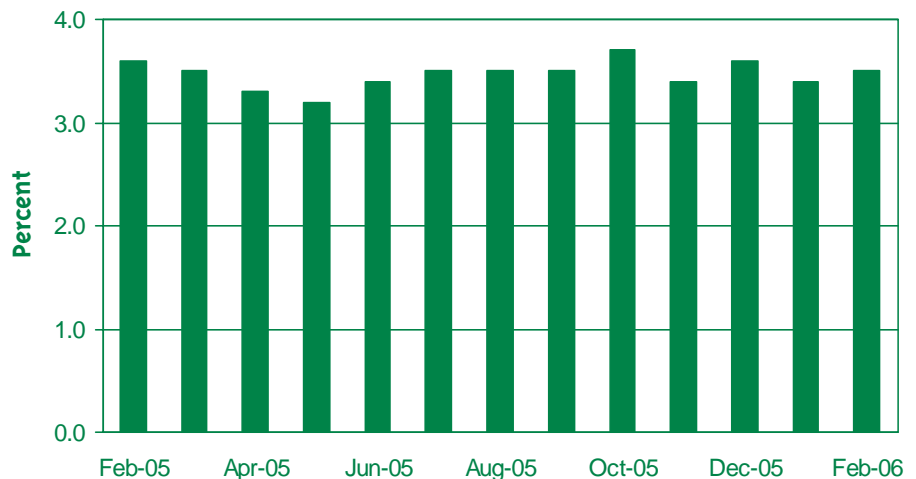
Pike Industries, an asphalt paving company, has approximately 250 employees in Vermont, and operates 280 vehicles of all kinds including pickups, tractor-trailers, and dump trucks. New drivers receive classroom training and each is assigned a veteran "mentor." Veteran drivers attend annual classroom training that includes a review of federal regulations and crash avoidance techniques. All drivers attend weekly "toolbox" talks to discuss fleet safety topics.

The booklet **Guidelines for Employers to Reduce Motor Vehicle Crashes**, is available to employers from: njames@labor.state.vt.us. The booklet will be sent in the mail, so be sure to include your mailing address.

Contact VDOL

If your address has changed or to discontinue your subscription, please email: sredpath@labor.state.vt.us

Vermont Seasonally Adjusted Unemployment Rate



Vermont Unemployment Estimates Statewide *(Seasonally Adjusted)*

	Feb. '06	Jan. '06	Feb. '05	Changes from:	
				Jan. '06	Feb. '05
TOTAL LABOR FORCE¹	362,600	360,900	354,300	1,700	8,300
EMPLOYED	349,800	348,700	341,500	1,100	8,300
UNEMPLOYED	12,700	12,200	12,700	500	0
RATE (%)	3.5	3.4	3.6	0.1	-0.1

¹Includes proprietors, professionals, and unpaid family workers.

Labor Market Areas By Residence *(Not Seasonally Adjusted)*

AREA	Total Labor Force	Number Employed	Number Unemployed	Feb-06 Rate (%)	Jan-06 Rate (%)	Feb-04 Rate (%)
Barre-Montpelier	29,650	28,150	1,500	5.0	5.6	5.2
Bennington	12,550	12,050	500	4.1	4.1	4.9
Bradford	4,900	4,650	250	5.0	5.5	5.5
Brattleboro	25,000	24,050	900	3.5	3.5	3.8
Burlington-South Burlington	113,600	109,350	4,200	3.7	3.7	3.6
Hartford	18,900	18,450	400	2.2	2.0	2.6
Manchester	12,850	12,300	500	4.0	3.6	4.1
Middlebury	17,400	16,650	750	4.3	4.2	4.4
Morristown-Stowe	20,700	19,700	1,000	4.7	4.6	5.3
Newport	14,450	13,500	950	6.7	6.4	7.2
Randolph	8,150	7,800	350	4.5	4.3	4.4
Rutland	29,950	28,750	1,200	4.1	3.8	4.0
Springfield	12,950	12,400	550	4.2	4.0	4.2
St. Johnsbury	14,650	13,850	750	5.2	5.0	5.1
Swanton-Enosburg	14,500	13,550	950	6.5	6.4	6.3
Warren-Waitsfield	4,850	4,750	100	2.4	2.2	2.0
Woodstock	3,500	3,400	100	2.5	2.5	3.3
Vermont Total	360,700	345,600	15,100	4.2	4.1	4.3

AREAS FROM ADJOINING STATES INCLUDING VERMONT TOWNS *(Not Seasonally Adjusted)*

Colebrook, NH-VT	3,750	3,600	150	4.3	3.8	4.2
Lebanon, NH-VT	44,800	43,650	1,100	2.5	2.3	2.6
Littleton, NH-VT	15,100	14,550	550	3.7	3.6	3.9
North Adams, MA-VT	16,950	15,850	1,100	6.5	6.5	6.3

Monthly estimates are preliminary and subject to revision. Detail may not add to totals due to rounding.

Vermont Seasonally Adjusted Nonfarm Employment in Thousands

BY NAICS	Prelim.	Revised	Revised	Changes From:	
	Feb. '06	Jan. '06	Feb. '05	Jan. '06	Feb. '05
Total - All Industries	306.0	306.4	304.7	-0.4	1.3
Private Industries	252.8	253.2	251.9	-0.4	0.9
Construction	16.4	16.5	16.3	-0.1	0.1
Manufacturing	36.7	36.8	37.0	-0.1	-0.3
Trade, Transportation & Utilities	59.9	59.9	59.5	0.0	0.4
Retail Trade *	40.8	40.7	40.6	0.1	0.2
Financial Activities	13.3	13.2	13.2	0.1	0.1
Professional & Business Services	22.2	22.2	21.8	0.0	0.4
Education & Health Care	54.8	54.9	53.9	-0.1	0.9
Private Ed. Services*	12.5	12.4	12.4	0.1	0.1
Health Care & Social Assistance*	42.5	42.5	41.4	0.0	1.1
Leisure & Hospitality	32.8	32.8	33.0	0.0	-0.2
Other Services	10.0	10.1	10.0	-0.1	0.0
Total Government	53.2	53.2	52.8	0.0	0.4

*These estimates are not endorsed by the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics.

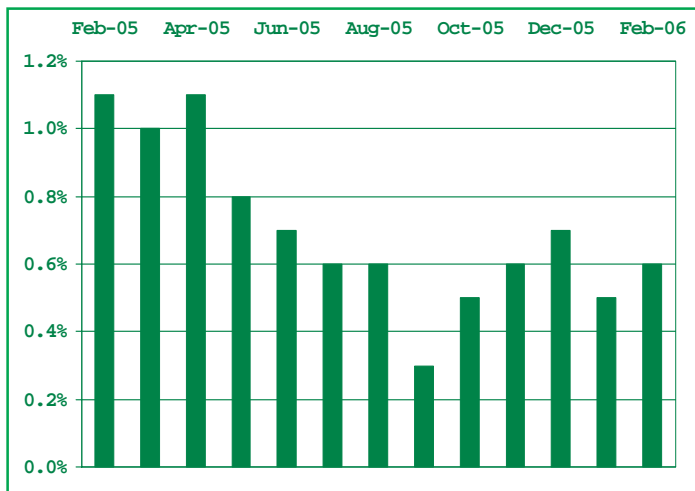
Note: Total - All Industries estimate is seasonally adjusted independently.

All seasonal adjustment performed with X12-ARIMA. Seasonal factors available from VDOL/LMI on request.

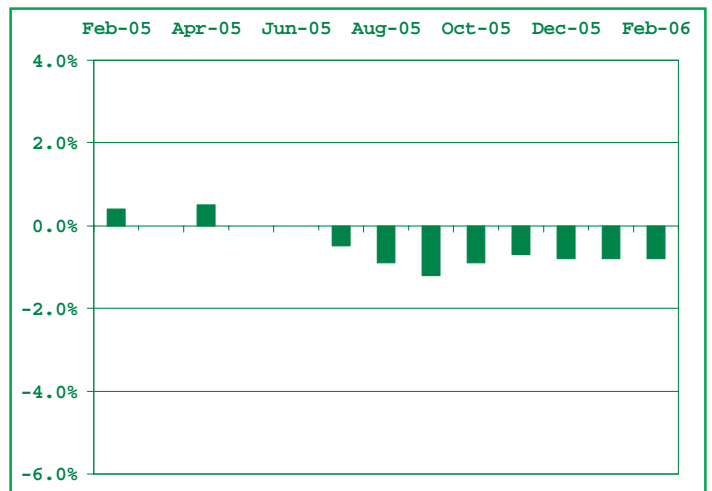
Produced by the Vermont Department of Labor in cooperation with the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics, unless otherwise noted.

Vermont Annual Job Growth Not Seasonally Adjusted Data

All Industries



Manufacturing



Nonfarm Employment In Vermont *(Not Seasonally Adjusted)*

Compiled by the Vermont Department of Labor in cooperation with the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor

INDUSTRY BY NAICS	Prelim.	Revised	Revised	Changes From:	
	Feb. '06	Jan. '06	Feb. '05	Jan. '06	Feb. '05
TOTAL NONFARM	305,800	304,750	304,050	1,050	1,750
TOTAL PRIVATE	250,300	250,950	248,900	-650	1,400
GOODS PRODUCING	51,050	51,650	51,150	-600	-100
MANUFACTURING	36,300	36,250	36,600	50	-300
Durable Goods	26,250	26,150	26,350	100	-100
Computer & Electrical Equipment Mfg.	9,150	9,250	9,150	-100	0
Fabricated Metal Products Mfg.	3,050	3,050	2,950	0	100
Machinery Mfg.	2,950	3,000	3,050	-50	-100
Transportation Equipment Mfg.	2,450	2,450	2,400	0	50
Furniture & Related Product Mfg.	2,000	2,050	2,100	-50	-100
Non-Durable Goods	10,050	10,100	10,250	-50	-200
Food Mfg.	3,700	3,750	3,650	-50	50
CONSTRUCTION	14,000	14,650	13,800	-650	200
NATURAL RESOURCES & MINING	750	750	750	0	0
SERVICE-PROVIDING	254,750	253,100	252,900	1,650	1,850
TRADE, TRANSPORTATION AND UTILITIES	58,800	59,150	58,650	-350	150
Wholesale Trade	10,000	10,000	9,900	0	100
Retail Trade	40,000	40,300	39,800	-300	200
Food & Beverage Stores	9,400	9,500	9,300	-100	100
General Merchandise Store	2,700	2,800	2,750	-100	-50
Transportation, Warehousing and Utilities	8,800	8,850	8,950	-50	-150
Utilities	1,700	1,700	1,700	0	0
Transportation & Warehousing	7,100	7,150	7,250	-50	-150
INFORMATION	6,300	6,250	6,200	50	100
FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES	13,050	13,050	13,000	0	50
Finance & Insurance	9,850	9,900	9,850	-50	0
Real Estate, Rental & Leasing	3,200	3,150	3,150	50	50
PROFESSIONAL AND BUSINESS SERVICES	21,300	21,200	20,900	100	400
Professional, Scientific and Technical	12,750	12,750	12,650	0	100
Administrative, Support and Waste	8,250	8,200	8,000	50	250
EDUCATIONAL AND HEALTH SERVICES	55,100	54,550	53,900	550	1,200
Educational Services	12,950	12,150	12,950	800	0
College, Universities and Professional	6,950	6,600	6,950	350	0
Health Care and Social Assistance	42,150	42,400	40,950	-250	1,200
Ambulatory Health Care Services	15,550	15,650	15,700	-100	-150
Hospitals	10,800	10,900	10,350	-100	450
Nursing and Residential Care Facilities	6,650	6,750	6,600	-100	50
LEISURE AND HOSPITALITY	34,950	35,300	35,300	-350	-350
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	3,250	3,200	3,350	50	-100
Accommodation and Food Services	31,700	32,100	31,950	-400	-250
Accommodations	13,750	14,150	14,100	-400	-350
Hotel & Motels	12,850	13,300	13,100	-450	-250
Food Services and Drinking Places	17,950	17,950	17,850	0	100
OTHER SERVICES	9,750	9,800	9,800	-50	-50
GOVERNMENT	55,500	53,800	55,150	1,700	350
Federal Government	5,950	6,000	6,100	-50	-150
State Government Education	8,800	7,400	8,700	1,400	100
Local Government Education	24,350	24,000	24,200	350	150
Other State Government	9,500	9,450	9,400	50	100
Other Local Government	6,900	6,950	6,750	-50	150



Unemployment Insurance and Wage Division

The Unemployment Insurance and Wage Division's two primary responsibilities are to provide temporary income for those workers who become involuntarily unemployed, who are able and willing to accept available suitable jobs, and to oversee and resolve issues concerning minimum wage, overtime, wage payments, employee benefits, and child labor. Employer taxes paid to the department and the federal government fund the entire cost of the Unemployment Insurance program. Employers also play a critical role in the administration of the UI program by providing wage information that is used to compute benefit eligibility and by responding to mailings directly related to an unemployed worker. They also help to ensure the integrity of the program by reporting potential fraudulent activities and not enabling individuals who are receiving benefits to also work off the books at the same time.

The division is comprised of the Claims Center, Employer Services, along with the Program Integrity, Wage and Hour, and the Information Technology Unit. Field Tax Auditors and Fraud Investigations also play a pivotal role in the integrity of the UI program, in addition to assisting with Wage and Hour claims. Valerie Rickert, a 20-year employee of the department, was recently appointed as the director of the division.

Our staff in the Information Technology Unit, managed by Patrick McCabe, technically supports all functions within the division. IT uses the latest technology such as a fully automated claim center for taking unemployment claims, voice response systems for processing weekly claims, and Internet applications for both employers and claimants. These systems allow us to support the payment of unemployment claims, the charging of benefits, the quarterly tax processing for employers, and federal reporting. In 2005, the unit was responsible for the ensuring payment and accounting of 310,000 checks totaling \$82 million, and the processing of taxes totaling \$54 million.

The Claims Center, managed by Corinne Ingraham, is responsible for processing all unemployment claims and determining eligibility for Vermont's unemployed workforce. To accomplish this task, the Claims Center has several Customer Service Representatives, Claims Specialists, Adjudicators, and clerical support. The claims process starts when an unemployed worker calls the Initial Claims Line. A customer service representative gathers all the necessary information to start the claim and employers are promptly notified. After a claim is opened, weekly claims can be filed by telephone, mail, or by Internet application. Direct deposit of the unemployment check is available, which eliminates the potential loss of checks. First payment is generally made within 11 days of opening the claim.

If the unemployed worker has left employment due to potentially disqualifying circumstances, has received separation pay, and/or has a potential able or availability issue, the claim is sent to an adjudicator for fact-finding. In April of 2004, we fully implemented a new adjudications system, Non-Monetary Adjudication System (NMAS), which dramatically improved our ability to address issues in a timely manner. The NMAS system allows the adjudicator to schedule fact-finding interviews with the claimant or employer, has numerous case managing tools, and uniform documents to assist with consistency in adjudicating issues. Since the implementation of NMAS, issues are generally resolved within 8 days of being assigned to the adjudicator.

The Claim Center also administers the Short-time Compensation (STC) plan. Employers who use this program have found it helps avoid total layoffs when work is slow. Plans are underway to fully automate the STC program through an Internet application, which will be used by the employer and worker.

The Employer Services Unit, managed by Maria Beede, is responsible for establishing, maintaining, or closing employer accounts. Each quarter, the Reports Processing Unit processes over 20,000 contribution reports and payments. Currently the Employer Services Unit has two major automation projects in the works. Preliminary efforts are underway to work collaboratively with the Tax Department and Secretary of State to develop an Internet registration process. We

Unemployment Insurance and Wage Division

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are also in the process of developing a program that will allow employers to report and pay their quarterly unemployment taxes over the Internet. It is expected this method of reporting will become available later this year. Both projects will involve employer representatives to help ensure the applications are user friendly.

Magnetic media reporting is already available for wage record reporting and federally required reports of New Hire. Electronically submitted reports save a substantial amount of processing time, reduction of paper, and potential errors in transposition of data, for employers and departmental personnel. Instructions and specifications for magnetic media are available at our website www.labor.state.gov or by calling 802-828-4253. Additionally, reports of New Hire, as required within 20 days of hiring an employee, can currently be done on our website.

The Employer Services Unit also has several field staff who conduct examinations of employer records to determine employer liability and to ensure proper reporting of all taxable wages. The auditors obtain missing wages and gather information to assist potentially eligible claimants in securing their unemployment benefits. From the ten statewide regional offices, the auditors assist employers, accountants, lawyers, and the general public by providing an understanding of the complex regulations and reporting requirements for Unemployment Compensation laws, as well as

explain the relationships with other state agencies.

The Program Integrity Unit, managed by Darcy Hamlin, is responsible for evaluating the proper payment of Unemployment Insurance claims and tax processes, identification and collection of benefit overpayments, and collection of delinquent employer tax and contribution reports. Benefit payments historically have been audited by the cross-match of wage record information with the Unemployment Insurance claims records. Through this cross-match, we are able to identify misreported wage issues as well as unknown separation issues. On the horizon is the implementation of a New Hire Reporting cross-match, which will allow us to utilize recent reports of new hire, identifying potential wage reporting issues months earlier than our current methods allow.

The Benefit Accuracy Measurement or BAM program, administered in the Program Integrity Unit, is responsible for conducting random audits of all aspects involving an unemployment claim. The purpose of these audits is multi-functioning in that the data is used to project the statistical likelihood of the accuracy of all claims filed as well as being a method of determining the improper payment of claims, establishing overpayments, and identifying areas of the department processes that could be improved to prevent a continuation of improper payments. The Tax Performance System or TPS program is responsible for similar random reviews related to the administration of an employer's tax account.

The Wage and Hour Unit, managed by Kelley Connelley, oversees state law and adopted rules concerning minimum wage, overtime, wage payments, employee benefits and child labor. The unit also provides information on wage and employment related issues and attempts to settle employer/employee wage and benefits disputes to the satisfaction of all parties. In 2005, the unit handled 551 wage claims resulting in \$117,045.15 of unpaid wages being turned over to the claimants.

At this time the Wage and Hour Program is working to expand its employer outreach, which will assist with compliance of Wage and Hour laws and rules. Some of the common mistakes made by employers include but are not limited to: deductions that bring employees wages below minimum wage, withholding of wages without employees consent, and improper classification of salary vs. hourly employees.

The Wage and Hour Program offers **free** mandatory posters at our website www.labor.state.gov or by calling 802-828-2157.

Each year, the division organizes informational meetings for employers. Presenters at these meetings include the Tax Department, Internal Revenue Service, Social Security Administration, Office of Child Support, Vocational Rehabilitation and VABIR, Department of Homeland Security/Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the Vermont Department of Labor.

If you would like to receive more information about these meetings, visit our website or call 802-828-4344.



DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

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