

***Insurance Times:*** Conn. WC insurers seek assigned risk rate increase  
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HARTFORD — Connecticut workers compensation rates for the voluntary market should drop overall next year, but assigned risk plan rates need a double-digit jump, the NCCI is recommending.

Specifically, the National Council on Compensation Insurance is seeking an overall 3.5 percent decrease for voluntary market advisory pure premium loss costs and an 11.9 percent jump for the Assigned Risk Plan.

The Connecticut Insurance Department has scheduled a public hearing to address the recommendation on Nov. 15, 10 a.m. at Insurance Department headquarters on 153 Market St.

NCCI is also recommending a change on surcharges for Assigned Risk Plans whose annual premiums are higher than \$5,500.

Right now, a 25 percent surcharge is applied to each qualifying policy, but NCCI wants to replace it with a 25 percent rate differential that applies to all policies.

While NCCI wants Connecticut workers comp rates to decline 3.5 percent overall, individual categories in the voluntary market would both see rate hikes and drops.

The NCCI proposal calls for manufacturing pure premium loss cost rates to drop 5.2 percent, 8.1 percent and 7.9 percent for manufacturing, office and clerical and goods & services, respectively.

Rates would climb 5.5 percent and 1.5 percent for contracting and miscellaneous.

Last year, Insurance Commissioner Susan Cogswell approved a 12.2 percent jump for the assigned risk plan and left the overall rates stay the same for the voluntary market.

Last year's rates followed a seven year stretch of decreasing workers compensation rates in the state.

Mass. to hire firm to again study universal health PLAN

BOSTON — Legislative leaders are entering into negotiations with the Illinois-based consulting firm LECG LLC, which will be charged with providing a fresh perspective and independent analysis of what it would take to deliver universal health care in Massachusetts.

The study is an outgrowth of the July 2000 managed care reform law, which dropped a consumer advocate-driven push for mandatory universal health care. Instead, the law set up an advisory committee to conduct what many are calling a "true study" of the financial impact and institutional dislocation that would be likely if all Massachusetts residents were guaranteed a minimum level of health coverage.

Currently, most citizens receive coverage through their private and government employers, or through government programs like Medicaid that serve the disabled and poor.

But for years, hundreds of thousands of Massachusetts citizens have routinely gone without health insurance either because they can't afford it, are not eligible for government programs, or because their employers don't offer it.

With estimates of the state's uninsured population ranging from 300,000 to 600,000, LECG will be charged with developing creative ways to provide coverage by streamlining and consolidating the complex financial networks and delivery systems that make up the state's health care system.

LECG has pledged to use two analytical perspectives. One focuses on the revenue sources that pay for health care and the other explores delivery and use of health care services.

Committee members believe the study results could lead to reforms that completely overhaul health care financing or incremental reforms that build on strengths of the current system and address weaknesses.

LECG prevailed because of its experience studying Medicaid programs and experimental policies in Oregon, and its work analyzing universal health care access systems in other countries, said Mary Beckham, the state's assistant secretary for health policy. Beckham led the search for a consultant.

LECG also promised to bolster its analyses with information culled from proprietary databases of employer-related health information owned by William M. Mercer Inc.

Advisory committee co-chairs Sen. Mark Montigny (D-New Bedford) and Rep. Nancy Flavin (D-Easthampton) hope to put the company to work in early November and expect a final report and recommendations next May and June.

MASS. FAIR PLAN SEEKS RATE CHANGES

BOSTON — The Massachusetts FAIR Plan wants to adjust insurance rates in several categories for 2002, affecting

homeowners but also rentals and condominiums.

Members of FAIR – also known as the Massachusetts Property Insurance Underwriting Association – testified about their rate filing at an Oct. 24 hearing.

FAIR officials want the rate change to become effective on Dec. 31. If approved, homeowners' rates would increase .4 percent across the state. Tenants and condominium coverage would dip 5 percent.

Combined, FAIR's overall homeowners forms would reflect rates .17 percent cheaper than last year, said Avinash Mehta, the FAIR Plan's technical assistant to the.

The filing also asks for a .6 percent overall decrease for dwelling fire and extended coverage for 1-4-family homes, Mehta said.

Homeowners' business reflects 85 percent of FAIR's total premium.

FAIR's commercial coverage, which represents less than 2.5 percent of total plan premium, wouldn't change.

#### NY ENFORCES CELL PHONE DRIVING BAN

ALBANY, N.Y. — Police have begun enforcing the nation's first law banning hand-held cellular phone use while driving, though offenders will be let go with a warning until Dec. 1.

First-time violators face a \$100 fine after that. A second conviction could bring a \$200 fine and subsequent violations could cost \$500.

Until March, courts may dismiss tickets with proof that motorists have purchased a hands-free phone device.

But Paul Adams, a real estate developer who averages 25,000 miles a year on the road, wonders if the attachments will distract drivers.

"They're all fumbly with their headset, they're not sure how to use it, they're panicking," Adams said. "This is a new learning curve."

The ban drew national headlines and scorn from some politicians but similar legislation is pending in 42 other states.