



Arkansas Workers' Compensation Training Guide

Permanent Partial Impairment (PPI) Ratings

Purpose

This training document explains how Permanent Partial Impairment (PPI) ratings are determined and applied under Arkansas workers' compensation law. It is intended for adjusters, case managers, utilization review staff, and claims professionals.

1. Definition of Permanent Partial Impairment

Permanent Partial Impairment refers to a permanent functional or anatomical loss that remains after the employee has reached the end of the healing period. PPI ratings quantify the degree of permanent impairment to the body as a whole or to a scheduled member.

Key points:

- PPI is evaluated only after the healing period ends.
- Impairment reflects permanent loss of function, not disability or wage loss.
- Pain alone is not ratable unless supported by objective findings.

2. Legal Authority

Arkansas impairment ratings are governed by:

- Ark. Code Ann. § 11-9-521 (scheduled injuries)
- Ark. Code Ann. § 11-9-522 (unscheduled injuries)
- Ark. Code Ann. § 11-9-704(c)(1)(B)
- AWCC Rule 34 (impairment rating guidelines)

The Arkansas Workers' Compensation Commission requires the use of the American Medical Association's Guides to the Evaluation of Permanent Impairment, 4th Edition.

3. Timing of an Impairment Rating

A PPI rating may be assigned when:

- Maximum Medical Improvement (MMI) has been reached.
- The condition is stable and not expected to improve.
- Permanent work restrictions are established, if applicable.

Impairment ratings assigned before MMI are premature and not valid.

4. Objective Findings Requirement

Arkansas law requires impairment ratings to be based on objective and measurable findings.

Examples of acceptable objective findings:

- Diagnostic imaging (MRI, X-ray, CT)
- EMG/NCV studies
- Loss of range of motion measured per AMA Guides
- Surgical findings

Subjective complaints alone are insufficient.

5. Scheduled vs. Unscheduled Injuries

Scheduled Injuries (Ark. Code Ann. § 11-9-521):

- Apply to specific body parts (arm, leg, hand, foot, eye, etc.).
- Compensation is based on the statutory schedule.
- Wage-loss factors do not apply.



Unscheduled Injuries (Ark. Code Ann. § 11-9-522):

- Typically involve the spine or body as a whole.
- Impairment rating is combined with vocational factors to determine wage-loss disability.
- AWCC considers age, education, work history, and transferable skills.

6. Role of the Treating Physician

- Treating physicians typically assign impairment ratings.
- Ratings must reference the AMA Guides, 4th Edition.
- Physicians must explain how objective findings support the percentage assigned.

The Commission may reject ratings that:

- Use the wrong AMA edition
- Fail to cite objective findings
- Are inconsistent with medical records

7. Independent Medical Evaluations (IMEs)

IMEs may be requested to:

- Resolve disputes over impairment ratings
- Validate methodology used by the treating physician
- Address inconsistencies or overstatement of impairment

The AWCC weighs credibility, methodology, and consistency with statutory standards.

8. Common Disputes

Frequent disputes involving PPI ratings include:

- Use of subjective complaints in rating calculation
- Improper use of the AMA Guides
- Inflated ratings unsupported by objective evidence
- Disagreement over scheduled vs. unscheduled classification

9. Practical Claims Handling Tips

- Confirm the physician used AMA Guides, 4th Edition.
- Verify objective findings support each component of the rating.
- Document the MMI date clearly.
- Review ratings for mathematical and methodological accuracy.
- Consider IME referral when ratings appear excessive or unsupported.

10. Summary

Permanent Partial Impairment ratings are a critical component of Arkansas workers' compensation claims. Proper timing, reliance on objective findings, and strict adherence to statutory and AWCC requirements are essential to ensure accurate benefit calculation and defensible claim outcomes.