

§ 97-2. Definitions.

When used in this Article, unless the context otherwise requires:

- (1) Employment. – The term "employment" includes employment by the State and all political subdivisions thereof, and all public and quasi-public corporations therein and all private employments in which three or more employees are regularly employed in the same business or establishment or in which one or more employees are employed in activities which involve the use or presence of radiation, except agriculture and domestic services, unless 10 or more full-time nonseasonal agricultural workers are regularly employed by the employer and an individual sawmill and logging operator with less than 10 employees, who saws and logs less than 60 days in any six consecutive months and whose principal business is unrelated to sawmilling or logging. For purposes of this section, "agriculture" has the same meaning as in G.S. 106-581.1.
- (2) Employee. – The term "employee" means every person engaged in an employment under any appointment or contract of hire or apprenticeship, express or implied, oral or written, including aliens, and also minors, whether lawfully or unlawfully employed, but excluding persons whose employment is both casual and not in the course of the trade, business, profession, or occupation of his employer, and as relating to those so employed by the State, the term "employee" shall include all officers and employees of the State, including such as are elected by the people, or by the General Assembly, or appointed by the Governor to serve on a per diem, part-time or fee basis, either with or without the confirmation of the Senate; as relating to municipal corporations and political subdivisions of the State, the term "employee" shall include all officers and employees thereof, including such as are elected by the people. The term "employee" shall include members of the North Carolina National Guard while on State active duty under orders of the Governor and members of the North Carolina State Defense Militia while on State active duty under orders of the Governor. The term "employee" shall include deputy sheriffs and all persons acting in the capacity of deputy sheriffs, whether appointed by the sheriff or by the governing body of the county and whether serving on a fee basis or on a salary basis, or whether deputy sheriffs serving upon a full-time basis or a part-time basis, and including deputy sheriffs appointed to serve in an emergency, but as to those so appointed, only during the continuation of the emergency. The sheriff shall furnish to the board of county commissioners a complete list of all deputy sheriffs named or appointed by him immediately after their appointment and notify the board of commissioners of any changes made therein promptly after such changes are made. Any reference to an employee who has been injured shall, when the employee is dead, include also the employee's legal representative, dependents, and other persons to whom compensation may be payable: Provided, further, that any employee, as herein defined, of a municipality, county, or of the State of North Carolina, while engaged in the discharge of the employee's official duty outside the jurisdictional or territorial limits of the municipality, county, or the State of North Carolina and while acting pursuant to authorization or instruction from any superior officer, shall have the same rights under this Article as if such duty or activity were performed within the territorial boundary limits of their employer.

Except as otherwise provided herein, every executive officer elected or appointed and empowered in accordance with the charter and bylaws of a corporation shall be considered as an employee of such corporation under this Article.

Any such executive officer of a corporation may, notwithstanding any other provision of this Article, be exempt from the coverage of the corporation's insurance contract by such corporation's specifically excluding such executive officer in such contract of insurance, and the exclusion to remove such executive officer from the coverage shall continue for the period such contract of insurance is in effect, and during such period such executive officers thus exempted from the coverage of the insurance contract shall not be employees of such corporation under this Article.

All county agricultural extension service employees who do not receive official federal appointments as employees of the United States Department of Agriculture and who are field faculty members with professional rank as designated in the memorandum of understanding between the North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service, North Carolina State University, A & T State University, and the boards of county commissioners shall be deemed to be employees of the State of North Carolina. All other county agricultural extension service employees paid from State or county funds shall be deemed to be employees of the county board of commissioners in the county in which the employee is employed for purposes of workers' compensation.

The term "employee" shall also include members of the Civil Air Patrol currently certified pursuant to G.S. 143B-1031(a) when performing duties in the course and scope of a State-approved mission pursuant to Subpart C of Part 5 of Article 13 of Chapter 143B of the General Statutes.

"Employee" shall not include any person performing voluntary service as a ski patrolman who receives no compensation for such services other than meals or lodging or the use of ski tow or ski lift facilities or any combination thereof.

"Employee" shall not include any person elected or appointed and empowered as an executive officer, director, or committee member under the charter, articles, or bylaws of a nonprofit corporation subject to Chapter 47A, 47C, 47F, 55A, or 59B of the General Statutes, or any organization exempt from federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, who performs only voluntary service for the nonprofit corporation, provided that the person receives no remuneration for the voluntary service other than reasonable reimbursement for expenses incurred in connection with the voluntary service. When a nonprofit corporation as described herein employs one or more persons who do receive remuneration other than reasonable reimbursement for expenses, then any volunteer officers, directors, or committee members excluded from the definition of "employee" by operation of this paragraph shall be counted as employees for the sole purpose of determining the number of persons regularly employed in the same business or establishment pursuant to G.S. 97-2(1). Other than for the limited purpose of determining the number of persons regularly employed in the same business or establishment, such volunteer nonprofit officers, directors, or committee members shall not be "employees" under the Act. Nothing herein shall prohibit a nonprofit corporation as described herein from voluntarily electing to provide for workers' compensation benefits in the manner provided in

G.S. 97-93 for volunteer officers, directors, or committee members excluded from the definition of "employee" by operation of this paragraph. This paragraph shall not apply to any volunteer firefighter, volunteer member of an organized rescue squad, an authorized emergency worker when that individual is engaged in emergency fire suppression activities for the North Carolina Forest Service, a duly appointed and sworn member of an auxiliary police department organized pursuant to G.S. 160A-282, or a senior member of the State Civil Air Patrol functioning under Subpart C of Part 5 of Article 13 of Chapter 143B of the General Statutes, even if such person is elected or appointed and empowered as an executive officer, director, or committee member under the charter, articles, or bylaws of a nonprofit corporation as described herein.

Any sole proprietor or partner of a business or any member of a limited liability company may elect to be included as an employee under the workers' compensation coverage of such business if he or she is actively engaged in the operation of the business and if the insurer is notified of his election to be so included. Any such sole proprietor or partner or member of a limited liability company shall, upon such election, be entitled to employee benefits and be subject to employee responsibilities prescribed in this Article.

"Employee" shall include an authorized emergency worker of the North Carolina Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services when that individual is engaged in emergency activities for the North Carolina Forest Service. As used in this section, "authorized emergency worker" means an individual who has completed required emergency response training as required by the North Carolina Forest Service and who is available as needed by the North Carolina Forest Service for emergency activities, including immediate dispatch to wildfires, snow events, hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, or other emergencies, and standby for initial attack on fires during periods of high fire danger.

- (3) Employer. – The term "employer" means the State and all political subdivisions thereof, all public and quasi-public corporations therein, every person carrying on any employment, and the legal representative of a deceased person or the receiver or trustee of any person. The board of commissioners of each county of the State, for the purposes of this law, shall be considered as "employer" of all deputy sheriffs serving within such county, or persons serving or performing the duties of a deputy sheriff, whether such persons are appointed by the sheriff or by the board of commissioners and whether serving on a fee basis or salary basis. Each county is authorized to insure its compensation liability for deputy sheriffs to the same extent it is authorized to insure other compensation liability for employees thereof. For purposes of this Chapter, when an authorized pickup firefighter of the North Carolina Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is engaged in emergency fire suppression activities for the North Carolina Forest Service, that individual's employer is the North Carolina Forest Service.
- (4) Person. – The term "person" means individual, partnership, association or corporation.
- (5) Average Weekly Wages. – "Average weekly wages" shall mean the earnings of the injured employee in the employment in which the employee was working at the time of the injury during the period of 52 weeks immediately preceding the date of the injury, including the subsistence allowance paid to

veteran trainees by the United States government, provided the amount of said allowance shall be reported monthly by said trainee to the trainee's employer, divided by 52; but if the injured employee lost more than seven consecutive calendar days at one or more times during such period, although not in the same week, then the earnings for the remainder of such 52 weeks shall be divided by the number of weeks remaining after the time so lost has been deducted. Where the employment prior to the injury extended over a period of fewer than 52 weeks, the method of dividing the earnings during that period by the number of weeks and parts thereof during which the employee earned wages shall be followed; provided, results fair and just to both parties will be thereby obtained. Where, by reason of a shortness of time during which the employee has been in the employment of his employer or the casual nature or terms of his employment, it is impractical to compute the average weekly wages as above defined, regard shall be had to the average weekly amount which during the 52 weeks previous to the injury was being earned by a person of the same grade and character employed in the same class of employment in the same locality or community.

But where for exceptional reasons the foregoing would be unfair, either to the employer or employee, such other method of computing average weekly wages may be resorted to as will most nearly approximate the amount which the injured employee would be earning were it not for the injury.

Wherever allowances of any character made to an employee in lieu of wages are specified part of the wage contract, they shall be deemed a part of his earnings.

Where a minor employee, under the age of 18 years, sustains a permanent disability or dies leaving dependents surviving, the compensation payable for permanent disability or death shall be calculated, first, upon the average weekly wage paid to adult employees employed by the same employer at the time of the accident in a similar or like class of work which the injured minor employee would probably have been promoted to if not injured, or, second, upon a wage sufficient to yield the maximum weekly compensation benefit. Compensation for temporary total disability or for the death of a minor without dependents shall be computed upon the average weekly wage at the time of the accident, unless the total disability extends more than 52 weeks, and then the compensation may be increased in proportion to the employee's expected earnings.

In case of disabling injury or death to a volunteer firefighter; volunteer member of an organized rescue squad; an authorized pickup firefighter, as defined in subdivision (2) of this section, when that individual is engaged in emergency fire suppression activities for the North Carolina Forest Service; a duly appointed and sworn member of an auxiliary police department organized pursuant to G.S. 160A-282; or senior members of the State Civil Air Patrol functioning under Subpart C of Part 5 of Article 13 of Chapter 143B of the General Statutes, under compensable circumstances, compensation payable shall be calculated upon the average weekly wage the volunteer firefighter, volunteer member of an organized rescue squad, authorized pickup firefighter of the North Carolina Forest Service; when that individual is engaged in emergency fire suppression activities for the North Carolina Forest Service, member of an auxiliary police department, or senior member of the State Civil Air Patrol was earning in the employment wherein he principally

earned his livelihood as of the date of injury. Provided, however, that the minimum compensation payable to a volunteer firefighter, volunteer member of an organized rescue squad, an authorized pickup firefighter of the North Carolina Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, when that individual is engaged in emergency fire suppression activities for the North Carolina Forest Service, a sworn member of an auxiliary police department organized pursuant to G.S. 160A-282, or senior members of the State Civil Air Patrol shall be sixty-six and two-thirds percent (66 2/3%) of the maximum weekly benefit established in G.S. 97-29.

- (6) Injury. – "Injury and personal injury" shall mean only injury by accident arising out of and in the course of the employment, and shall not include a disease in any form, except where it results naturally and unavoidably from the accident. With respect to back injuries, however, where injury to the back arises out of and in the course of the employment and is the direct result of a specific traumatic incident of the work assigned, "injury by accident" shall be construed to include any disabling physical injury to the back arising out of and causally related to such incident. Injury shall include breakage or damage to eyeglasses, hearing aids, dentures, or other prosthetic devices which function as part of the body; provided, however, that eyeglasses and hearing aids will not be replaced, repaired, or otherwise compensated for unless injury to them is incidental to a compensable injury.
- (7) Carrier. – The term "carrier" or "insurer" means any person or fund authorized under G.S. 97-93 to insure under this Article, and includes self-insurers.
- (8) Commission. – The term "Commission" means the North Carolina Industrial Commission, to be created under the provisions of this Article.
- (9) Disability. – The term "disability" means incapacity because of injury to earn the wages which the employee was receiving at the time of injury in the same or any other employment.
- (10) Death. – The term "death" as a basis for a right to compensation means only death resulting from an injury.
- (11) Compensation. – The term "compensation" means the money allowance payable to an employee or to his dependents as provided for in this Article, and includes funeral benefits provided herein.
- (12) Child, Grandchild, Brother, Sister. – The term "child" shall include a posthumous child, a child legally adopted prior to the injury of the employee, and a stepchild or acknowledged child born out of wedlock dependent upon the deceased, but does not include married children unless wholly dependent upon him. "Grandchild" means a child, as defined in this subdivision, of a child, as defined in this subdivision. "Brother" and "sister" include stepbrothers and stepsisters, half brothers and half sisters, and brothers and sisters by adoption, but does not include married brothers nor married sisters unless wholly dependent on the employee. "Child," "grandchild," "brother," and "sister" include only persons who at the time of the death of the deceased employee are under 18 years of age.
- (13) Parent. – The term "parent" includes stepparents and parents by adoption, parents-in-law, and any person who for more than three years prior to the death of the deceased employee stood in the place of a parent to him, if dependent on the injured employee.

- (14) Widow. – The term "widow" includes only the decedent's wife living with or dependent for support upon him at the time of his death; or living apart for justifiable cause or by reason of his desertion at such time.
- (15) Widower. – The term "widower" includes only the decedent's husband living with or dependent for support upon her at the time of her death or living apart for justifiable cause or by reason of her desertion at such time.
- (16) Adoption. – The term "adoption" or "adopted" means legal adoption prior to the time of the injury.
- (17) Singular. – The singular includes the plural and the masculine includes the feminine and neuter.
- (18) Hernia. – In all claims for compensation for hernia or rupture, resulting from injury by accident arising out of and in the course of the employee's employment, it must be definitely proven to the satisfaction of the Industrial Commission:
 - a. That there was an injury resulting in hernia or rupture.
 - b. That the hernia or rupture appeared suddenly.
 - c. Repealed by Session Laws 1987, c. 729, s. 2.
 - d. That the hernia or rupture immediately followed an accident. Provided, however, a hernia shall be compensable under this Article if it arises out of and in the course of the employment and is the direct result of a specific traumatic incident of the work assigned.
 - e. That the hernia or rupture did not exist prior to the accident for which compensation is claimed.

All hernia or rupture, inguinal, femoral or otherwise, so proven to be the result of an injury by accident arising out of and in the course of employment, shall be treated in a surgical manner by a radical operation. If death results from such operation, the death shall be considered as a result of the injury, and compensation paid in accordance with the provisions of G.S. 97-38. In nonfatal cases, if it is shown by special examination, as provided in G.S. 97-27, that the injured employee has a disability resulting after the operation, compensation for such disability shall be paid in accordance with the provisions of this Article.

In case the injured employee refuses to undergo the radical operation for the cure of said hernia or rupture, no compensation will be allowed during the time such refusal continues. If, however, it is shown that the employee has some chronic disease, or is otherwise in such physical condition that the Commission considers it unsafe for the employee to undergo said operation, the employee shall be paid compensation in accordance with the provisions of this Article.

- (19) Medical Compensation. – The term "medical compensation" means medical, surgical, hospital, nursing, and rehabilitative services, including, but not limited to, attendant care services prescribed by a health care provider authorized by the employer or subsequently by the Commission, vocational rehabilitation, and medicines, sick travel, and other treatment, including medical and surgical supplies, as may reasonably be required to effect a cure or give relief and for such additional time as, in the judgment of the Commission, will tend to lessen the period of disability; and any original artificial members as may reasonably be necessary at the end of the healing period and the replacement of such artificial members when reasonably necessitated by ordinary use or medical circumstances.

- (20) Health care provider. – The term "health care provider" means physician, hospital, pharmacy, chiropractor, nurse, dentist, podiatrist, physical therapist, rehabilitation specialist, psychologist, and any other person providing medical care pursuant to this Article.
- (21) Managed care organization. – The term "managed care organization" means a preferred provider organization or a health maintenance organization regulated under Chapter 58 of the General Statutes. "Managed care organization" also means a preferred provider benefit plan of an insurance company, hospital, or medical service corporation in which utilization review or quality management programs are used to manage the provision of health care services and benefits under this Chapter.
- (22) Suitable employment. – The term "suitable employment" means employment offered to the employee or, if prohibited by the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1324a, employment available to the employee that (i) prior to reaching maximum medical improvement is within the employee's work restrictions, including rehabilitative or other noncompetitive employment with the employer of injury approved by the employee's authorized health care provider or (ii) after reaching maximum medical improvement is employment that the employee is capable of performing considering the employee's preexisting and injury-related physical and mental limitations, vocational skills, education, and experience and is located within a 50-mile radius of the employee's residence at the time of injury or the employee's current residence if the employee had a legitimate reason to relocate since the date of injury. No one factor shall be considered exclusively in determining suitable employment. (1929, c. 120, s. 2; 1933, c. 448; 1939, c. 277, s. 1; 1943, c. 543; c. 672, s. 1; 1945, c. 766; 1947, c. 698; 1949, c. 399; 1953, c. 619; 1955, c. 644; c. 1026, s. 1; c. 1055; 1957, c. 95; 1959, c. 289; 1961, cc. 231, 235; 1967, c. 1229, s. 1; 1969, c. 206, s. 2; c. 707; 1971, c. 284, s. 1; c. 1231, s. 1; 1973, c. 521, ss. 1, 2; c. 763, ss. 1-3; c. 1291, s. 14; 1975, c. 266, s. 1; c. 284, ss. 2, 3; c. 288; c. 718, s. 3; c. 817, s. 1; 1977, c. 419; c. 893, s. 1; 1979, cc. 86, 374; c. 516, ss. 4, 5; c. 714, s. 3; 1981, c. 421, ss. 1, 2; 1983, c. 833; 1983 (Reg. Sess., 1984), c. 1042, s. 1; 1985, cc. 133, 144; 1987, c. 729, ss. 1, 2; 1991, c. 703, s. 1; 1993, c. 389, s. 3; 1993 (Reg. Sess., 1994), c. 679, ss. 2.6, 10.7; 1995, c. 517, s. 35; 1999-219, s. 4.2; 1999-418, s. 1; 1999-456, s. 33(c); 2001-204, ss. 1, 1.1, 2; 2003-156, s. 1; 2009-281, s. 1; 2011-145, s. 13.25(mm), (xx); 2011-287, s. 2; 2013-155, s. 5; 2013-198, s. 25; 2014-64, s. 2(c); 2015-286, s. 2.3; 2017-108, s. 13; 2017-212, s. 4.6(a); 2021-78, s. 10.)