

L&I Inspector Makes Up New Rules

Central Washington Home Builders Association responds

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Here's a recent example of authoritative abuse from an employee of the state Department of Labor & Industries (L&I). As homebuilders, material suppliers, subcontractors and associates, we all experience the mandated intrusion of L&I into our job sites, offices and even our payroll. As you read this keep in mind that you, the small business owner, provide this particular person with the opportunity for his employment as well as the initial resources for his salary and benefits.

This experience comes to us from one of our builder members and was corroborated by another builder member who experienced similar treatment from the same individual a few days later. We begin with a surprise job-site visit by an L&I electrical inspector. The lead carpenter was somewhat surprised to see the inspector because the electricians were still on the jobsite and the electrical panel hadn't been made up yet.

The inspector appeared to be in a poor mood given some of the critical comments he was making as he walked around. After only a few minutes, the lead carpenter was soundly rebuked for not providing a minimum 18" opening for floor access to a future soaking tub pump motor. After telling the inspector he had never heard of that particular requirement before, the inspector tells him "we had a meeting last week and sh-t runs down hill." Somewhat shocked by that, the carpenter then offered that he would cut in the access opening after the tub was set; he just wanted to make sure the access location was compatible with the pump motor location on the tub. The homeowner had not selected the tub yet. The inspector threatened to make him wire and light the crawlspace if he didn't comply.

The lead carpenter, shaken by this experience, called the builder. Already aware of the other contractors experience a few days earlier, the builder went down to the L&I office. The inspector's immediate supervisor was available and met with the builder right away.

Well, as it turns out, there is not such requirement in the code. The inspector's supervisor was appalled with the inspector's behavior, all the while stating there was not much he could do about it. The conditions of the "employee contract" severely limit the options available to the supervisor. Sanctioning an employee, or even - heaven forbid - firing one is the next thing to impossible, and frankly a whole lot of trouble, inferred the supervisor. But, he agreed to do what he could.

Since that time it has been reported to us that the local L&I office did go as far as they could. The local L&I folks were most cooperative with CWHBA staff and the builder. They met no less than four times with the builder, as well as once with his lead carpenter. Ultimately, a letter of reprimand was put in the employee's file, but he continues to inspect. While this action falls short in our opinion, be assured that L&I has received the message. Our members will not abide crude behavior by L&I field inspectors any longer.

As this episode comes to an end, there is still a question that begs an answer. How many of you would be in business today if you allowed your employees to treat your customers that way? The simple answer is NONE.

THE TOP 10 LIST OF TAXED STATES

According to a recent study by the *Tax Foundation*, Washington State imposes the second highest total tax burden (federal, state & local taxes) in the nation on its citizens. Rankings are listed as a percentage of income.

1.....	Connecticut	36.7%
2.....	Washington	35.6%
3.....	New York	34.7%
4.....	New Jersey	34.3%
5.....	Wyoming.....	34.1%
6.....	Wisconsin	33.2%
7.....	Minnesota	32.9%
8. (tie).....	Michigan	32.8%
 Illinois	32.8%
10.....	California	32.7%

