Pacific Northwest Workers' Compensation
WA vs. OR vs. CA Comparison

A side-by-side comparison of workers' compensation requirements in Washington, Oregon, and California — the three states most relevant to Pacific Northwest businesses. Understanding these differences is essential for employers operating across state lines.

	WASHINGTON	OREGON	CALIFORNIA
Market Type	MONOPOLISTIC State fund only — L&I; Cannot use private carriers	COMPETITIVE Private insurers + SAIF SAIF is state-chartered insurer	COMPETITIVE Private insurers + SCIF SCIF competes with private market
Coverage Threshold	All employers with 1+ employee	All employers with 1+ employee (incl. part-time)	All employers with 1+ employee (incl. family members)
Premium Basis	Hours worked × rate (unique to WA)	Payroll × rate (standard method)	Payroll × rate (own CA classification)
Rating Bureau	L&I; own system (not NCCI)	NCCI (National Council on Comp Insurance)	WCIRB (CA own rating bureau, not NCCI)
Officer Exclusion	Corporate officers may elect to exclude	Officers are employees; exclusion requires filing	Officers generally cannot be excluded
Sole Proprietors	Not required to cover self; may elect coverage	Not required to cover self; may elect coverage	Not required to cover self; may elect coverage
Employers Liability	NOT included in L&I; coverage — must buy separate stop-gap	Included in private policy (Part B standard)	Included in private policy (Part B standard)
Safety Committee	Required for 11+ employees (L&I;)	Required for 11+ employees (OR-OSHA)	Written IIPP required for ALL employers
Injury Reporting	Serious/fatal: 8 hrs to L&I; Other injuries: 5 business days	First Report of Injury within 5 days of knowledge	DWC-1 to worker within 1 business day of knowledge
Claims Admin	L&I; administers all claims; self-insured option avail.	Insurer or TPA administers; managed care orgs avail.	Insurer/TPA; heavy regulation & litigation
Independent Contractors	Standard ABC test; IC misclassification carries penalties	Standard tests apply; construction scrutiny high	AB5 law — strict ABC test; heavy misclassification penalties
Experience Rating	L&I; own experience rating system (separate from NCCI)	NCCI experience modification applies	WCIRB experience modification applies (separate from NCCI)
Relative Cost	Moderate (L&I; administered; no market competition)	Moderate to Low (competitive market keeps rates in check)	HIGH (among highest in nation; calculate carefully)
Out-of-State Employer	Must register with L&I; for any WA employees; no private carrier option	Must obtain OR coverage for OR employees; constractor board filing req'd	CA law applies to anyone working in CA — even temporarily
Temporary Workers in State	WA L&I; coverage required after brief threshold (consult L&I;)	OR coverage required; reciprocity agreements may apply	CA coverage strongly recommended for any work performed in CA

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KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR MULTI-STATE EMPLOYERS

Washington	Washington's monopolistic system means you CANNOT purchase workers' comp from a private insurer. You must register with L&I; and file quarterly hour-based reports. Critically, L&I; does not include employers liability (Part B) — purchase stop-gap coverage separately to protect against third-party claims. If you self-insure in other states, Washington still requires separate L&I; enrollment.
Oregon	Oregon offers the most flexibility — private insurers compete with SAIF, keeping rates reasonable. If you're already insured in Washington, you'll need a separate Oregon policy or endorsement. SAIF is a solid option for employers who have trouble with the voluntary market. Don't forget construction contractor board registration requirements if you do any construction work in Oregon.
California	California demands the most attention. Rates are significantly higher than WA or OR. AB5's strict independent contractor tests mean many workers presumed to be ICs elsewhere must be covered as employees in California. If you send even one employee to California on a project — even briefly — verify that your policy covers California exposure. Never assume your WA or OR policy covers California workers.

First Underwriters Insurance Brokers — Your Pacific Northwest Multi-State Workers' Comp Specialists

We help employers navigate the complex intersection of Washington's L&I;, Oregon's competitive market, and California's heavily regulated system. Whether you need to build a multi-state program from scratch or audit an existing one, we have the expertise to ensure you're covered correctly — and cost-effectively.

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