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latest findings from the state Employment Security Department.

Jun. 13, 2013

Workers in Washington state are making more money these days, according to the latest findings from the state Employment Security Department.

For the first time in history, the average annual wage has passed the \$50,000 mark to \$51,595 in 2012. That's an increase of 3.4 percent, the agency said.

The average weekly wage climbed from \$959 to \$992. The figures only include wages covered by unemployment insurance.

The agency said much of the increase was driven by a 6.1 percent hike in the number of insured workers earning more than \$75,000. The average number of Washington workers covered by unemployment grew by 1.9 percent — or 52,519 people. Total earnings increased 5.4 percent, or by \$7.4 billion.

The average annual wage is the basis for calculating unemployment benefits for jobless workers. The minimum weekly benefit is calculated at 15 percent of the average weekly wage. That will increase by \$5 to \$148 for claims opened on or after July 7. Meanwhile, the maximum weekly benefit, calculated at 63 percent of the average weekly wage, will jump by \$20 to \$624. Roughly 18 percent of current unemployment-insurance claims are paid the maximum benefit, while 7 percent are paid the minimum.

Apart from unemployment benefits, the average annual wage is also used to compute employer's unemployment taxes. Starting next year, employers will pay unemployment taxes on the first \$41,300 paid to each employee, up from \$39,800 this year.

The three industries with the highest wage growth in 2012 were the company

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