

PUNITIVE DAMAGES REVIEW



2023

50-STATE SURVEY



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Wilson Elser 2023
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50-STATE SURVEY SUMMARY



State	May Punitive Damages Be Awarded?	Are Punitive Damages Generally Insurable?
Alabama	Yes	Yes
Alaska	Yes	Yes
Arizona	Yes	Yes
Arkansas	Yes	Yes
California	Yes	No
Colorado	Yes	No
Connecticut	Yes	Depends
Delaware	Yes	Yes
District of Columbia	Yes	Undetermined
Florida	Yes	No
Georgia	Yes	Yes
Hawaii	Yes	Yes
Idaho	Yes	Yes
Illinois	Yes	No
Indiana	Yes	No
Iowa	Yes	Yes
Kansas	Yes	No
Kentucky	Yes	Yes
Louisiana	Yes, but only by statute	Yes
Maine	Yes	Probably not
Maryland	Yes	Yes
Massachusetts	Yes	Probably
Michigan	No	Not applicable
Minnesota	Yes	It depends
Mississippi	Yes	Yes
Missouri	Yes	No
Montana	Yes	Yes
Nebraska	No	Not applicable
Nevada	Yes	Yes
New Hampshire	Yes, but only by statute	Yes
New Jersey	Yes	No
New Mexico	Yes	Yes
New York	Yes	No
North Carolina	Yes	Yes
North Dakota	Yes	It depends
Ohio	Yes	No
Oklahoma	Yes	No
Oregon	Yes	Yes
Pennsylvania	Yes	No
Rhode Island	Yes	No
South Carolina	Yes	Yes
South Dakota	Yes	Probably not
Tennessee	Yes	Yes
Texas	Yes	Depends
Utah	Yes	No
Vermont	Yes	Yes
Virginia	Yes	Yes
Washington	No	Not applicable
West Virginia	Yes	Yes
Wisconsin	Yes	Yes
Wyoming	Yes	Yes



PUNITIVE DAMAGES LAWS OF EACH STATE

Key aspects of the punitive damages laws and decisions of each state are summarized below. As each state's punitive damages jurisprudence has developed independently, there is considerable variation among the states as reflected in the summaries that follow.

4	ALABAMA	57	KENTUCKY	111	NORTH DAKOTA
7	ALASKA	60	LOUISIANA	113	OHIO
11	ARIZONA	63	MAINE	115	OKLAHOMA
13	ARKANSAS	67	MARYLAND	118	OREGON
16	CALIFORNIA	70	MASSACHUSETTS	121	PENNSYLVANIA
19	COLORADO	74	MICHIGAN	124	RHODE ISLAND
22	CONNECTICUT	76	MINNESOTA	127	SOUTH CAROLINA
27	DELAWARE	79	MISSISSIPPI	130	SOUTH DAKOTA
30	DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	83	MISSOURI	133	TENNESSEE
33	FLORIDA	87	MONTANA	137	TEXAS
36	GEORGIA	90	NEBRASKA	141	UTAH
39	HAWAII	91	NEVADA	144	VERMONT
41	IDAHO	95	NEW HAMPSHIRE	147	VIRGINIA
44	ILLINOIS	98	NEW JERSEY	149	WASHINGTON
47	INDIANA	101	NEW MEXICO	151	WEST VIRGINIA
50	IOWA	104	NEW YORK	153	WISCONSIN
54	KANSAS	108	NORTH CAROLINA	156	WYOMING



ALABAMA

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. The purpose of punitive damages is to deter wrongful conduct and to punish those who may profit by such conduct. See *Am. Pioneer Life Ins. Co. v. Williamson*, 704 So. 2d 1361, 1366 (Ala. 1997); *BMW of N. Am., Inc. v. Gore*, 701 So. 2d 507, 513 (Ala. 1997); *Ayres v. Lakeshore Cmty. Hosp.*, 689 So. 2d 39, 41 (Ala. 1997); *Reserve Nat'l Ins. Co. v. Crowell*, 614 So. 2d 1005, 1009 (Ala. 1993); *Smith v. Schulte*, 671 So. 2d 1334, 1346 (Ala. 1995), overruled in part on other grounds by *Ex Parte Apicella*, 809 So. 2d 865 (Ala. 2001).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Alabama allows punitive damages when a plaintiff shows that the acts complained of were committed with malice, willfulness, or wanton and reckless disregard of the rights of others. *Gulf Atl. Life Ins. Co. v. Barnes*, 405 So. 2d 916, 925 (Ala. 1981). See *Whitt v. Hulsey*, 519 So. 2d 901, 906 (Ala. 1987).

Standard of Proof. With the exception of wrongful death actions, punitive damages may be awarded in a civil action for tort only where it is proven by clear and convincing evidence that the defendant consciously or deliberately engaged in oppression, fraud, wantonness, or malice with regard to the plaintiff. ALA. CODE ANN. § 6-11-20(a) (LexisNexis 2010).

Fraud is defined by the Alabama statute as an intentional misrepresentation, deceit, or concealment of a material fact the concealing party had a duty to disclose, which was gross, oppressive, or malicious and committed with the intention on the part of the perpetrator to thereby deprive a person or entity of property or legal rights or otherwise cause injury. ALA. CODE ANN. § 6-11-20 (b)(1). *Malice* is defined as an intentional wrongful act without just cause or excuse, either (1) with an intent to injure the person or property of another person or entity or (2) under such circumstances that the law will imply an evil intent. ALA. CODE ANN. § 6-11-20(b)(2). *Wantonness* is defined as conduct that is carried on with a reckless or conscious disregard of the rights or safety of others. ALA. CODE ANN. § 6-11-20(b) (3). It requires some degree of consciousness on the part of the defendant that the injury is likely to result from the act or omission. *Coca-Cola Bottling Co. United v. Stripling*, 622 So. 2d 882, 884-85 (Ala. 1993). *Oppression* is defined as subjecting a person to cruel and unjust hardship in conscious disregard of that person's rights. ALA. CODE ANN. § 6-11-20(b)(5).

Action Against State. Punitive damages may not be awarded against the state or any county, municipality, or agency thereof. ALA. CODE ANN. § 6-11-26 (LexisNexis 2010). An exception applies, however, to any entity covered under the Medical Liability Act. § 6-5-480.

Arbitration. A pre-dispute arbitration clause that prohibits an arbitrator from awarding punitive damages is void as contrary to Alabama public policy. *Sloan Southern Homes, LLC v. McQueen*, 955 So. 2d 401 (Ala. 1996).

Breach of Contract. Generally, punitive damages are not recoverable for breach of contract. *Boros v. Baxley*, 621 So. 2d 240, 245 (Ala. 1993); *Corson v. Universal Door Sys., Inc.*, 596 So. 2d 565, 572 (Ala. 1991); *John Deere Indus. Equip. Co. v. Keller*, 431 So. 2d 1155, 1157 (Ala. 1983); *Geohagan v. Gen. Motors Corp.*, 279 So. 2d 436, 438 (Ala. 1973). Punitive damages, however, may be awarded in a breach of contract suit if a party is found to have acted wantonly, spitefully, or maliciously. *Gross v. Lowder Realty Better Homes & Gardens*, 494 So. 2d 590, 597 n.4 (Ala. 1986) (overruled on other grounds by *White Sands Group, L.L.C. v. PRS II, LLC*, 2009 WL 2841114 (Ala. Sep. 04, 2009)).

Defamation. In order to recover punitive damages, a plaintiff must show that the defendant communicated the defamatory statement with malice. *Ponder v. Lake Forest Property Owners Ass'n.*, Court of Appeals of Alabama. June 26, 2015 – So.3d—2015 WL 3935490.



Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under Alabama law, an employer is not liable for punitive damages for the conduct of an employee unless the employer:

- (i) knew or should have known of the unfitness of the employee and employed him or continued to employ him, or used his services without proper instruction and with a disregard of the rights or safety of others; or
- (ii) authorized the wrongful conduct; or
- (iii) ratified the wrongful conduct, unless the acts of the employee were calculated to or did benefit employer, except where the plaintiff knowingly participated with the employee to commit fraud or wrongful conduct with full knowledge of the import of his act.

Otherwise, “no defendant shall be liable for any punitive damages unless that defendant has been expressly found by the trier of fact to have engaged in conduct warranting punitive damages, and such defendant shall be liable only for punitive damages commensurate with that defendant’s own conduct.” Alabama Code §6-11-21 (e); Ala. Code § 6-11-27(a).

However, this code section’s heightened evidentiary standard is not applicable to wrongful death claims, because all damages in wrongful death actions are punitive. Ala. Code § 6-11-29; *Cherokee Elec. Coop. v. Cochran*, 706 So. 2d 1188, 1193 & n.5 (Ala. 1997).

Environmental Liability. Penalties regarding harm to the environment and any threat to the health or safety of the public are governed by Alabama Code section 22-22A-5. Punitive damages are not allowed in addition to fines or penalties for violations of this section. Ala. Code ANN. § 22-22A-5 (LexisNexis 2010).

Insurer’s Bad Faith. In a fraud action against an insurer, if the jury does not award either compensatory or nominal damages, the jury is not permitted to award punitive damages. *Life Ins. Co. of Ga. v. Smith*, 719 So. 2d 797 (Ala. 1998); *Ala. Dep’t of Env’tl. Mgmt. v. Wright Bros. Constr. Co.*, 604 So. 2d 429 (Ala. Civ. App. 1992).

Product Liability. Punitive damages are available in an action for product liability. See *Hobart Corp. v. Scoggins*, 776 So. 2d 56 (Ala. 2000). There must be clear and convincing evidence of wantonness in order to sustain a punitive damages award. *Id.* (holding that plaintiff failed to present clear and convincing evidence that defendant designed and manufactured the slant-blade saw with knowledge that it had dangerous propensities, and reversed the award of punitive damages).

Professional Liability. Punitive damages may be awarded in a medical malpractice case. The plaintiff has the burden to prove breach of an applicable medical standard of care as to each asserted instance of wantonness. *Ferguson v. Baptist Health Sys.*, 910 So. 2d 85, 93 (Ala. 2005) (citing Ala. Code ANN. § 6-5- 548(a)). The plaintiff must produce expert medical testimony to establish each applicable standard and to establish the standard has been breached. *Tuck v. Health Care Auth. of Huntsville*, 851 So. 2d 498 (Ala. 2002).

Wrongful Death. Punitive damages may be awarded in wrongful death actions. ALA. Code ANN. § 6-5-410 (LexisNexis 2010). Further, the Alabama Supreme Court upheld the statutory provision that punitive damages in wrongful death actions may not be apportioned among joint tortfeasors. *Campbell v. Williams*, 638 So. 2d 804, 809 (Ala. 1994).



II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes. It is not against public policy in Alabama to allow punitive damages to be covered by insurance in wrongful death cases. *Montgomery Health Care Facility, Inc. v. Ballard*, 565 So. 2d 221, 226 (Ala. 1990). See also *Capital Motor Lines v. Loring*, 189 So. 897, 899 (Ala. 1939) (holding that although damages were not imposed to punish the insurer, liability to pay damages arose out of the insurer's voluntary obligation to pay a judgment rendered against the insured); *Am. Fid. & Cas. Co. v. Werfel*, 162 So. 103, 106 (Ala. 1935) (holding that policy was broad enough to cover personal injury or death as a result of an accident and, therefore, would also cover punitive damages awarded as a result of wrongful death).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Compensatory or nominal damages must be awarded in order to support a punitive damages award. *Life Ins. Co. of Ga. v. Smith*, 719 So. 2d 797, 806 (Ala. 1998) (overruling long-standing rule that compensatory damages were not a prerequisite for punitive damages). See also *Employees' Benefit Ass'n v. Grissett*, 732 So. 2d 968, 980 n.6 (Ala. 1998); *S. Exposition Mgmt. Co. v. Univ. Auto. Sales, Inc.*, 740 So. 2d 992 (Ala. 1998).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Yes. Pursuant to ALA. CODE ANN. § 6-11-21 (*LexisNexis* 2010), effective June 7, 1999, in all civil actions in Alabama where an entitlement to punitive damages shall have been established under applicable laws, no award of punitive damages may exceed three times the compensatory damages of the party claiming punitive damages or \$500,000, whichever is greater.

If the defendant is a small business (defined as having a net worth of \$2 million or less), no award of punitive damages may exceed \$50,000 or 10 percent of the business's net worth, whichever is greater. § 6-11-2 (b).

In all civil actions for physical injury wherein entitlement to punitive damages has been established, the award may not exceed three times the compensatory damages of the party claiming punitive damages or \$1.5 million, whichever is greater. § 6-11-2 (d).

These limitations do not apply to class actions, actions for wrongful death, or actions for intentional infliction of physical injury. § 6-11-2 (h),(j).

The caps are adjusted every three years at an annual rate in accordance with the Consumer Price Index Rate.

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Punitive damages are payable to the claimant. Although the statute does not specifically delineate a recipient, it may be inferred that punitive damages are payable to the party claiming them. See ALA. CODE ANN. § 6-11-21 (*LexisNexis* 2010). In addition, "no portion of a punitive damages award shall be allocated to the state or any agency or department of the state." *Id.*



ALASKA

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. See, e.g. *Clary Ins. Agency v. Doyle*, 620 P.2d 194 (Alaska 1980); *Anchorage Chrysler Ctr., Inc. v. DaimlerChrysler Motors Corp.*, 221 P.3d 977 (Alaska 2009); *Brandner v. Hudson*, 171 P.3d 83 (Alaska 2007); *State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co. v. Weiford*, 831 P.2d 1264 (Alaska 1992); *Barber v. Nat'l Bank of Alaska*, 815 P.2d 857 (Alaska 1991).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Alaska Statutes section 09.17.020 (2010) states that “punitive damages may be awarded in an action only if the plaintiff proves by clear and convincing evidence that the defendant’s conduct (1) was outrageous, including acts done with malice or bad motives or (2) evidenced reckless indifference to the interest of another person.” *Anchorage Chrysler Ctr., Inc. v. Daimler Chrysler Motors Corp.*, 221 P.3d 977, 997 (Alaska 2009) (punitive damages are to be awarded with caution, after consideration of the severity of the wrongdoing and the need for deterrence). “Since punitive damages are assessed as an example and warning to others, and a primary concern of law is payment of just compensation for the wrong done, punitive damages are not favored in law. They are to be allowed only with caution and within narrow limits. To support a claim for punitive damages, the plaintiff must show ‘by clear and convincing evidence that the defendant’s conduct was outrageous, such as acts done with malice, bad motive, or reckless indifference to the interests of another.’” *Id.* See also *Alaska Marine Pilots v. Hendsch*, 950 P.2d 98 (Alaska 1997); *Reust v. Alaska Petroleum Contrs., Inc.*, 127 P.3d 807, 820 (Alaska 2005) (citing *Robles v. Shoreside Petroleum, Inc.*, 29 P.3d 838, 846 (Alaska 2001) (quoting *Chizmar v. Mackie*, 896 P.2d 196, 210 (Alaska 1995))).

Punitive damages have been limited to cases where the wrongdoer’s conduct could fairly be categorized as “outrageous, such as acts done with malice or bad motives or reckless indifference to the interests of another.” *Gr. Divide Ins. Co. v. Carpenter*, 79 P.3d 599 (Alaska 2003); *State Farm Fire & Cas. Co. v. Nicholson*, 777 P.2d 1152, 1158 (Alaska 1989); *Alyeska Pipeline Serv. Co. v. Beadles*, 731 P.2d 572, 574 (Alaska 1987); *Ross Lab. v. Thies*, 725 P.2d 1076, 1081 (Alaska 1986). Malice may be inferred if the acts exhibit “a callous disregard for the rights of others.” *Alyeska Pipeline Serv. Co. v. O’Kelley*, 645 P.2d 767, 774 (Alaska 1982). Thus, where there is no evidence of malicious or outrageous conduct, the jury is not permitted to receive an instruction on punitive damages. *Hancock v. Northcut*, 808 P.2d 251, 259 (Alaska 1991).

Standard of Proof. Clear and convincing evidence is required to sustain a punitive damages award. AS § 09.17.020 (b) (2010). “Actual malice need not be proved.” *Sturm, Ruger & Co. v. Day*, 594 P.2d 38, 46 (Alaska 1979).

Actions Against State. Punitive damages may not be awarded against the State. AS § 09.50.280 (2010).

Breach of Contract. Punitive damages are not recoverable for a breach of contract unless the conduct constituting the breach is also a tort for which punitive damages are recoverable. *Zerbe v. Collette*, No. S-18166, 2023 Alas. LEXIS 21 (2023); see also *Reeves v. Alyeska Pipeline Serv. Co.*, 56 P.3d 660, 671 (Alaska 2002). “Awarding punitive damages would be inconsistent with the policy behind contract damages: ‘The purpose of awarding contract damages is to compensate the injured party For this reason, courts in contract cases do not award damages to punish the party in breach or to serve as an example to others unless the conduct constituting the breach is also a tort for which punitive damages are recoverable.’” *Wien Air Alaska v. Bubbel*, 723 P.2d 627 (Alaska 1986). See also *Alaska N. Dev. v. Alyeska Pipeline Serv. Co.*, 666 P.2d 33, 41 (Alaska 1983), cert. denied, 464 U.S. 1041 (1984) (punitive damages are not available in a breach of contract action unless the wrongdoer’s conduct can be characterized as outrageous, such as acts done with malice or bad motives or reckless indifference to the interests of another.); *Gr. W. Sav. Bank v. George W. Easley Co.*, 778 P.2d 569, 580 (Alaska 1989); *Zeman v. Lufthansa German Airlines*, 699 P.2d 1274, 1286 (Alaska 1985); see *Spence v. Se. Alaska Pilots’ Ass’n*, 789 F. Supp. 1014, 1026 (D. Alaska 1992).



Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under Alaska Statutes section 09.17.020(k), in a civil action in which an employer is determined to be vicariously liable for the act or omission of an employee, punitive damages may not be awarded against the employer under principles of vicarious liability unless:

- (1) the employer or the employer's managerial agent
 - (A) authorized the act or omission and the manner in which the act was performed or omission occurred; or
 - (B) ratified or approved the act or omission after the act or omission occurred; or
- (2) the employee
 - (A) was unfit to perform the act or avoid the omission and the employer or the employer's managerial agent acted recklessly in employing or retaining the employee; or
 - (B) was employed in a managerial capacity and was acting within the scope of employment.

In this subsection, "managerial agent" means a management level employee with the stature and authority to exercise control, discretion, and independent judgment over a certain area of the employer's business and with some power to set policy for the employer. AS § 09.17.020(k).

"Because the law treats the employer and employee alike as wrongdoers, it is proper for the jury to consider what amount of punitive damages will suffice to punish and motivate the vicariously liable employer; as other jurisdictions have held in applying the course of employment rule, evidence of the employer's financial wealth is relevant and admissible in these circumstances." *Laidlaw Transit v. Crouse*, 53 P.3d 1093, 1102 (Alaska 2002).

Environmental Liability. Punitive damages are available in an environmental liability case. *Maddox v. Hardy*, 187 P.3d 486, 495 (Alaska 2008).

General Liability. Punitive damages may be awarded in a personal injury claim against a drunken driver. *Lamb v. Anderson*, 126 P.3d 132 (Alaska 2005). Punitive damages may be awarded for improper termination, although punitive damages may be limited pursuant to Alaska Statutes section 09.17.020(h) for certain employment discrimination cases. *Reust v. Alaska Petroleum Contrs., Inc.*, 127 P.3d 807 (Alaska 2005). Where picketing involves "threats of bodily harm, personal assaults, and property destruction," such actions may warrant a punitive damages award. *Int'l Bhd. of Elec. Workers, Local 1547 v. Alaska Util. Constr., Inc.*, 976 P.2d 852 (Alaska 1999).

Insurer's Bad Faith. Not all conduct that amounts to the tort of bad faith on the part of the insurer is sufficient to justify an award of punitive damages, and outrageous misconduct must be proven to support such damages. *Nelson v. Progressive Corp.*, 976 P.2d 859 (Alaska 1999). The insured must present evidence to support a conclusion that the insurer is guilty of a "gross breach of accepted standards of conduct which might be characterized as outrageous or malicious." *State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co. v. Weiford*, 831 P.2d 1264, 1269 (Alaska 1992); see also *State Farm Fire & Casualty Co. v. Nicholson*, 777 P.2d 1152 (Alaska 1989) (punitive damages may be awarded for first-party bad faith claims); *Ace v. Aetna Life Ins. Co.*, 40 F. Supp. 2d 1125 (9th Cir. 1999) (accord).

Landlord-Tenant. Under Alaska law, the special remedies for failure to supply essential services are available for both negligent and deliberate conduct. *Guilford v. Weidner Inv. Servs.*, 522 P.3d 1085, 1101 (Alaska 2023). Alaska law punishes deliberate failure to supply essential services by authorizing a tenant to recover one and one-half times actual damages. *Id.* The degree of culpability in the landlord's conduct does not support a distinction in the type of injury that may be compensated with damages; Alaska law punishes more culpable conduct with a damages multiplier. *Id.*

Product Liability. Punitive damages are available in product liability cases. See, e.g. *Kava v. Am. Honda Motor Co.*, 48 P.3d 1170 (Alaska 2002); *Blake v. Guthy-Renker, LLC*, 965 F. Supp. 2d 1076 (D. Alaska 2013).



Professional Liability. The attorney-client relationship involves a fiduciary duty and punitive damages may be awarded when this duty is breached through conduct manifesting reckless indifference to the client's rights. *Power Constrs., Inc. v. Taylor & Hintze*, 960 P.2d 20, 30 (Alaska 1998). See also *Cummings v. Sea Lion Corp.*, 924 P.2d 1011 (Alaska 1996) (punitive damages permitted where attorney's failure to disclose financial interest in company with which the client was doing business amounted to fiduciary fraud); *UnionAmerica Ins. Co. v. Gen. Star Indem. Co.*, 2005 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 46337 (D. Alaska 2005) (suggesting punitive damages would be permitted if they had been pleaded).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes. Payment of punitive damages under an auto insurance policy, which covered "any amount" the insured became legally liable for as a result of bodily injury or property damage caused by his or her wrongful actions, does not violate public policy. Alaska's public policy in imposing punitive damages is not strong enough to justify voiding the contractual rights of the insured. This does not apply where punitive damages expressly are excluded by the insurance contract. *Le Doux v. Cont'l Ins. Co.*, 666 F. Supp. 178 (D. Alaska 1987); see also *Aetna Cas. & Sur. Co. v. Marion Equip. Co.*, 894 P.2d 664, 670 (Alaska 1995); *Parker Drilling Co. v. Hughes, Thorsness, Gantz, Powell & Brundin*, 1997 U.S. App. LEXIS 22355 (9th Cir. 1997) (punitive damages covered pursuant to contractual indemnity).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

All punitive damages are insurable unless expressly excluded by the insurance contract. *Le Doux v. Cont'l Ins. Co.*, 666 F. Supp. 178 (D. Alaska 1987); see also *Aetna Cas. & Sur. Co. v. Marion Equip. Co.*, 894 P.2d 664, 670 (Alaska 1995).

C. What is the relationship between punitive and compensatory damages

Punitive damages may be available though actual damages are not an "essential element" of the cause of action if (1) the underlying cause of action states a claim for relief independent of the request for punitive damages, and (2) the plaintiff establishes that defendant's conduct rose to the requisite level of culpability and that plaintiff suffered "substantial damage," even if the amount of actual damages may be uncertain. *Lockhart v. Draper*, 209 P.3d 1025 (Alaska 2009); see also *Merdes & Merdes, P.C. v. Leisnoi, Inc.*, 410 P.3d 398 (Alaska 2017) ("Punitive damages may be available for particularly egregious misconduct even without compensatory damages.").

Punitive damages could be awarded if an equitable remedy intended to make the plaintiff whole had been awarded and if the requirements of Alaska Statutes section 09.17.020(b) are met. *Id.* at 1028; see also *Clary Ins. Agency v. Doyle*, 620 P.2d 194, 204 (Alaska 1980) (finding a reasonable relationship between the award of compensatory damages and punitive damages is required, but no precise ratio is mandated).

A punitive damages award is deemed excessive if it is manifestly unreasonable, resulting from passion or prejudice or disregard of the rules of law. See *Ace v. Aetna Life Ins. Co.*, 139 F.3d 1241, 1248 (9th Cir. 1998). Relevant factors include (1) the likelihood at the time of the conduct that serious harm would arise from the defendant's conduct; (2) the degree of the defendant's awareness of the likelihood described in (1) of this subsection; (3) the amount of financial gain the defendant gained or expected to gain as a result of the defendant's conduct; (4) the duration of the conduct and any intentional concealment of the conduct; (5) the attitude and conduct of the defendant upon discovery of the conduct; (6) the financial condition of the defendant; and (7) the total deterrence of other damages and punishment imposed on the defendant as a result of the conduct, including compensatory and punitive damages awards to persons in situations similar to those of the plaintiff and the severity of the criminal penalties to which the defendant has been or may be subjected. AS § 09.17.020(c).



In *Ace*, the court held that although not dispositive itself, the 130:1 ratio of punitive to compensatory damages is far beyond any ratio approved by Alaska courts. *Id.* In *Sturm, Ruger*, the Alaska Supreme Court noted the relationship between punitive and compensatory damages was “a factor” but “there may be cases in which it is only of slight value or is totally inapplicable.” *Sturm, Ruger*, 615 P.2d at 624 n.3.

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Yes. Alaska Statutes section 09.017.020(f) limits punitive damages so that they generally do not exceed the greater of (1) three times the amount of compensatory damages awarded to the plaintiff or (2) \$500,000. There are two exceptions to this rule. ALASKA STAT. § 09.17.020(f) (2015).

Under the first exception, if the fact finder determines that (1) the conduct proven was motivated by financial gain and (2) the adverse consequences of the conduct were actually known by the defendant or the person responsible for making policy decisions on behalf of the defendant, it may award an amount of punitive damages not to exceed the greatest of (1) four times the amount of compensatory damages awarded to the plaintiff, (2) four times the aggregate amount of financial gain that the defendant received as a result of the defendant’s misconduct, or (3) \$7 million. See ALASKA STAT. § 09.17.020(g) (2015). This type of reward is determined by a separate trial. See AS § 09.17.020(a), (e).

Under the second exception, in an action against an employer to recover damages for an unlawful employment practice, the punitive damages may not exceed (1) \$200,000 if the employer has fewer than 100 employees in the state; (2) \$300,000 if the employer has 100 or more, but fewer than 200 employees in the state; (3) \$400,000 if the employer has 200 or more, but fewer than 500 employees in the state; and (4) \$500,000 if the employer has 500 or more employees in the state. See ALASKA STAT. § 09.17.020(h) (2015).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

50% of a punitive damages award is paid to the claimant, and the remaining 50% must be paid to the general fund of the State. See AS § 09.17.020(j).



ARIZONA

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. *Rawlings v. Apodaca*, 726 P.2d 565 (Ariz. 1986); *Linthicum v. Nationwide Life Ins. Co.*, 723 P.2d 675 (Ariz. 1986); see also *Ortiz v. Zurich Am. Ins. Co.*, No. CV-13-02097-PHX-JAT (D. Ariz. Sep. 25, 2015)

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Under Arizona common law, “evidence reflect[ing] something more than the conduct necessary to establish the tort” is required to warrant recovery of punitive damages. *Rawlings v. Apodaca*, 726 P.2d 565 (Ariz. 1986) (quoting Keeton et al., *Prosser and Keeton on Torts* § 2, at 9-10 (5th ed. 1984)). A plaintiff must also establish that the defendant’s wrongful conduct was coupled with an “evil mind.” *Linthicum v. Nationwide Life Ins. Co.*, 723 P.2d 675 (Ariz. 1986). An “evil mind” may be shown by evidence that defendant pursued a course of conduct knowing that it created a substantial risk of significant harm to others. *Rawlings v. Apodaca*, 726 P.2d at 578; *Warner v. Sw. Desert Images, LLC*, 180 P.3d 986 (Ariz. Ct. App. 2008); *Medasys Acquisition Corp. v. SDMS, PC*, 55 P.3d 763 (Ariz. 2002).

Standard of Proof. The standard of proof is clear and convincing evidence. *Nardelli v. Metro. Group Prop. & Cas. Ins. Co.*, 277 P.3d 789 (Ariz. Ct. App. 2012); *Linthicum v. Nationwide Life Ins. Co.*, 723 P.2d 675 (Ariz. 1986); see also *Thompson v. Better-Bilt Aluminum Prods. Co.*, 832 P.2d 203 (Ariz. 1992).

Actions Against State. “Neither a public entity nor a public employee acting within the scope of his employment is liable for punitive or exemplary damages.” Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 12-820.04 (2019).

Breach of Contract. Punitive damages are not available for breach of contract, *Cont’l Nat’l Bank v. Evans*, 489 P.2d 15 (Ariz. 1971), unless the breach also constitutes a tort. *In re Marriage of Bengel*, 726 P.2d 1088 (Ariz. Ct. App. 1986). See also *El Capitan HOA v. State Farm Fire & Cas. Co.*, No. CV-12-631-PHX-SMM (D. Ariz. Mar. 14, 2014)

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. In Arizona, punitive damages may be assessed against a principal for wrongs committed by its agent only if the acts were committed in furtherance of the employer’s business and within the scope of the agent’s employment. *Haralson v. Fisher Surveying, Inc.*, 31 P.3d 114, 119-20 (Ariz. 2002). Arizona has specifically rejected the *Restatement (Second) of Torts* § 909 (1977) and *Restatement (Second) of Agency* § 217C (1957). *Id.* Under the Restatement, the absence of independent wrongdoing on the part of the employer would generally prevent any recovery of exemplary damages. *Id.* Moreover, where no punitive damages have been awarded against an employee, no punitive damages can be vicariously imputed to the employer. *Wiper v. Downtown Dev. Corp.*, 732 P.2d 200, 202 (Ariz. 1987).

Environmental liability. Punitive damages may be awarded in the context of environmental liability. *Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 49-287(J)* (2022).

General liability. Punitive damages may be awarded in personal injury cases where the misconduct is aggravated, wanton, reckless, malicious or evidences spite or ill will. *Ranburger v. S. Pac. Transp. Co.*, 760 P.2d 551 (Ariz. 1988).

Insurer’s Bad Faith. Punitive damages may be recovered by a first-party claimant for an insurer’s bad faith refusal to defend or pay benefits, if the insured can prove that the decision not to pay or defend was made with the intent to consciously and knowingly disregard the insured’s rights. *Rawlings v. Apodaca*, 726 P.2d 565, 577-78 (Ariz. 1986). “[P]laintiff must show that the evil hand that unjustifiably damaged the objectives sought to be reached by the insurance contract was guided by an evil mind which consciously sought to damage the insured or acted intentionally, knowing that its conduct was likely to cause unjustified, significant damage to the insured.” *Id.*



Product Liability. Punitive damages may be awarded against a defendant manufacturer if the plaintiff can establish the requisite intent is established. See e.g., *Volz v. Coleman Co.*, 748 P.2d 1191 (Ariz. Ct. App. 1986). The manufacturer or seller of a drug, however, is not liable for exemplary or punitive damages if the drug alleged to cause the harm has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration or is generally recognized as safe and effective pursuant to conditions established by the federal food and drug administration and applicable regulations, including packaging and labeling regulations. *Ariz. Rev. Stat. §12-701, A.* (2023). However, punitive damages may be awarded if the plaintiff proves, by clear and convincing evidence, that the defendant, either before or after making the drug available for public use, knowingly, in violation of applicable federal food and drug administration regulations, withheld from or misrepresented to the administration information known to be material and relevant to the harm which the plaintiff allegedly suffered. *Id.*, B.

Professional liability. Punitive damages may be awarded against a law partnership for the acts of one of its partners in the ordinary course of partnership business through Arizona’s Uniform Partnership Act. *Hyatt Regency Phoenix Hotel Co. v. Winston & Strawn*, 907 P.2d 506 (Ariz. Ct. App. 1995).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes, punitive damages generally are insurable if coverage is provided in the insurance policy. See *Price v. Hartford Accident & Indem. Co.*, 502 P.2d 522 (Ariz. 1972); but see *State Farm Fire & Cas. Co. v. Wise*, 721 P.2d 674 (Ariz. Ct. App. 1986) (finding that the absence of an insurance provision expressly excluding punitive damages makes insurer liable for punitive damages). See also *State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co. v. Wilson*, 782 P.2d 727 (Ariz. 1989) (public policy does not militate in favor of construction of an insurance policy that the victim’s insurer pay punitive damages against the tortfeasor).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Punitive damages may not be awarded without an award of compensatory damages. *Hyatt Regency Phoenix Hotel Co. v. Winston & Strawn*, 907 P.2d 506 (Ariz. Ct. App. 1995). See also *Bridgestone/Firestone N. Amer. Tire, LLC v. Naranjo*, 79 P.3d 1206 (Ariz. Ct. App. 2003). There is, however, no specifically required compensatory-to-punitive-damages ratio. *Neinsted v. Wetzel*, 651 P.2d 876 (Ariz. Ct. App. 1982). See also *Bridgestone/ Firestone*, 79 P.3d 1206 citing *State Farm Mut. Auto Ins. Co. v. Campbell*, 538 U.S. 408 (2003) (declining “to impose a bright line ratio which punitive damages award cannot exceed” but “in practice, few awards exceeding a single digit ratio between punitive and compensatory damages, to a significant degree, will satisfy due process”).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

No.

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Arizona follows the general rule that punitive damages are payable to the immediate person injured. *Watts v. Golden Age Nursing Home*, 619 P.2d 1032 (Ariz. 1980). Punitive damages awarded in the context of environmental liability are paid into the state’s general fund. *Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 49-287(J)* (2022).



ARKANSAS

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. Ark. Code ANN. §16-55-206. "Punitive damages punish and deter. Their premise is that the compensatory damages have made the plaintiff whole, but further sanctions are justified to punish the defendant for its conduct in the case and to deter future, similar conduct by the defendant and others." *Jim Ray, Inc. v. Williams*, 99 Ark.App. 315, 260 S.W.3d 307 (Ark. Ct. App. 2007).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. "In order to recover punitive damages from a defendant, a plaintiff has the burden of proving that the defendant is liable for compensatory damages and that either or both of the following aggravating factors were present and related to the injury for which compensatory damages were awarded: (1) The defendant knew or ought to have known, in light of the surrounding circumstances, that his or her conduct would naturally and probably result in injury or damage and that he or she continued the conduct with malice or in reckless disregard of the consequences from which malice may be inferred, or (2) The defendant intentionally pursued a course of conduct for the purpose of causing injury or damage." Ark. Code ANN. § 16-55-206 (2010); *Yeakley v. Doss*, 257 S.W.3d (Ark. 2007).

An award of punitive damages is justified only where evidence indicates that the defendant acted wantonly in causing injury or with such a conscious indifference to consequences that malice might be inferred. See *McCoy v. Montgomery*, 259 S.W.3d 430, 435 (Ark. 2007); see also *J.B. Hunt Transp., Inc. v. Doss*, 899 S.W.2d 464, 469 (Ark. 1995); *D'Arbonne Constr. Co. v. Foster*, 123 S.W.3d 894 (Ark. 2003); see also *Ford Motor Co. v. Washington*, 431 S.W.3d 210, 220 (Ark. 2013) ("An instruction for punitive damages may be given when there is evidence that a party likely knew or ought to have known, in light of the surrounding circumstances, that his conduct would naturally or probably result in injury, and that he continued such conduct in reckless disregard of the consequences from which malice could be inferred.")

Negligence, however gross, will not justify an award of punitive damages. *Mo. P. R. Co. v. Mackey*, 760 S.W.2d 59, 63 (Ark. 1988). In addition, punitive damages are recoverable whenever authorized by statute, but there is no legal "right" to such damages. See Ark. Code ANN. § 16-55-201 (2010).

Standard of Proof. Clear and convincing evidence is required to sustain an award of punitive damages. See Ark. Code ANN. § 16-55-207 (2010) ("A plaintiff must satisfy the burden of proof required under § 16-55-206 by clear and convincing evidence in order to recover punitive damages from the defendant."); *Barton AG Ctr., Inc. v. Case*, 459 S.W.3d 307, 312 (Ark. Ct. App.) ("Clear and convincing evidence is proof that produces a firm conviction that the allegation is true."); see also AMI 2218 (2014); *Uniguard Ins. Co. v. Murphy Oil USA, Inc.*, 962 S.W.2d 735, 742 (Ark. 1998).

Actions Against State. State and local governments are not liable for punitive damages. Ark. Code ANN. § 21-9-203; see also *Smith v. Arkansas Board of Election Commissioners*, United States District Court, E.D. Arkansas, Western Division. March 18, 2016 Slip Copy 2016 WL 1367771.

Appeal. There are three guideposts to appeals of punitive damages awards: 1. Degree of reprehensibility, 2. Award ratio to actual harm inflicted on plaintiff, and 3. Comparison of punitive damages to civil/criminal penalties that could be imposed. *Routh Wrecker Serv. v. Washington*, 980 S.W.2d 240, 245 (Ark. 1998) (citing *Bmw of N. Am. v. Gore*, 517 U.S. 559, 575, 116 S. Ct. 1589, 1599 (1996)).

Nothing in §16-55-201 et.seq. and §§ 16-114-206(a), 16-114-208(a), 16-114-208(c)(1), 16-114-209, and 16-114-210—16-114-212 shall limit the duty of a court or the appellate court to: 1. Scrutinize all punitive damages awards; 2. Ensure that all punitive damages awards comply with applicable procedural, evidentiary, and constitutional requirements; and 3. Order remittitur where appropriate. Ark. Code ANN. §16-55-210.



Arbitration. Punitive damages can be awarded by arbitrators pursuant to the FAA. Ark. Code ANN. §16-108-221.

Breach of Contract. Generally, punitive damages are not recoverable in actions for breach of contract unless a willful or malicious act was committed in connection with the contract. *Brookwood, Ltd. P'ship v. DeQueen Physical Therapy & Occupational Therapy, Inc.*, 547 S.W.3d 461, 470 (Ark. Ct. App.); *Dews v. Halliburton Indus., Inc.*, 708 S.W.2d 67, 71 (Ark. 1986). A bare allegation of fraud that results in monetary loss is insufficient for punitive damages. See *McClellan v. Brown*, 632 S.W.2d 406 (Ark. 1982). There is no CGL coverage under policies for breach of contract or punitive damages. *Columbia Insurance Group, Inc. v. Cenark Project Management Services, Inc.*, Supreme Court of Arkansas. April 28, 2016 Not Reported in S.W.3d 2016 Ark. 185. One cannot recover punitive damages if the sole cause of action is based in contract. *Wheeler Motor Co., Inc. v. Roth*, 1993, 867 S.W.2d 446, 315 Ark. 318.

Deceit Actions. Punitive damages are available in deceit actions, even if restitution, rather than compensatory damages, is awarded. *Wheeler Motor Co., Inc. v. Roth*, 1993, 867 S.W.2d 446, 315 Ark. 318.

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under Arkansas law, punitive damages may be recovered from an employer for acts or omissions of his employee in the scope and course of his employment whenever the employee's acts are of such character as to form the basis for an allowance of exemplary damages. *B & F Engineering, Inc. v. Cotroneo*, 830 S.W.2d 835 (Ark. 1992); *Miller v. Blanton*, 213 Ark. 246, 251 (Ark. 1948). This is true even though these acts were done without the employer's knowledge or authorization and were not subsequently ratified by him, regardless of whether he did or did not know the employee to be incompetent or disqualified for the service in which he was engaged. *Id.* See also *Ray Dodge, Inc. v. Moore*, 479 S.W.2d 518, 523 (Ark. 1972) (“[A] corporation may be held liable for exemplary or punitive damages for such acts of its agents or servants acting within the scope of their employment as would, if done by an individual acting for himself, render him liable for such damages.”).

Environmental Liability. “If any person who is liable for a release or threat of release of a hazardous substance fails without sufficient cause to properly provide remedial action or removal action upon order of the Division of Environmental Quality, the person may be liable to the state for punitive damages in an amount equal to three (3) times the amount of any costs incurred by the state as a result of the failure to take proper action.” Ark. Code ANN. § 8-7-517 (2019).

Fraud. A claim of fraud can support restitution and punitive damages. See *Thomas Auto Co. v. Craft*, 763 S.W.2d 651, 654 (Ark. 1989); *Siemens Industry, Inc. v. City of Monticello*, United States District Court, E.D. Arkansas, Pine Bluff Division. May 24, 2016 Slip Copy 2016 WL 3020867.

Express Statutory Authorization. Punitive damages are recoverable whenever authorized by statute, but there is no legal “right” to punitive damages. See Ark. Code ANN. § 16-55-201 *et seq.*

General Liability. Liability for punitive damages in any action for personal injury, medical injury, property damage, or wrongful death shall be several only and shall not be joint. Ark. Code ANN. § 16-55-201 (2010).

Insurer's Bad Faith. An insurance company may incur liability for the first party tort of bad faith when it affirmatively engages in dishonest, malicious, or oppressive conduct in order to avoid a just obligation to its insured. *Emp'rs Equitable Life Ins. Co. v. Williams*, 665 S.W.2d 873, 873 (Ark. 1984)

Interference with Contract. Punitive damages for the tort of interference with contractual relations may be awarded. *Stewart Title Guar. Co. v. Am. Abstract & Title Co.*, 215 S.W.3d 596, 609- 10 (Ark. 2005); see also *United Bilt Homes, Inc. v. Sampson*, 832 S.W.2d 502, 504 (Ark. 1992) (“We hold that United Bilt's conduct was tortious interference with an existing contract. We further hold that the circuit court's award of punitive damages was not in error.”).

Product Liability. Punitive damages may be awarded in product liability cases. *Forrest City Mach. Works, Inc. v. Aderhold*, 616 S.W.2d 720, 726 (Ark. 1981).

Professional Liability. Punitive damages are recoverable under the Medical Malpractice Act. Ark. Code ANN. §16-114-201 (2010); *HCA Health Servs. of Midwest, Inc. v. Nat'l Bank of Commerce*, 745 S.W.2d 120 (Ark. 1988). The Arkansas Supreme Court held that in enacting the Medical Malpractice Act, the Arkansas General Assembly “did not restrict an injured party from claiming punitive damages when a medical-care provider, as defined by the Act, is guilty of willful and wanton misconduct.” *Id.* at 528.



II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes. Punitive damages are insurable except for those damages that arise from an intentional tort. *Smith v. St. Paul Guardian Ins. Co.*, 622 F. Supp. 867 (W.D. Ark. 1985) (“There is nothing in the state’s public policy that prevents an insurer from indemnifying its insured against punitive damages arising from an ‘accident[. . .] [T]hough punitive in nature, the Arkansas Supreme Court allows them to be “passed through” to the insurer, in cases of ‘accident.’”); see also *Talley v. MFA Mut. Ins. Co.*, 620 S.W.2d 260 (Ark. 1981) (clarifying that the unintended consequences of intentional acts may be included in coverage); *S. Farm Bureau Cas. Ins. Co. v. Easter*, 45 S.W.3d 380 (Ark. 2001).

Policies containing an exclusion for punitive damages must include a definition of punitive damages substantially similar to the following: “Punitive damages are damages that may be imposed to punish a wrongdoer and to deter others from similar conduct.” Ark. Code ANN. §23-79-307.

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

No recovery for punitive damages is permitted unless actual damages are proved and assessed. *Williams v. Walker*, 508 S.W.2d 52, 53 (Ark. 1974); see also *Growth Props. I v. Cannon*, 669 S.W.2d 447 (Ark. 1995) (there can be no recovery of punitive damages without actual damages).

The Arkansas Supreme Court has referenced the U.S. Supreme Court’s *State Farm v. Campbell*, 538 U.S. 408 (2003) decision. See *Advocat Inc. v. Sauer*, 111 S.W.3d 346, 359 (Ark. 2003). Though the court did not expressly apply the Supreme Court’s ratio (punitive damages not to exceed double-digit multipliers of compensatory damages), the state court ultimately remitted \$42 million of the \$63 million punitive damages award. *Id.* at 369. Up to that point, the highest punitive damages award affirmed by the state Supreme Court had been \$3 million. See *id.* (citing *Airco., Inc. v. Simmons First Nat. Bank*, 638 S.W.2d 660 (Ark. 1982)). The highest punitive damages award that had been affirmed by the Court of Appeals was \$4 million. See *id.* at 57-58 (citing *Arrow Int’l, Inc. v. Sparks*, 98 S.W.3d 48 (Ark. Ct. App. 2003)). Since then, the Arkansas Supreme Court has affirmed large punitive damages awards, including a \$25 million punitive damages award in a negligence action that resulted in one person’s death and caused severe and permanent injuries to another person. *Union Pac. R.R. Co. v. Barber*, 149 S.W.3d 325, 350 (Ark. 2004).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Punitive damages cannot be statutorily capped as it would unconstitutionally limit a plaintiff’s recovery under article 5, section 32 of the state constitution. See *Bayer v. CropScience LP v. Schafer*, 385 S.W.3d 822 (2011). Ark. Const. art. 5, § 32 bestows upon the General Assembly the power to limit the amount of recovery *only* in matters arising between employer and employee. The General Assembly may limit tort liability *only* where there is an employment relationship between the parties.

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Generally, an award of punitive damages is payable to the plaintiff.



CALIFORNIA

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes, except in an action for the breach of an obligation arising from a contract or against a public agency. (*Civ. Code* § 3294(a); *Gov't Code* §§ 818, 825.) "Punitive damages...are neither equitable nor corrective; punitive damages serve but one purpose -- to punish and through punishment, to deter." (*Dyna-Med, Inc. v. Fair Employment & Housing Com.* (1987) 43 Cal.3d 1379, 1387; see also, *Bullock v. Philip Morris USA, Inc.* (2008) 159 Cal.App.4th 655, 690 [punitive damages are warranted to achieve punishment or deterrence].) Punitive damages are awarded to punish a defendant's intentional wrongdoing or conscious disregard for the rights of others. (*Hobbs v. Bateman Eichler Hill Richards, Inc.* (1985) 164 Cal.App.3d 174, 195.)

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. In California, punitive damages are damages, other than compensatory or nominal damages, awarded against a party to punish for their own personal outrageous conduct. (See, *Di Giorgio Fruit Corp. v. AFL & CIO* (1963) 215 Cal. App.2d 560, 580.) A claim for punitive damages is governed by Civil Code section 3294, which allows for recovery of punitive damages in connection with a breach of an obligation not arising from contract, but only where a plaintiff can show by clear and convincing evidence that a defendant has been "guilty of oppression, fraud or malice." (*Id.* at § 3294(a).)

The relevant terms of *Civil Code* section 3294 are defined as follows: Malice constitutes "conduct which is intended by the defendant to cause injury to the plaintiff or despicable conduct which is carried on by the defendant with a willful and conscious disregard of the rights or safety of others." (*Id.* at § 3294(c)(1).) Oppression is "despicable conduct that subjects a person to cruel and unjust hardship in conscious disregard of that person's rights." (*Id.* at § 3294(c)(2).) "Fraud means an intentional misrepresentation, deceit or concealment of a material known fact to the defendant with the intention of depriving a person of legal rights otherwise causing injury." (*Id.* at § 3294(c)(3).)

"Despicable conduct" is defined as "conduct which is so vile, base, contemptible, miserable, wretched or loathsome that it would be looked down upon and despised by ordinary decent people." (*Mock v. Mich. Millers Mutual Ins. Co.* (1992) 4 Cal. App.4th 306, 331.)

Mere spite, ill will, carelessness, ignorance or negligence, even gross negligence, are not sufficient to justify an award of punitive damages. (See, *Ebaugh v. Rabkin* (1972) 22 Cal.App.3d 891, 894; *Flyer's Body Shop Profit Sharing Plan v. Ticor Title Ins. Co.* (1986) 185 Cal.App.3d 1149, 1154; *Jackson v. Johnson* (1992) 5 Cal.App.4th 1350, 1354.)

Standard of Proof. The plaintiff must prove the defendant's oppressive, fraudulent, or malicious conduct by "clear and convincing evidence" in order to recover punitive damages. (*Civ. Code* § 3294(a); *Butte Fire Cases* (2018) 24 Cal.App.5th 1150, 1158.)

Evidence of a defendant's financial condition is a condition precedent to an award of punitive damages. (*Adams v. Murakami* (1991) 54 Cal.3d 105, 115-116.) An appellate court cannot make a fully informed determination of whether an award of punitive damages is excessive unless the record contains evidence of defendant's financial condition as an element of the punitive damages claim. (*Id.* at 110.)

To conduct pre-trial discovery of the defendant's profits or financial condition, the plaintiff must first submit admissible evidence showing there is a substantial probability the plaintiff will prevail on the claim for punitive damages. (*Civ. Code* § 3295(c); *Jabro v. Superior Court* (2002) 95 Cal.App.4th 754, 758.)



On application of the defendant, the court shall preclude the admission of evidence of the defendant's profits or financial condition until after the trier of fact finds punitive damages are warranted. (*Civ. Code* § 3295(d); *Torres v. Automobile Club of So. California* (1997) 15 Cal.4th 771, 777-778.)

Arbitration. Yes. Punitive damages may be awarded in an arbitration proceeding. (*Baker v. Sadick* (1984) 162 Cal.App.3d 618, 631.)

Actions Against State. No. Punitive damages may not be awarded against a California public agency and public agencies are forbidden from indemnifying their employees for their employees' punitive damages liability. (*Gov't Code* §§ 818, 825.)

Breach of Contract. No. Punitive damages are not recoverable in an action for a non-insurance contract breach in the absence of a violation of an independent duty arising from principles of tort law other than the denial of the existence of, or liability under, a breached contract. (*Civ. Code* § 3294(a); *Freeman & Mills, Inc. v. Belcher Oil Co.* (1995) 11 Cal.4th 85, 103.) While punitive damages are not ordinarily recoverable for a breach of contract, regardless of whether the breach is intentional, willful or in "bad faith," such damages may be awarded where a defendant fraudulently induces the plaintiff to enter into a contract. (*Las Palmas Associates v. Las Palmas Center Associates* (1991) 235 Cal.App.3d 1220, 1238-1239.)

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Yes. Under California law, an employer is not liable for punitive damages, based upon acts of an employee, unless (i) the employer had advance knowledge of the unfitness of the employee and employed him with a conscious disregard of the rights or safety of others, or (ii) authorized or ratified the wrongful conduct for which the damages are awarded, or (iii) was personally guilty of oppression, fraud, or malice. (*Civ. Code* § 3294(b).)

With respect to a corporate employer, the wrongful conduct must be on the part of an officer, director, or managing agent of the corporation. (*White v. Ultramar, Inc.* (1999) 21 Cal.4th 563, 566-567.) A managing agent is an employee who has broad discretionary powers and exercises substantial discretionary authority in the corporation to determine corporate policy. (*Id.* at 577.) A supervisor who has no discretionary authority over decisions that ultimately affect corporate policy would not be considered a managing agent, even though he has the ability to hire and fire other employees. (*Id.* at 563.)

Environmental Liability. Yes. Punitive damages may be assessed in those cases where the claimant presents, by clear and substantial proof, substantial evidence to demonstrate that the defendant's conduct in causing exposure to a toxic hazard amounts to oppression, fraud or malice. (*Potter v. Firestone Tire & Rubber Co.* (1993) 6 Cal.4th 965, 998.) In imposing such damages, courts consider whether the defendant is guilty of despicable conduct carried on in a willful and conscious disregard for the rights and safety of others. (*Id.* at 998-999.) "[T]he size of the potential class of plaintiffs is similarly diminished and the moral blame heightened since the defendant is aware of the danger posed by its conduct and acts in conscious disregard of the known risk." (*Id.*)

General Liability. Yes. Punitive damages may be awarded in an action for breach of an obligation, not arising from a contract, where the defendant is guilty of fraud, oppression or malice. (*Civ. Code* § 3294(a).)

Insurer's Bad Faith. Yes. An insurer is not liable for punitive damages except where the existence of malice, oppression and fraud is established by clear and convincing evidence. *Mock v. Michigan Millers Mutual Ins. Co.*, *supra*, 4 Cal.App.4th 306, 328.) Evidence that an insurer has violated its duty of good faith and fair dealing does not automatically mean that the insurer has acted with the requisite malice, fraud or oppression to justify an award of punitive damages. (*Id.* at 607.)

Medical Professionals and Religious Corporations. Yes. Punitive damages may be sought against medical professionals and religious corporations. However, the plaintiff must first demonstrate a sufficient probability of prevailing on his or her claim for punitive damages. (*Code Civ. Proc.* §§ 425.13(a), 425.14.)



II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

No. Insurance Code section 533 provides “[a]n insurer is not liable for a loss caused by the wilful act of the insured; but he is not exonerated by the negligence of the insured, or of the insured’s agents or others.” California public policy that permits the recovery of punitive damages only for the sake of example and by way of punishment, precludes passing punitive damages to an insurer. (*Ford Motor Co. v. Home Ins. Co.* (1981) 116 Cal.App.3d 374, 383-384.)

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Probably. Early cases held Insurance Code section 533 does not apply where the insured is not personally at fault. (*See, Arenson v. Nat’l Auto & Cas. Ins. Co.* (1955) 45 Cal.2d 81.) However, the California Supreme Court in *PPG Indus., Inc. v. Transamerica Insurance Co.* (1999) 20 Cal.4th 310, applied the prohibition against a corporate successor that was not at fault, but was contractually liable for its predecessor’s punitive damages liability.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Actual damages is a prerequisite for an award of punitive damages. (*See, Gagnon v. Cont’l Casualty Co.* (1989) 211 Cal.App.3d 1598, 1603, fn. 5; *Esparza v. Specht* (1976) 55 Cal.App.3d 1, 6.) “[I]f damages are actually suffered, punitive damages may be awarded in appropriate cases even if the injured party is not awarded compensatory damages or is only awarded nominal damages.” (*Carr v. Progressive Casualty Ins. Co.* (1984) 152 Cal.App.3d 881, 892.)

California state law does not have a cap on punitive damages. However, grossly excessive or arbitrary punishments are prohibited by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. (*BMW of North America, Inc. v. Gore* (1996) 517 U.S. 559, 568; *State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co. v. Campbell* (2003) 538 U.S. 408, 416.) “[C]ourts must ensure that the measure of punishment is both reasonable and proportionate to the amount of harm to the plaintiff and to the general damages recovered.” (*Id.* at 426.)

To evaluate the size of a punitive damages award, the court must consider: “(1) the degree of reprehensibility of the defendant’s misconduct; (2) the disparity between the actual or potential harm suffered by the plaintiff and the punitive damages award; and (3) the difference between the punitive damages awarded by the jury and the civil penalties authorized or imposed in comparable cases.” (*Nickerson v. Stonebridge Life Ins. Co.* (2016) 63 Cal.4th 363, 371-372, citing *State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co. v. Campbell*, *supra*, 538 U.S. at 418.)

Absent special justification, ratios of punitive damages to compensatory damages greatly exceeding 9 or 10 to 1 are presumed to be excessive and therefore unconstitutional. (*Simon v. San Paolo U.S. Holding Co., Inc.* (2005) 35 Cal.4th 1159, 1182.)

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

The plaintiff may not seek punitive damages from either a health care provider or religious corporation without a prior court order, upon proof of a substantial probability he or she will prevail on their claim for punitive damages. (*Code Civ. Proc.* §§ 425.13(a), 425.14.)

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Generally, punitive damages are recoverable by the plaintiff.



COLORADO

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. Punitive damages (referred to in CO as “exemplary damages”) are recoverable only pursuant to statute. See C.R.S. § 13-21-102 (2022); *Seaward Constr. Co. v. Bradley*, 817 P.2d 971, 973 (Colo. 1991); *Kaitz v. District Court*, 650 P.2d 553 (Colo. 1982).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Punitive damages are recoverable in all civil actions in which damages are assessed by a jury for a wrong done to person or to personal or real property and the injury was attended by circumstances of fraud, malice, or wanton and reckless conduct. C.R.S. § 13-21-102(a); see also *White v. Brock*, 584 P.2d 1224 (Colo. App. 1978). The punitive damages statute defines “willful and wanton” for purposes of determining punitive damages as “conduct purposefully committed which the actor must have realized as dangerous, done heedlessly and recklessly, without regard to the consequences, or of the rights and safety of others, particularly the plaintiff.” C.R.S., § 13-21-102(1)(b). This standard has been interpreted as justifying punitive damages “when the act causing the plaintiff’s injuries was performed with an evil intent, and with the purpose of injuring the plaintiff, or with such a wanton and reckless disregard of his rights as evidence of a wrongful motive.” *Tri-Aspen Constr. Co. v. Johnson*, 714 P.2d 484, 486 (Colo. 1986) (quotations omitted). Wanton and reckless disregard in the context of punitive damages involves “conduct that creates a substantial risk of harm to another and is purposefully performed with an awareness of the risk in disregard of the consequences.” *Id.* (quoting *Palmer v. A. H. Robins Co.*, 684 P.2d 187, 215 (Colo. 1984)).

Standard of Proof. Colorado requires proof beyond a reasonable doubt to support a punitive damages award. C.R.S. § 13-25-127(2) (2022); Conduct that is merely negligent cannot serve as a basis for exemplary damages. *Frick v. Abell*, 602 P.2d 852, 854 (1979). However, repeated failure to correct a known dangerous condition may convert mere negligence into wanton and reckless disregard. *Jacob v. Commonwealth Highland Theatres, Inc.*, 738 P.2d 6 (Colo. App. 1986). A claim for punitive damages may not be included in any initial claim for relief. C.R.S., § 13-21-102(1.5). Such a claim may be allowed by amendment of the pleadings after the exchange of initial disclosures and the plaintiff establish “prima facie proof of a triable issue” to the Court. C.R.S., § 13-21-102(1.5)(a). “The existence of a triable issue on liability for punitive damages is established by showing of a reasonable likelihood that the issue will ultimately be submitted to the jury for resolution.” *Leidholt v. District Court In and For the City and County of Denver*, 619 P.2d 768, 771 (Colo. 1980). Denial or granting of a leave to amend a complaint is within the discretion of the trial court. *H W. Houston Constr. Co. v. Dist. Ct.*, 632 P.2d 563 (Colo. 1981).

Actions Against State. A public entity is not liable for punitive damages. C.R.S. § 24-10-114(4) (2022). However, a public entity, after adoption of resolutions of an open public meeting, may defend, pay, or otherwise settle a punitive damages claim against a public employee. C.R.S. § 24-10-118(5) (2022). See, e.g., *Healy v. Counts*, 536 F. Supp. 600, 601 (D. Colo. 1982).

Breach of Contract. Generally, punitive damages are not recoverable in the context of a contract action. *Mortgage Finance Inc. v. Podleski*, 742 P.2d 900 (Colo. 1987).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under Colorado law, an employer cannot be held liable for exemplary damages for the acts of a non-managerial employee unless it is shown that (i) the employer authorized or approved the act for which exemplary damages are claimed, or (ii) the employer approved of or participated in the wrong of its employee, or (iii) the employer failed to exercise proper care in selecting its employees. *Holland Furnace Co. v. Robson*, 402 P.2d 628, 631 (Colo. 1965). In the case of a managerial employee, however, an employer may be held liable for punitive damages if the employee was acting in the scope of his employment. *Fitzgerald v. Edelen*, 623 P.2d 418, 423 (Colo. Ct. App. 1980); Restatement (Second) of Agency § 217C (1958).



Environmental Liability. There is no Colorado case directly on point. But as explained above, punitive damages are generally recoverable in civil cases when it is established that the injury was inflicted through fraud, malice, or wanton and reckless conduct. See C.R.S. § 13-21-102 (2015).

Insurer's Bad Faith. Punitive damages may be recovered on a claim of bad faith breach of insurance contract if the breach is accompanied by circumstances of fraud, malice or willful and wanton conduct. *Ballow v. PHICO Insurance Company*, 878 P.2d 672, 682 (Colo. 1994); *S. Park Aggregates, Inc. v. Nw. Nat'l. Ins. Co.*, 847 P.2d 218, 224 (Colo. App. 1992).

Product Liability. Punitive damages are recoverable in connection with a strict product liability claim in tort. *Palmer v. A.H. Robins Co., Inc.*, 684 P.2d 187, 2014-05 (Colo. 1984).

Professional Liability. C.R.S. § 13-64-302.5(3) prohibits punitive damages from being alleged in a medical malpractice lawsuit until all discovery is completed. The measure also protects physicians from being held liable for punitive damages because of an adverse effect from prescription medicine that was administered in compliance with FDA guidelines. C.R.S. § 13-64-302.5(5) In addition, a physician is shielded from punitive damages for the act of another, unless the physician directed the act or ratified it. C.R.S. § 13-64-302.5(6)

Wrongful Death. Exemplary damages are permitted when the death "is attended by circumstances of fraud, malice, or willful and wanton conduct." C.R.S. § 13-21-203(3). "Willful and wanton conduct" has the same meaning as that set forth in C.R.S. § 13-21-102 (1) (b).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

No. "[P]ublic policy prohibits insurers from assuming any obligation for indemnity of punitive damages." *Universal Indem. Ins. Co. v. Tenery*, 39 P.2d 776 (Colo. 1934). An insurer that does not participate in the wrongful conduct is not obliged to cover punitive damages. *Union Ins. Co. v. Kjeldgaard*, 775 P.2d 55, 56 (Colo. App. 1988), *appeal after remand, affirmed*, 820 P.2d 1183 (Colo. App. 1991) (bodily injury and property damage liability policy does not render insurer liable for punitive damages awarded against insured); *Brown v. W. Cas. & Sur. Co.*, 484 P.2d 1252, 1253 (Colo.App. 1971) (insurer not liable for punitive damages recovered in motorist's default judgment against insured); *Gleason v. Fryer*, 491 P.2d 85, 86 (Colo. App. 1971).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

No statute or decision on point.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

In order to uphold a judgment for punitive damages, there must be proof of actual damages and there must be a rational relationship between punitive and compensatory damages. *Mortgage Finance Inc. v. Podelski*, 742 P.2d 900, 903 (Colo. 1987) (punitive damages must bear a reasonable relationship to compensatory damages). There is no precise ratio. In addition, evidence of the income or net worth of a party shall not be considered in determining the appropriateness or amount of punitive damages. C.R.S. § 13-21-102(6); *see also Corbetta v. Albertson's, Inc.*, 975 P.2d 718 (Colo. 1999).



D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Reasonable exemplary damages are limited to an amount that is equal to the amount of the actual damages awarded to the injured party. C.R.S. § 13-21-102(1)(a). The court, however, may increase any award of exemplary damages to a sum not to exceed three times the amount of actual damages if it is shown that the defendant during the pendency of the action has continued the injurious behavior against the plaintiff or others in a willful and wanton manner or has willfully and wantonly further aggravated the damages to the plaintiff when the defendant knew or should have known that such action would produce aggravation. *Kirk v. Denver Pub. Co.*, 818 P.2d 262, 266 (Colo. 1991) (discussing C.R.S. § 13-21-102(3)(a) & (b)). The court may also reduce or disallow the award of punitive damages to the extent that the deterrent effect of the damages has been accomplished; the conduct resulting in the award has ceased; or the purpose of such damages has otherwise been served. C.R.S. § 13-21-102(2). Punitive damages are not subject to prejudgment interest. *Lira v. Davis*, 832 P.2d 240 (Colo. 1992).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Punitive damages are payable to the injured party. C.R.S. § 13-21-102(1)(a).



CONNECTICUT

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. *Berry v. Loiseau*, 614 A.2d 414 (Conn. 1992). The measure of punitive damages rests in the sound discretion of the trier of fact. *Freeman v. Alamo Mgmt. Co.*, 607 A.2d 370 (Conn.1992). See also *Tomick v. UPS*, 115 A.3d 1143, 157 Conn. App. 312 (2015).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. In order for punitive or exemplary damages to be awarded, the evidence must reveal a reckless indifference to the rights of others or an intentional and wanton violation of those rights. The basic requirement to justify an award of punitive damages is described in terms of wanton and malicious injury, evil motive and violence. A plaintiff may recover punitive damages even if he does not specifically plead them in the body of the complaint or the claims for relief. *West Haven v. Hartford Ins. Co.*, 221 Conn. 149 (Conn. 1992); *Franc v. Bethel Holding Co.*, 73 Conn. App. 114 (Conn. 2002); *Chapman Lumber, Inc. v. Clifford L. Tager*, 2005 Conn. Super. Lexis 863. See also *Gaughan v. Higgins*, 186 Conn. App. 618 (2018); *Cohen v. The Cadle Co.*, No. CV196051384S, 2019 Conn. Super. LEXIS 3423, at *20-21 (Super. Ct. Dec. 20, 2019)

The test for allowing punitive damages should not depend on the nature of the injury or the type of damage sustained, but on the nature of the consequences of the wrongful conduct involved. *Am. Airlines, Inc. v. Nat'l Automatic Prod. Co.*, 477 A.2d 171 (Conn. Super. Ct. 1984). See also *Ames v. Sears, Roebuck & Co.*, 8 Conn. App. 642 (1986).

The purpose of punitive damages is to fully compensate plaintiffs for the harm that they have suffered. *Berry v. Loiseau*, 614 A.2d 414 (Conn. 1992); *Ulbrich v. Groth*, 310 Conn. 375, 455, 78 A.3d 76, 127 (2013). It is also to focus on deterrence and punishment. *Stone v. E. Coast Swappers, LLC*, No. 20382, 2020 Conn. LEXIS 319, at *16-17 (Dec. 11, 2020). As courts have uniformly held, no plaintiff has a right to punitive damages; the purpose of punitive damages is to vindicate the public interest, not that of a particular plaintiff. *Freeman v. Alamo Mgmt. Co.*, 607 A.2d 370 (Conn. 1992).

Standard of Proof. There is no higher standard of proof required when a plaintiff seeks to prove criminal activity in a civil action. Rather, only preponderance of the evidence is required for a punitive damages award. *Freeman*, 607 A.2d at 370; *Stuart v. Stuart*, 297 Conn. 26, 38, 996 A.2d 259, 266 (2010). The party seeking an award of punitive damages bears the burden of proving the amount of those damages. *Venturi v. Savitt, Inc.*, 468 A.2d 933 (Conn. 1983). To furnish a basis for recovery of punitive damages, the pleadings must allege and the evidence must show wanton or willful malicious misconduct, and the language contained in the pleadings must be sufficiently explicit to inform the court and opposing counsel that such damages are being sought. *Harold Stohlts et al. v. James F. Gilkinson et al.*, 2003 WL 22080510, Conn. Super (Aug. 22, 2003), judgment affirmed by *Stohlts v. Gilkinson*, 87 Conn. App. 634 (2005). See also *Gaughan v. Higgins*, 186 Conn. App. 618 (2018).

Action Against State. Connecticut does not permit punitive damages to be assessed against a municipality on public policy grounds unless expressly authorized by statute or through statutory construction. *Trimachi v. Conn. Workers Comp. Comm.*, 2000 Conn. Super. (LexisNexis 1548).

Breach of Contract. Punitive damages are not ordinarily recoverable for breach of contract. *Brodeur & Co., CPAs, P.C. v. Charlton*, 2003 Conn. Super. (Lexis 2833). However, in Connecticut, breach of contract founded on tortious conduct may allow the award of punitive damages. Such tortious conduct must be alleged in terms of wanton and malicious injury, evil motive and violence. *Silano v. Granfors*, 2004 Conn. Super. (Lexis 414).



Civil Actions. Under Conn. Gen. Stat. § 52-257, where defendant intentionally struck plaintiff, and as a direct and proximate result of the harmful and offensive conduct plaintiff sustained personal injuries and continuing pain and suffering and medical expenses, the court awarded plaintiff economic, non-economic, and punitive damages. *Murphy v. Lachapell*, 2000 Conn. Super. (LexisNexis 3546); *Abbas v. Avignone*, 2013 Conn. Super. LEXIS 1615 (Conn. Super. Ct. July 18, 2013).

Defamation. Conn. Gen. Stat. § 52-237 states that in any action for a libel, unless the plaintiff proves either malice in fact or that the defendant, after having been requested by the plaintiff in writing to retract the libelous charge failed to do so within a reasonable time, the plaintiff will recover nothing but actual damages. In *Silva v. Sinchak*, 1993 Conn. Super. (LexisNexis 345), the attorney alleged facts concerning the defendants' failure to properly retract the allegedly libelous statements. This was sufficient to sustain the claim for punitive damages. Malice in fact has never been interpreted to require "proof of spite, ill will, or personal pique on the part of the perpetrator of a libel." Proof of any improper or unjustifiable motive will suffice. See *Corbett v. Register Publishing Co*, 33 Conn. Supp. 4 (1975).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under Connecticut law, punitive damages may be awarded against an employer only if:

1. the employer or a managerial agent of the employer authorized the employee's conduct and the manner of engaging in such conduct, or
2. the employee was unfit and the employer or a managerial agent was reckless in employing or retaining him, or
3. the employee was employed in a managerial capacity and was acting in the scope of employment, or
4. the employer or a managerial agent of the employer ratified or approved the employee's conduct

Stohlts v. Gilkinson, 867 A.2d 860, 874 (Conn. App. Ct. 2005) (citing 4 Restatement (Second) of Torts, § 909 (1979)). See also *Aurora Loan Servs., LLC v. Hirsch*, 170 Conn. App. 439 (2017).

Environmental Liability. An award of punitive damages consisting of attorney's fees was permitted in *Wedig v. Brinster*, 1 Conn. App. 123 (1983) when the Court found that the defendants were liable under a theory of fraudulent concealment and non-disclosure of material facts relating to the sewer system in the sale of a house.

General Liability. A punitive damages award cannot stand in the absence of a verdict in the plaintiff's favor on a cause of action sounding in tort. *Barry v. Posi-Seal Int'l Inc.*, 672 A.2d 514 (Conn. App. 1996).

Under Conn Gen Stat. § 52-257, where defendant intentionally struck plaintiff, and as a direct and proximate result of the harmful and offensive conduct plaintiff sustained personal injuries and continuing pain and suffering and medical expenses, the court awarded plaintiff economic, non-economic and punitive damages. *Murphy v. Lachapell*, 2000 Conn. Super. (Lexis 3546) (Dec. 13, 2000).

Health Care. Under Conn. Gen. Stat. § 19a-550(e), where the deprivation of any right or benefit created or established for the well-being of a patient is found to have been willful or in reckless disregard of the rights of the patient, punitive damages may be assessed. *Gitelman v. Hughes Health & Rehab., Inc.*, 2012 Conn. Super. LEXIS 176 (Conn. Super. Ct. Jan. 18, 2012).

Home Improvement. A contractor was subject to punitive damages and attorney fees where (1) he overcharged a homeowner; (2) he was unlicensed and unregistered, in violation of the Home Improvement Act, Conn. Gen. Stat. § 20-418; and (3) the contract failed to include a provision advising the homeowner of his right to cancel, as required by Conn. Gen. Stat. § 42-134a. *Bevilacqua v. Petrillo*, 1996 Conn. Super. (Lexis 18) (1996).

Insurer's Bad Faith. Pursuant to Conn. Gen. Stat. § 38a-815, an insurer who acts unreasonably and in bad faith by withholding insurance benefits may be liable in tort, yet only if the insured sues for punitive damages must the tortious conduct be alleged in terms of wanton and malicious injury, evil motive and violence, and outrageous conduct. *Masik v. Costa*, 2000 Conn. Super. (LexisNexis 2550). A recipient's request for admission of financial records of a workers' compensation insurer was permitted



because the insurer's financial circumstances were relevant to the award of punitive damages under the Connecticut Unfair Trade Practices Act, Conn. Gen. Stat. § 42-110g(a) (2010). The recipient alleged that the insurer unilaterally reduced his workers' compensation benefits in violation of Conn. Gen. Stat. § 31-296, and the court found that punitive damages were designed to deter future conduct. *Lenz v. CNA Assurance Co.*, 1993 Conn. Super. (LexisNexis 1200).

Landlord and Tenant. Where a landlord removed a tenant's belongings, placed them in a garage, and changed the locks, a court awarded double damages, punitive damages, attorney fees, and costs. *Gaylord v. Mosher*, 1991 Conn. Super. (LexisNexis 2691). Tenants established an entitlement to a punitive damages award when they showed that the landlord's action in locking them out of their office space and conversion of their valuable computer equipment was oppressive, unethical and unscrupulous conduct in violation of the Conn. Gen. Stat. § 42-110a. *Haskins v. Brown*, 2003 Conn. Super. (Lexis 1799).

Motor Vehicles. An employer of a truck driver could be liable for punitive damages where the truck driver deliberately or with reckless disregard caused a collision in violation of Conn. Gen. Stat. § 14-222 because Conn. Gen. Stat. §§ 14-295 and 52-183 expressed a legislative intent to alter the common law rule and impose vicarious liability on an employer for punitive damages. *Rosado v. Choiniere*, 1998 Conn. Super. (Lexis 438).

Product Liability. Conn. Gen. Stat. § 52-240(b) (2010) allows punitive damages to be awarded if the claimant proves that the harm suffered was the result of the product seller's reckless disregard for the safety of product users, consumers or others who were injured by the product. In a consumer's suit alleging that her hip prosthesis was defective, the consumer was unable to obtain punitive damages because there was no evidence that the manufacturer acted with disregard for consumer dangers. *Dunn v. Zimmer, Inc.*, 2005 U.S. Dist. (Lexis 5347) (D. Conn. 2005). Evidence concerning product design, decisions made by the company, and how the product was marketed to consumers, were relevant inquiries of deciding whether an award of punitive damages was appropriate. See *Izzarelli v. R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co.*, 806 F. Supp. 2d 516 (D. Conn. 2011), *aff'd*, 701 Fed. Appx. 26, 2017 U.S. App. LEXIS 12125 (2d Cir. Conn. 2017). Connecticut permits awards of punitive damages for harm to property as well as to persons. *Greene v. Black & Decker (U.S.), Inc.*, No. CV 9575137, 1998 WL 131717, at *1 (Conn. Super. Ct. Mar. 11, 1998).

Professional Liability. Where the deprivation of any right or benefit created or established for the well-being of a patient is found to have been willful or in reckless disregard of the rights of the patient, punitive damages may be assessed. Conn. Gen. Stat. § 19a-550(e) (2010). A contractor may also be subject to punitive damages. *Bevilacqua v. Petrillo*, No. CV940364614S, 1996 WL 22396, at *1 (Conn. Super. Ct. Jan. 2, 1996).

Trade Secret. Under Conn. Gen. Stat. § 35-53, if the court finds willful and malicious misappropriation, the court may award punitive damages. The trial court did not abuse its discretion in awarding punitive damages under Conn. Gen. Stat. § 35-53(b) where the award was supported by an undisputed finding that former employees' conduct in misappropriating their corporate employers' trade secrets was willful and malicious. *Smith v. Snyder*, 267 Conn. 456 (2004). See also, *Elm City Cheese Co., Inc. v. Federico*, 251 Conn. 59 (1999) (Plaintiff's cheese manufacturing business operations were a protectable trade secret. Accordingly defendant, a former employee, was held liable for punitive damages and attorney fees, and also was enjoined from further use of the former employer's trade secret.)

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

It depends. A recent ruling carved out an exception for common law punitive damages when a policy expressly covers intentional acts and the punitive damages are awarded because of those acts. In *Nationwide Mutual Ins. Co. v. Pasiak*, 327 Conn. 225 (2017), the Court held that common law punitive damages were included in the policy because the policy provided coverage for false imprisonment. *Id.* ("[W]e conclude that, under the facts of the present case, the plaintiffs [Nationwide] are bound to keep the bargain they struck, which includes coverage for common law punitive damages for false imprisonment"). Significantly, Connecticut's common law punitive damages are limited to the costs of litigation and attorney fees.



Conversely, in *Bodner v. United Serv. Auto Ass'n*, the Court held that “a tortfeasor may not protect himself from liability by seeking indemnity from his insurer for punitive damages that were imposed on him for his own intentional or reckless wrongdoing. *Bodner v. United Serv. Auto. Ass'n*, 610 A.2d 1212 (Conn. 1992). *Bodner* focused on public policy considerations specific to uninsured motorist coverage. The Court in *Bodner* held that “[t]he public policy established by the uninsured motorist statute is that every insured is entitled to recover for the damages her or she would have been able to recover if the uninsured motorist had maintained a policy of liability insurance. [A]llowing a recovery of punitive damages under uninsured motorist coverage would, in effect, place the insured in a better position than would exist if the tortfeasor had been insured.” *Bodner v. United Serv. Auto Ass'n*, 610 A.2d 1212 (Conn. 1992).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

At common law, there is no vicarious liability for punitive damages. *Zwicker v. Sabetta*, No. CV075008853S, 2008 Conn Super Lexis 292, at *5 (Conn. Super. Ct. Feb. 1, 2008). *Santillo v. Arredono*, No. 442323, 2001 Conn Super Lexis 826, at *2 (Conn. Super. Ct. Mar. 21, 2001).

Connecticut courts are split as to whether certain statutes, such as Conn. Gen. Stat. §14-295, permit vicarious liability for punitive damages. See *Zwicker v. Sabetta*, No. CV075008853S, 2008 Conn Super Lexis 292, at *5 (Conn. Super. Ct. Feb. 1, 2008); see also *Villard v. Shoreline Pools Serv., Inc.*, No. FSTCV106007372S, 2011 Conn Super Lexis 2094 at *5 (Conn. Super. Ct. Aug. 19, 2011); but see *Santillo v. Arredono*, No. 442323, 2001 Conn Super Lexis 826, at *2 (Conn. Super. Ct. Mar. 21, 2001);

In *Avis*, an insured found vicariously liable for punitive damages awarded under Conn. Gen. Stat. § 14-154a in an underlying action, brought suit seeking indemnity for the punitive damage award. *Avis Rent A Car System, Inc. v. Liberty Mutual Ins. Co.*, 203 Conn. at 674, 526 A.2d 52. The Court determined that a claimant who had been held liable for punitive damages, under General Statutes § 14-154a, as the alter ego of the tortfeasor was not barred, as a matter of public policy, from recourse to its insurance coverage. *Id.*; see also *Bodner v. United Servs. Auto. Ass'n*, 222 Conn. 480, 498, 610 A.2d 1212, 1221-22 (1992).

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Compensatory and punitive damages, although usually awarded at the same time, serve different purposes. Compensatory damages are intended to redress the concrete loss that a plaintiff has suffered by reason of a defendant’s conduct. By contrast, punitive damages are aimed at deterrence and retribution. *Stack v. Jaffee*, 306 F. Supp. 2d 137 (D. Conn. 2003). See also *Cooper Indus. v. Leatherman Tool Group, Inc.*, 121 S. Ct. 1678 (2001).

Under Connecticut law, common law punitive damages primarily serve compensatory purposes. *Lyons v. Nichols*, 1999 Conn. Super. (Lexis 1297). By requiring the payment of actual costs and attorney fees, punitive damages leave to the injured party the full payment and full use of his compensatory damages award, no more and no less, undiminished by having to pay costs and attorney fees from the award. *Engram v. Zapert*, 1996 Conn. Super. (LexisNexis 2955); see also *Berry v. Loiseau*, 223 Conn. 786, 825, 614 A.2d 414, 434 (1992)

1. There is an exception to the general rule that common-law punitive damages cannot be vicariously assessed. According to the Restatement (Second) of Torts:

Punitive damages can properly be awarded against a master or other principal because of an act by an agent if, but only if, (a) the principal or a managerial agent authorized the doing and the manner of the act, or (b) the agent was unfit and the principal or a managerial agent was reckless in employing or retaining him, or (c) the agent was employed in a managerial capacity and was acting in the scope of employment, or (d) the principal or a managerial agent of the principal ratified or approved the act. *Zwicker v. Sabetta*, No. CV075008853S, 2008 Conn Super Lexis 292, at *5 (Conn. Super. Ct. Feb. 1, 2008)



D. Are there any statutory caps or other limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Punitive damages are limited to the costs of litigation, less taxable costs. *Purcell v. Vogt ex rel. Surface Techniques, Inc.*, No. CV000175088, 2003 Conn Super. Lexis 1339, at *1 (Conn. Super. Ct. Apr. 30, 2003). See also *Gaughan v. Higgins*, 186 Conn. App. 618 (2018). However, there are statutory exceptions to the rule that punitive damages are limited to litigation expenses in excess of taxable costs. *Freeman v. Alamo Mgmt. Co.*, 607 A.2d 370 (Conn.1991). For example, Conn. Gen. Stat. § 47a- 46 states that double damages are allowed in a civil action if the defendant has entered into the land, tenement or dwelling unit by force or after entry held the same by force or otherwise injured the party aggrieved in the manner described in § 47a- 43. Additionally, in *Staehele v. Michael's Garage, Inc.*, 646 A.2d 888 (Conn. App. 1994), the court held that the recognized method of determining punitive damages under the Connecticut Unfair Trade Practices Act was to award an amount equal to the plaintiff's actual damages.

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Generally, an award of punitive damages is payable to the claimant. Punitive damages may be awarded to a spouse in connection with a loss of consortium claim. *Champagne v. Raybestos-Manhattan, Inc.*, 562 A.2d 1100 (Conn.1989).



DELAWARE

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. Punitive damages generally are available in Delaware. *Littleton v. Young*, 608 A.2d 728 (Del. 1992); *Jardel Co., Inc. v. Hughes*, 523 A.2d 518 (Del. 1987). An award of punitive damages must subsist on grounds other than making the plaintiff whole. *Jardel Co.*, 523 A.2d, at 528; but see *Beals v. Wash. Int'l Inc.*, 386 A.2d 1156 (Del. Ch. 1978) (where the court states that the Court of Chancery has no jurisdiction to assess punitive damages).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. The penal aspect and public policy considerations that justify the imposition of punitive damages require that they be imposed only after a close examination of whether the defendant's conduct is outrageous because of evil motive or reckless indifference to the rights of others. Mere inadvertence, mistake or errors of judgment that constitute mere negligence will not suffice. It is not enough that a decision be wrong. It must result from a conscious indifference to the decision's foreseeable effect. *Eby v. Thompson*, 2005 Del. Super. (LexisNexis 63) (Feb. 8, 2005); *Jardel Co.*, 523 A.2d, at 529.

Standard of Proof. Clear and convincing evidence is required to obtain punitive damages. *Kanga v. Gannett Co.*, 1998 Del. Super. (LexisNexis 427) (1998), *aff'd in part, rev'd in part Gannett Co., Inc. v. Kanga*, 750 A.2d 1174 (Del. 2000). When addressing the amount of punitive damages to assess, the defendant is entitled to present mitigating evidence. *Wilhem v. Ray*, 903 A.2d 745 (2006).

Breach of Contract. Exemplary damages are not recoverable as a general rule in the pure action for breach of contract. Only when there appears in the record a willful wrong, in the nature of deceit, will the court award punitive damages. *G.K.T., Inc. v. Jackson*, 2000 Del. C.P. (LexisNexis 32).

Punitive damages will not be justified based solely on a showing that the defendant took a stance that was unreasonable or unjustified or that the conduct was intentional, unless the intentional breach is similar in character to an intentional tort. *Pierce v. Int'l Ins. Co. of Ill.*, 671 A.2d 1361, 1367 (Del. 1996). Punitive damages may be recoverable for breach of contract if the conduct of the defendant amounts to an independent tort. *E.I. DuPont de Nemours & Co. v. Pressman*, 679 A.2d 436, 445 (Del. Super. Ct. 1996). Although the UCC imposes a duty of good faith and fair dealing, punitive damages generally are not awarded for a breach of this duty. *E.I. DuPont*, 679 A.2d, at 445.

Credit Services. A buyer injured by a violation of Chapter 24 dealing with credit services organizations may be awarded punitive damages. 6 Del. C. § 2409.

Commerce and Trade. 6 Del. C. § 2513 addresses consumer fraud. Under this section, the act, use or employment by any person of any deception, fraud, false pretense, false promise, misrepresentation, or the concealment, suppression, or omission of any material fact in connection with the sale, lease or advertisement of any merchandise, is an unlawful practice. If the fraud is gross, oppressive or aggravated, or where it involves breach of trust or confidence, the plaintiff may recover punitive damages. *Stephenson v. Capano Dev., Inc.*, 462 A.2d 1069, 1076 (Del. 1983).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under Delaware law, punitive damages may be awarded against a master or other principal only if:

1. the principal or a managerial agent authorized the doing and the manner and employee's conduct and the manner of engaging in such conduct, or
2. the agent was unfit and the principal or a managerial agent was reckless in employing or retaining him, or



3. the agent was employed in a managerial capacity and was acting in the scope of employment, or
4. the principal or a managerial agent of the principal ratified or approved the act.

Ramada Inns, Inc. v. Dow Jones & Co., Inc., No. 83C-AU-56, 1988 Del. Super. (LexisNexis 29), at *4 (citing 4 Restatement (Second) of Torts, § 909 (1979)).

Environmental Liability. There is no law in Delaware specifically allowing or denying punitive damages in the case of environmental liability. However, 7 Del. C. § 6309(b) imposes civil penalties with regard to hazardous waste disposal. *Wilson v. Chem-Solv, Inc.*, 1988 Del. Super. (LexisNexis 372).

Housing. Under 6 Del. C. § 4613, if a discriminatory housing practice is found to have occurred, the aggrieved person may be awarded punitive damages.

Insurer's Bad Faith. Punitive damages may be available if, for example, a delay in payment or the denial of coverage was willful or malicious. *Pierce v. Int'l Ins. Co. of Ill.*, 671 A.2d 1361 (Del. 1996).

Under Del. Super. Ct. R. Civ. 12, where there were no plausible circumstances under which it could be proven that an insurer withheld benefits without any reasonable justification, the plaintiffs' punitive damages claims were dismissed. *Kraus v. State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co.*, 2004 Del. Super. (LexisNexis 127).

A cause of action for bad faith delay, or the nonpayment of an insured's claim in a first-party insured-insurer relationship, is cognizable under Delaware law as a breach of contractual obligations. Punitive damages may be recoverable for an intentional or malicious breach of a contract of insurance. *Tackett v. State Farm Fire & Cas. Ins. Co.*, 653 A.2d 254, 256 (Del. 1995).

Product Liability. In the product liability context, imposition of punitive damage claims is limited to the persistent distribution of an inherently dangerous product with knowledge of its injury-causing effect among the consuming public. Punitive damages are imposed only after a close examination of whether the defendant's conduct is outrageous because of evil motive or reckless indifference to the rights of others. Inadvertence, mistakes or errors of judgment that constitute mere negligence will not suffice. *Greenlee v. Imperial Homes Corp.*, 1994 Del. Super. (LexisNexis 386).

Professional Liability. There is no outright bar against awarding punitive damages on an attorney malpractice action. *Lillquist v. Rodriguez*, 1995 Del. Super. (LexisNexis 553). While ordinary negligence will not suffice to support an award of punitive damages, intentional or willful conduct with reckless disregard for the interests of a client may subject an attorney to the imposition of punitive damages. *Cummings v. Pinder*, 574 A.2d 843 (Del. 1990). In any action for medical negligence, punitive damages may be awarded only if it is found that the injury complained of was maliciously intended or was the result of willful or wanton misconduct by the health care provider. 18 Del. C. § 6855 (2005).

Property. Under 25 Del. C. § 1501, addressing the liability of owners or occupiers of land for injury to guests or trespassers, punitive damages may be warranted against a mall lessee who took no security precautions in the face of numerous crimes on mall property, which resulted in the rape and murder of a mall employee. *Craig v. A.A.R. Realty Corp.*, 576 A.2d 688 (Del. Super. Ct. 1989); *but see Jardel Co.*, 523 A.2d 518, *supra*, where the court stated that while mercantile landlords should be encouraged to provide safe premises for their customers and employees, they should not be punished for mere inadequacy, as a lesson to other landlords.

Uninsured/Underinsured Motorists. 18 Del. C. § 3902 does not preclude an insurer from agreeing to provide coverage to its insured for any punitive damages that might be assessed against an uninsured motorist involved in an accident with its insured. Absent explicit policy wording clearly excluding or not extending coverage for punitive damages, Delaware courts generally hold that liability coverage includes punitive damages. *Jones v. State Farm Auto. Ins. Co.*, 610 A.2d 1352, 1354 (Del 1992).



The General Assembly has formulated no policy forbidding insurance coverage of punitive damages. In declaring its intent to protect the public in its possible claims against a tortfeasor, the General Assembly did not limit automobile liability insurance to compensatory damages. *Valley Forge Ins. Co. v. Jefferson*, 628 F. Supp. 502, 508 (Del. 1986).

Wrongful Death. Where death is simultaneous with an accident, damages based upon pain and suffering that decedent experiences prior to death and punitive damages are not recoverable. *Benson v. Lynch*, 404 F. Supp. 8 (Del. 1975). Punitive damages are not allowed under the wrongful death statute, but are available under the survival action statutes for the pain and suffering incurred by the deceased prior to death, and such damages could be awarded against defendants where the evidence was sufficient to find a reckless indifference to the risk their actions posed. However, such damages would not be awarded against a defendant who had taken necessary and reasonable precautions against the injury suffered by the deceased. *Sterner v. Wesley College, Inc.*, 747 F. Supp. 263 (Del. 1990); see also 10 Del. C. § 3701.

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes. Delaware law permits insurance for punitive damages awards to the benefit of the wrongdoer. *Whalen v. On Deck Inc.*, 514 A.2d 1072 (Del. 1986).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

The trial court has the duty to ensure that punitive damages have the required factual showing of recklessness and that any award of punitive damages be proportionate to the award of compensatory damages. *Gannett Co. v. Kanaga*, 750 A.2d 1174 (Del. 1998).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Courts reviewing punitive damages must ensure that the measure of punishment is both reasonable and proportionate to the amount of harm to the plaintiff and to the general damages recovered. *State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co. v. Campbell*, 538 U.S. 408 (2003).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

An injured plaintiff may recover punitive damages. *Jardel Co., Inc.*, 523 A.2d 518, *supra*. Punitive damages are recoverable by the administrator of a decedent's estate, where the conduct of the defendant was wanton, because the purpose of the award is to punish the tortfeasor. *Reynolds v. Willis*, 209 A.2d 760 (Del. 1965).



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. See Standardized Civil Jury Instructions for the District of Columbia at 16.01-16.03 (2023); *King v. Kirlin Enters., Inc.*, 626 A.2d 882 (D.C. Cir. 1993).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Under District of Columbia law, punitive damages are warranted only when the defendant commits a tortious act accompanied with fraud, ill will, recklessness, wantonness, oppressiveness, willful disregard of the plaintiff's right, or other circumstances tending to aggravate the injury. *Pitt v. D.C.*, 377 U.S. App. D.C. 103 (D.C. Cir. 2007) (citations and quotations omitted). Punitive damages are justified where defendant "commits a tortious act accompanied by fraud, ill will, recklessness, wantonness, oppressiveness, willful disregard of plaintiff's rights or other circumstances tending to aggravate the injury. Whether punitive damages will lie depends on the intent with which the wrong was done..." *Wash. Med. Ctr. v. Holle*, 573 A.2d 1269 (D.C. 1990); see also *Dalo v. Kivitz*, 596 A.2d 35 (D.C. 1991).

Standard of Proof. In order to sustain an award of punitive damages, the plaintiff must prove by a preponderance of the evidence that the defendant committed a tortious act, and by clear and convincing evidence that the act was accompanied by conduct and a state of mind evincing malice or its equivalent. *Jonathan Woodner Co. v. Breeden*, 665 A.2d 929, 938 (D.C. 1995). Punitive damages may be awarded "only if it is shown by clear and convincing evidence that the tort committed by the defendant was aggravated by egregious conduct and a state of mind that justifies punitive damages." *Oliver v. Mustafa*, 929 A.2d 873 (D.C. 2007) (citations and quotations omitted). In order to impose punitive damages, the jury must find by clear and convincing evidence that the tortious act was accompanied by conduct and a state of mind evincing malice or its equivalent, *i.e.*, that the defendant acted with evil motive, actual malice, deliberate violence or oppression, or with intent to injure, or in willful disregard for the rights of the plaintiff; and 2) that the defendant's conduct itself was outrageous, grossly fraudulent, or reckless toward the safety of the plaintiff. See *Croley v. Republican Nat'l Comm.*, 759 A.2d 682, 695 (D.C. 2000); *Pitt v. D.C.*, 491 F.3d 494 (D.C. Cir. 2007) (citations omitted). The jury may infer the requisite state of mind from the surrounding circumstances. *Id.* Note: this standard is less strict than Maryland's, for example, which requires actual malice.

Actions Against District. Punitive damages may not be awarded in contract disputes against the District of Columbia. . D.C. Code § 2-359.05 (Westlaw 2016); See also *Smith v. District of Columbia*, 336 A.2d 831 (D.C. 1975)

Breach of Contract. Punitive damages are not awarded for mere breach of contract, regardless of motives or conduct of breaching party. *Walch v. Ford Motor Co.*, 627 F. Supp. 1519 (D.D.C 1986). Punitive damages may be awarded when conduct constituting breach of contract amounts to an independent tort or is accompanied by fraudulent conduct. *Wash. v. Gov't Employees Ins. Co.*, 769 F. Supp. 383 (D.D.C. 1991).

Although punitive damages generally are not recoverable for breach of contract, this rule is inapplicable if an independent fiduciary relationship exists between the parties. *Wagman v. Lee*, 457 A.2d 401 (D.C. 1983), *cert. denied*, 464 U.S. 849 (1983). Punitive damages are not usually available for breach of contract, even if the breach was willful, wanton or malicious. The only exception to this rule arises where the alleged breach of contract merges with and assumes the character of a willful tort. *Bernstein v. Fernandez*, 649 A.2d 1064, 1073 (D.C. 1991) (citation and quotation omitted)]. A "willful tort" is one that is "calculated rather than inadvertent, flagrant and in disregard of obligations of trust". *Bernstein v. Fernandez*, 649 A.2d 1064, 1074 n.12 (D.C. 1991), citing and quoting *Brown v. Coates*, 253 F.2d 36, 39, 102 U.S. App. D.C. 300 (1958); see *Bedell v. Inver Housing, Inc.*, 506 A.2d 202, 206 (D.C. 1986) (landlord-tenant case holding that punitive damages do not lie for breach of contract except where breach merges with and assumes the character of a willful tort); *cf. Bay Gen. Industries v. Johnson*, 418 A.2d 1050, 1057-1058 (D.C. 1980) (punitive damages available where proof of intent to defraud or other extreme circumstances).



Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under District of Columbia law, an employer cannot be held liable for exemplary or punitive damages merely by reason of wanton, oppressive or malicious intent on the part of an employee. D.C. Std. Civ. Jury Instr. No. 16-2; *Aetna Life Ins. Co. v. Brewer*, 12 F.2d 818, 821 (D.C. Cir. 1926). An employer will not be held liable for exemplary damages for the act of an employee unless it is proven that: (i) the employer authorized or approved the act for which the exemplary damages are claimed, or (ii) the employer approved of or participated in the wrong of which the employee was guilty, or (iii) the employer did not exercise proper care in selecting the employee. *Id.*

Environmental Liability. Punitive damages are awarded where statutorily allowed, e.g., pursuant to the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. See *Chem. Waste Mgmt., Inc. v. U.S.E.P.A.*, 649 F. Supp. 347 (D.D.C. 1986). In interpreting the Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Act, punitive damages were held not consistent with statutory provision. *State of Ohio v. U.S. Dept. of Interior*, 880 F.2d 432 (D.D.C. 1989). See also D.C. Code Title 8, Environmental and Animal Control and Protection at § 8-1446 (authorizing award of punitive damages for release of hazardous materials in transit if plaintiff's injuries were caused by the defendant's wanton or reckless disregard for public safety) and numerous sections authorizing penalties.

Insurer's Bad Faith. D.C. courts have not recognized a separate tort of bad faith by insurance companies in the handling of policy claims. See *Fireman's Fund Ins. Co. v. CTIA- The Wireless Ass'n*, 480 F. Supp. 2d 7 (D.D.C. 2007). An insured may not request punitive damages for its traditional breach of contract claims. *Id. In dicta*, the court in *Fireman's* also indicates that it "is not convinced that in the District of Columbia the duty to defend gives rise to a fiduciary duty between the insurer and insured such that punitive damages may be awarded for its breach," although the court acknowledges that there is some support in District of Columbia law for the notion that punitive damages can be awarded for a breach of a fiduciary duty. *Id.* (citing *Wagman v. Lee*, 457 A.2d 401, 404 (D.C. 1983)).

However, in addition to breach of contract claims, there may be other claims relating to insurance contracts, such as fraud and negligent misrepresentation. *Eres v. Progressive Am. Ins. Co.*, 998 F.3d 1273.

Product Liability. Punitive damages may be awarded if the plaintiff can prove that the defendant's conduct supports the claim, and the conduct is clearly established. See *Nakajima v. Gen. Motors Corp.*, 857 F. Supp. 100 (D.D.C. 1994).

Professional Liability. Punitive damages may be awarded in cases for legal malpractice so long as the award is not excessive. *Breezevale Ltd. v. Dickinson*, 879 A.2d 957, 969 (D.C. 2005). Recovery of punitive damages requires a showing of willful misconduct or malice. *Dalo v. Kivitz*, 596 A.2d 35 (D.C. 1991).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

The District of Columbia remains undecided on the insurability of punitive damages. Although it is clear that under District of Columbia law, contract provisions may be invalidated when they are contrary to public opinion, there is no District of Columbia precedent specifically declaring that indemnification of punitive damages awards is contrary to public policy. See *Salus v. Cont'l Cas. Co.*, 478 A.2d 1067, 1070 (D.C. 1984) (suggesting, but not holding, that indemnification of punitive damages may be contrary to public policy).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

The District of Columbia is undecided on this issue. See Section II. A. above.



C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

The purpose of compensatory damages is to place the injured party in the same (or substantially similar) position monetarily as if the injury had not occurred. Punitive damages are damages above and beyond the amount of compensatory [or nominal] damages a jury may award. Punitive damages are awarded to punish the defendant for his or her conduct and to serve as an example to prevent others from acting in a similar way. 1 Civil Jury Instructions for DC § 16.01 (2023).

However, an award of punitive damages cannot stand alone, unaccompanied by compensatory damages. *Bernstein v. Fernandez*, 649 A.2d 1064, 1066 (D.C. 1991). Before punitive damages may be awarded, there must be a basis in the record for an award of actual damages, even if nominal. *Maxwell v. Gallagher*, 709 A.2d 100 (D.C. 1998). A plaintiff, however, need not prove anything more than nominal actual damages to justify the imposition of punitive damages. *Robinson v. Sarisky*, 535 A.2d 901 (D.C. 1988).

A judge must always be prepared to adjust an award of punitive damages that is clearly excessive in light of all circumstances, including the financial situation of the defendant. *Quinn v. DiGuilian*, 739 F.2d 637 (D.C. Cir. 1984). The defendant has the burden of producing evidence of his own financial condition. See *Hutchinson v. Stuckey*, 952 F.2d 1418 (D.C. Cir. 1992).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

No, however, the court has discretion to grant remittitur when the verdict is so large that it is beyond all reason, or so great as to shock conscience; however, in such a case, the verdict must be so inordinately large as obviously to exceed the maximum limit of the reasonable range within which the jury may properly operate. See *Daka, Inc. v. Breiner*, 711 A.2d 86 (D.C. 1998). Where there is no express statutory limit of punitive damages, punitive damages cannot be of a magnitude to constitute a deprivation of property without due process. See *Browning-Ferris Indus. of Vt., Inc. v. Kelco Disposal Inc.*, 492 U.S. 257 (1989).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Generally, punitive damages are payable to the plaintiff.



FLORIDA

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. A plaintiff's right to claim punitive damages is subject to the plenary authority of the legislature. *Alamo Rent-A-Car v. Mancusi*, 632 So. 2d 1352 (Fla. 1994). The statutes governing punitive damages awards were amended, with an effective date of October 1, 1999, unless otherwise expressly provided. See 1999 Fla. Laws ch. 99-225, amending FLA. STAT. ANN. §§ 768.72, 768.725, 768.73, 768.735, 768.736 and 768.737.

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. A defendant in any civil action may be held liable for punitive damages only if the trier of fact, based on clear and convincing evidence, finds that the defendant was personally guilty of intentional misconduct or gross negligence. FLA. STAT. ANN. § 768.72(2) (LexisNexis 2010). Intentional misconduct is defined as having "actual knowledge of the wrongfulness of the conduct and the high probability that injury or damage...would result and, despite that knowledge, intentionally pursued that course of conduct, resulting in injury or damage." *Id.* Gross negligence is defined as conduct that is "so reckless or wanting in care that it constituted a conscious disregard or indifference to the life, safety, or rights of persons exposed to such conduct." *Id.*

Punitive damages may be awarded when the acts complained of have been committed with malice, moral turpitude, wantonness, willfulness, outrageous aggravation or with a reckless indifference for the rights of others. See, e.g., *W.R. Grace & Co. v. Waters*, 638 So. 2d 502 (Fla. 1994); see also *Alamo Rent-A-Car*, 632 So. 2d 1352. Something more than gross negligence is needed to justify the imposition of punitive damages. *White Constr. Co. v. Dupont*, 455 So. 2d 1026 (Fla. 1984) receded from on other grounds by *Murphy v. Int'l Robotic Sys. Inc.*, 766 So. 2d 1010 (Fla. 2000); *S & S Toyota, Inc. v. Kirby*, 649 So. 2d 916 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1995).

Punitive damages may be awarded in an action against property owners in a personal injury claim. See, e.g., *Southstar Equity, LLC v. Chau*, 998 So. 2d 625 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 2008). In *Southstar Equity*, the court found evidence was sufficient to establish either gross negligence or intentional misconduct so as to support an award for punitive damages where a tenant was told, based on management policy, that there was no crime problem at the apartment complex and was later carjacked in the complex parking lot and shot. *Id.* In order to award punitive damages based on gross negligence, "it must be shown that the defendant's conduct was so reckless or wanting in care that it constituted a conscious disregard or indifference to the life, safety, or rights of persons exposed to such conduct." *Id.* at 632. *Internal quotations omitted.*

Standard of Proof. Clear and convincing evidence is required to sustain an award of punitive damages. Fla. Stat. Ann. § 768.725 (LexisNexis 2010).

Appellate Issues. First, leave of court is required in order to allege punitive damages in a complaint. A party must first provide reasonable evidentiary support for punitive damages. See Fla. R. Civ. P. 1.190(f) ("The motion to amend can be filed separately and before the supporting evidence or proffer, but each shall be served on all parties at least 20 days before the hearing.").

As of April 1, 2022, Florida Rule of Appellate Procedure 9.130 allows for an immediate interlocutory appeal on non-final orders granting or denying a motion for leave to amend to assert a claim for punitive damages. This will allow a party to appeal before discovery can be conducted into the defendant's financial information.

Prior Punitive Damages Award. Effective October 1, 1999, punitive damages may not be awarded against a defendant in a civil action if that defendant establishes, before trial, that punitive damages have previously been awarded against that defendant in any state or federal court in any action alleging harm from the same act or single course of conduct for which the claimant seeks compensatory damages. If the court determines, however, by clear and convincing evidence, that the amount of prior punitive damages was insufficient to punish that defendant, the court may permit the jury to consider an award of subsequent punitive damages. See FLA. STAT. ANN. §§ 768.73(2)(A) and (B).



In *Owens-Corning Fiberglass Corp. v. Ballard*, 749 So.2d 483 (Fla. 1999), the Supreme Court of Florida affirmed a punitive damages award of \$31 million, almost 18 times the amount of compensatory damages awarded, against a manufacturer of an asbestos-containing product. The court acknowledged that under the amended version of FLA. STAT. ANN., § 768.73, effective October 1999, the punitive damages award likely would not be affirmed.

Actions Against State. Punitive damages are not permitted against the state and its agencies. Fla. Stat. Ann. § 768.28(5).

Breach of Contract. Punitive damages may be recovered in breach of contract actions only where the act constituting the breach would also give rise to an independent cause of action sounding in tort. *Ferguson Transp., Inc. v. N. Am. Van Lines, Inc.*, 687 So. 2d 821 (Fla. 1997); see also *In re St. Laurent*, 991 F.2d 672 (Eleventh Cir. 1993) citing *Lewis v. Guthartz*, 428 So. 2d 222 (Fla. 1982).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. In order to support a claim of vicarious liability against an employer for punitive damages under Florida law, the plaintiff must (a) establish that the conduct of the employee was willful and wanton and (b) establish some fault on the part of the employer. *Schropp v. Crown Eurocars*, 654 So. 2d 1158, 1160 (Fla. 1995). It is not necessary for the plaintiff to establish that the employer acted with the same heightened culpability as the employee. It is sufficient if the plaintiff establishes that the employer knowingly participated in, condoned, ratified or consented to the conduct or engaged in conduct constituting gross negligence that contributed to the loss, damages or injury. Florida Statutes Ann. §768.72.

Insurer's Bad Faith. Pursuant to Florida Statutes, punitive damages may be awarded against an insurer where "the acts giving rise to the violation occur with such frequency as to indicate a general business practice and these acts are: (a) willful, wanton, and malicious; (b) in reckless disregard for the rights of any insured; or (c) in reckless disregard for the rights of a beneficiary under a life insurance contract." FLA. STAT. ANN. § 624.155 (LexisNexis 2010); see, e.g., *Scott v. Progressive Express Ins. Co.*, 932 So. 2d 475 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 2006).

Product Liability. Punitive damages are available in product liability cases. In *Owens-Corning Fiberglass Corp. v. Rivera*, 683 So. 2d 154 (Fla. 3d DCA 1996), the Third District Court of Appeals affirmed a \$1.5 million punitive damages award against a manufacturer of an asbestos-containing product, holding that the punitive damages award did not violate the due process clause.

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

No. The Supreme Court of Florida has found that public policy precluded coverage for directly assessed punitive damages. *U.S. Concrete Pipe Co. v. Bould*, 437 So. 2d 1061 (Fla. 1983). The court also held that Florida public policy did not preclude coverage for punitive damages awarded in cases when the insured is vicariously liability for another's wrong. *Id.*; see also *Morgan Int'l Realty, Inc. v. Dade Underwriters Ins. Agency, Inc.*, 617 So. 2d 455 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1993); *Aromin v. State Farm Fire & Cas. Ins. Co.*, 908 F.2d 812 (Eleventh Cir. 1990); [Herendeen v. Mandelbaum](#), 232 So.3d 487 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 2017) («Florida law does not allow indemnification against punitive damages.»); *U.S. Concrete Pipe Company v. Bould*, 437 So. 2d 1061 (Fla. 1983).

A principal has to be grossly negligent is not merely negligent to be vicariously liable for punitive damages but that act is not insurable in Florida. See *Ranger Constr. Indus. v. Allied World Nat'l Assurance Co.*, 2019 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 220478, (S.D. Fla. Dec. 20, 2019) ("[W]hen the legislature enacted [Florida Statute § 768.72](#), it did not intend to change 50 years of Florida public policy regarding the uninsurability of punitive damages without making any indication that it was doing so.").

B. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

A compensatory damages award need not underlie a punitive damages award in a case in which the jury has made express findings against the defendant. A jury finding of liability is equivalent to a finding of nominal damages. *Ault v. Lohn*, 538 So. 2d 454 (Fla. 1989); *Ad-Vantage Tel. Directory Consultants, Inc. v. GTE Directories Corp.*, 943 F.2d 1511 (Eleventh Cir. 1991); *Platte v. Whitney Realty Co.*, 538 So. 2d 1358 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1989).



C. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Yes. In any civil action based on negligence, strict liability, product liability, misconduct in commercial transactions, professional liability, or breach of warranty, and involving willful, wanton or gross misconduct, the judgment for the total amount of punitive damages awarded to a claimant may not exceed three times the amount of compensatory damages or \$500,000, whichever is higher. FLA. STAT. ANN. § 768.73(1)(a)-(b) (LexisNexis 2010).

The statute provides only two exceptions. First, where the trier of fact finds that the wrongful conduct was motivated solely by unreasonable financial gain and determines that the unreasonably dangerous nature of the conduct, together with the high likelihood of injury resulting from the conduct, were actually known by the defendant, the judgment for the total amount of punitive damages awarded to a claimant may not exceed four times the amount of compensatory damages or \$2 million, whichever is higher. *Id.* Second, if the fact finder determines that at the time of the injury the defendant had a specific intent to harm the claimant, and the defendant's conduct did in fact harm the claimant, there shall be no cap on punitive damages. *Id.*

The court may not exclude one of the elements of the compensatory damages award when reviewing the amount of a punitive damages award. *Christenson & Assocs. v. Palumbo-Tucker*, 656 So. 2d 266 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1995) (noting prejudgment interest is an element of compensatory damages).

While a punitive damages award should provide some retribution and deterrence, it should not be in an amount that will financially destroy or bankrupt the defendant. *Arab Termite & Pest Control, Inc. v. Jenkins*, 409 So. 2d 1039 (Fla. 1982); see also *Brooks v. Rios*, 707 So. 2d 374 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1998).

D. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Generally, punitive damages are payable only to the plaintiff directly injured as a result of the misconduct giving rise to the entitlement to the award. A spouse of the injured plaintiff is not entitled to punitive damages under a derivative claim against the tortfeasor(s). See *Martin v. Story*, 97 So. 2d 343 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1957); *Moran v. Stephens*, 265 So. 2d 379 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1972).



GEORGIA

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. Ga. Code Ann. §51-12-5.1(c) (2010). Under Georgia law, damages are awardable solely to punish, penalize or deter the defendant; however, something more than mere commission of a tort is always required for punitive damages, and there must be circumstances of aggravated conduct or outrage, such as spite and malice, or fraudulent or evil motive on the part of the defendant, or such conscious and deliberate disregard of the interests of others that the conduct may be called willful or wanton. *Banks v. ICI Ams.* 469 S.E. 2d 171, 175 (Ga. 1996).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Punitive damages may be awarded where the defendant's actions showed willful misconduct, malice, fraud, wantonness, oppression or that entire want of care that would raise the presumption of conscious indifference to consequences. Ga. Code Ann. §51-12-5.1(b) (2010); *Banks*, 469 S.E.2d at 175 (where there are aggravated circumstances in the tort, including malice, willfulness, wantonness or conscious indifference to the consequences of conduct, punitive damages may be awarded); *Fickling & Walker Co. v. Giddens Constr. Co.*, 376 S.E.2d 655, 659 (Ga. 1989).

An award of punitive damages must be specifically prayed for in the complaint. Ga. Code Ann. §51-12-5.1(d)(1).

Standard of Proof. Clear and convincing evidence is required to sustain a punitive damages award. Ga. Code Ann. § 51-12-5.1(b); *Banks*, 469 S.E.2d 171, *supra*; *Mack Trucks, Inc. v. Conkle*, 436 S.E.2d 635 (Ga. 1993).

Actions Against State. Punitive or exemplary damages may not be awarded against the state. Ga. Code Ann. § 50-21-30.

Breach of Contract. Punitive damages may not be awarded in a breach of contract action. Ga. Code Ann. §§ 13-6-10, 51-12-5.1 (2010); *Trust Co. Bank v. Citizens & S. Trust Co.*, 390 S.E.2d 589, 592 (Ga. 1990).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under Georgia law, employers may be vicariously liable for punitive damages arising from the acts or omissions of their employees if the employee's tortious conduct is committed in the course of the employer's business, within the scope of the employee's employment, and is sufficiently wrongful to support recovery of punitive damages under Ga. Code Ann. § 51-12-5.1. *May v. Crane Bros.*, 576 S.E.2d 286, 287 n.3 (Ga. 2003).

Environmental Liability. Punitive damages may be awarded. "To authorize the imposition of punitive or exemplary damages there must be evidence of willful misconduct, malice, fraud, wantonness, or oppression, or that entire want of care which would raise the presumption of a conscious indifference to consequences." *Bracewell v. King*, 250 S.E.2d 25, 27 (Ga. Ct. App. 1978) (quoting *S. R. Co. v. O'Bryan*, 45 S.E. 1000 (Ga. 1903)).

General Liability. In automobile collision cases, punitive damages are not recoverable where the driver at fault simply violated a rule of the road. *Doctoroff v. Perez*, 615 S.E.2d 623, 624 (Ga. Ct. App. 2005). Instead, the defendant's violation must have been the proximate cause of the accident or part of a pattern or policy of dangerous driving. *Id.* (citing *Brooks v. Gray*, 585 S.E.2d 188 (Ga. Ct. App. 2003)).

The Georgia Supreme Court recently ruled that punitive damages can be awarded to the party that negligently entrusted a vehicle to a drunk driver causing injury to an innocent motorist. *Reid v. Morris*, 309 Ga. 230, 845 S.E.2d 590 (Ga. 2020).



Insurer's Bad Faith. An insurance company may be liable for damages to its insured for failing to settle the claim of an injured person where the insurer is guilty of negligence, fraud or bad faith in failing to compromise the claim. *S. Gen. Ins. Co. v. Holt*, 416 S.E.2d 274, 276 (Ga. Ct. App. 1992) (automobile insurer's failure to settle within the time limit set by injured party's counsel constituted negligence and bad faith so as to sustain an award of punitive damages).

Product Liability. In a tort action where a cause of action arises from product liability, there shall be no limitation regarding the amount that may be awarded as punitive damages. Ga. Code Ann. § 51-12-5.1(e)(1). Only one award of punitive damages may be recovered in a court in this state from a defendant for any act or omission if the cause of action arises from product liability, regardless of the number of causes of action that may arise from such act or omission. § 51-12-5.1(e)(1); *Gen. Motors Corp., v. Moseley*, 447 S.E.2d 302, 312 (Ga. Ct. App. 1994) (where a jury awarded \$4.2 million in compensatory damages and \$101 million in punitive damages for the death of 17-year-old Moseley when Moseley's GM pickup truck burst into flames as a result of an alleged design defect in the fuel tank), abrogated on other grounds by *Webster v. Boyett*, 496 S.E.2d 459 (Ga. 1998).

Professional Liability. An attorney's concealment and misrepresentation of matters affecting his client's case will give rise to a claim for punitive damages. *Houston v. Surret*, 474 S.E.2d 39, 41 (Ga. Ct. App. 1996).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes. The Legislature's expressed policy in favor of coverage for any legal liability is broad enough to include punitive damages. *Greenwood Cemetery, Inc. v. Travelers Indem. Co.*, 232 S.E.2d 910, 913 (Ga. 1977); *Lunceford v. Peachtree Cas. Ins. Co.*, 495 S.E.2d 88, 91 (Ga. Ct. App. 1997) (the public policy against insuring for injuries intentionally inflicted was not violated when an automobile liability insurance contract covered the liability of the insured arising out of willful and wanton misconduct). *In re Wright Medical Technology, Inc.*, 2015 Slip Copy 2015 WL 6690046, United States District Court, N.D. Georgia, Atlanta Division (insurance coverage for punitive damages does not violate Georgia public policy).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Punitive damages may be recovered only when there is entitlement to compensatory damages. *S. Gen. Ins. Co.*, 416 S.E.2d at 276. While there is no fixed rule regarding the proportional relationship between the amounts of punitive and actual damages awards, the court may always consider the collective conscience of the jury when reviewing an award. *Hosp. Auth. of Gwinnett County v. Jones*, 386 S.E.2d 120 (Ga. 1989); *vacated and remanded*, 499 U.S. 914 (1991); *affirmed on remand*, 409 S.E.2d 501 (Ga. 1991).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

In the absence of evidence of specific intent, the amount that may be awarded in a case shall be limited to a maximum of \$250,000. Ga. Code Ann. § 51-12-5.1(g) (2010); *J.B. Hunt Transp. v. Bentley*, 427 S.E.2d 499 (Ga. Ct. App. 1992), *cert. denied*, 1993 Ga. (LexisNexis 421) (1993) (where the court found that there was no evidence that the driver in a car accident acted with specific intent to cause harm and therefore there was no basis to award more than \$250,000 in punitive damages on the claims). Where there is specific intent to cause harm or if the injury was caused while under the influence of drugs or alcohol there are no caps on punitive damages. Ga. Code Ann. § 51-12-5.1; *Bo Phillips Co., Inc. v. R.L. King Properties, LLC*, Court of Appeals of Georgia, March 23, 2016—S.E.2d – 2016 WL 1126517.



The statutory cap is inapplicable to product liability actions, although punitive damages in such cases are limited, as only one award of punitive damages may be assessed against a defendant for acts or omissions sounding in products liability, regardless of the number of causes of action. Ga. Code Ann. §51-12-5.1(e)(1)&(2). *Mack Trucks, Inc. v. Conkle*, 436 S.E.2d 635, 638 (Ga. 1993).

The Georgia Supreme Court ruled this year that the \$250,000 cap in punitive damages is constitutional and did not infringe on the right to a fair trial by jury, separation of powers, or the guarantee of equal protection. [Taylor v. Devereux Found., Inc.](#), Nos. S22A1060, S22X1061, 2023 Ga. LEXIS 63 (Mar. 15, 2023) (Upholding the trial court's decision to substantially reduce a \$50 million verdict to \$250,000).

To whom are punitive damages payable?

Ga. Code Ann. § 51-12-5.1(e)(2) requires 75 percent of amounts awarded as punitive damages to be paid to the state treasury. Although this is the largest contributory provision in the country, it has been upheld as not in violation of the constitutional takings clause, and not a revenue-raising measure in contravention of the Georgia Constitution. *State v. Moseley*, 463 S.E.2d 632, 633 (Ga. 1993). A jury instruction that 75 percent of a punitive damages award would go to the state treasury has been held to be improper. *Ford v. Uniroyal Goodrich Tire Co.*, 476 S.E.2d 565, 566 (Ga. 1996). This amount is less a proportionate part of the costs of litigation and reasonable attorney's fees as determined by the trial court. Ga. Code Ann. §51-12-5.1(e)(2).

With regard to the remaining 25 percent, punitive damages are generally payable to the plaintiff directly injured as a result of the misconduct giving rise to the entitlement to the award. No statutory authority or case law addresses whether a spouse of the injured plaintiff is entitled to punitive damages under a derivative claim against the tortfeasor(s).



HAWAII

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. Where clear and convincing evidence exists, Hawaii permits an award of punitive damages when “there has been some willful misconduct or that entire want of care which would raise the presumption of a conscious indifference to consequences.” *Ditto v. McCurdy*, 947 P.2d 952, 960 (Haw. 1997) (quotations omitted). The plaintiff’s right to punitive damages award is derived from common law authority.

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Punitive damages may be awarded only in cases where the wrongdoer has acted wantonly or oppressively with such malice as implies a spirit of mischief or criminal indifference to civil obligations. *Kang v. Harrington*, 587 P.2d 285, 291 (Haw. 1978); *Masaki v. Gen. Motors Corp.*, 780 P.2d 566, 573 (Haw. 1989).

Standard of Proof. A plaintiff must show by clear and convincing evidence that the defendant’s behavior meets the standard of conduct stated above. *AMFAC, Inc. v. Waikiki Beachcomber Inv. Co.*, 839 P.2d 10, 37 (Haw. 1992).

Actions Against State. Punitive damages are not permitted in actions against the state. Haw. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 662-2 (2015).

Breach of Contract. In order to recover punitive damages based on breach of contract, one must show that the contract was breached in such a willful, wanton and reckless manner as to result in tortious injury. *Ross v. Stouffer Hotel Co.*, 879 P.2d 1037, 1049 (Haw. 1994); *AMFAC, supra* (stating that there must be requisite evidence that the defendant “wantonly, oppressively, maliciously, or willfully breached” the agreement).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Federal courts interpreting Hawaii law have found that: “The law in Hawaii regarding a corporation’s liability for punitive damages appears well-settled. Punitive damages may be recovered against a corporate defendant only if the corporation expressly or impliedly authorized or ratified the tortious act of its agent.” *Jenkins v. Whittaker Corp.*, 551 F. Supp. 110, 112 (D. Haw. 1982) (citing *Baldwin v. Hilo Tribune-Herald, Ltd.*, 32 Haw. 87, 106–09 (1931) and *Chin Kee v. Kaeleku Sugar Co., Ltd.*, 29 Haw. 524, 537 (1926) in support). “Furthermore, any such authorization or ratification must come from officers or any other person actually wielding the executive power of the corporation.” *Jenkins*, 551 F. Supp. at 112 (quotations omitted); see also *Man v. Raymark Industries*, 728 F. Supp. 1461, 1470 (D. Haw. 1989) (holding that public policy favors the imposition of punitive damages on successor corporations).

Environmental Liability. Punitive damages may be recovered for violations of Hawaii’s Environmental Response Law, where any person who is liable for a release, or threat of a release, of hazardous substances, and who fails, without sufficient cause, to provide removal or remedial action pursuant to an administrative order, may be liable to the department of health for punitive damages up to three times the amount of any costs incurred as a result of the failure to perform the acts specified in the order. Haw. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 128D-8 (2015). Punitive damages shall be in addition to those recovered pursuant to § 128D-5.

Insurer’s Bad Faith. To recover punitive damages, a plaintiff must show more than the commission of the tort of bad faith denial of a claim; a plaintiff must show with clear and convincing evidence that “the defendant has acted wantonly or oppressively or with such malice as implies a spirit of mischief or criminal indifference to civil obligations, or where there has been some willful misconduct or that entire want of care which would raise the presumption of a conscious indifference to consequences.” *Best Place, Inc. v. Penn Am. Ins. Co.*, 920 P.2d 334, 348 (Haw. 1996); see also *Jou v. Nat’l Interstate Ins. Co. of Hawaii*, 157 P.3d 561, 569 (Ct. App. 2007) (holding that an injured employee was an intended beneficiary of his employers’ workers’ compensation insurance contract, and a breach of the implied contractual duty of good faith gives rise to the independent tort cause of action for a third-party beneficiary under the same standards and with the same limitations for punitive damages as discussed in *Best Place*).



Product Liability. In product liability actions, punitive damages may be awarded even in strict liability cases, based on a showing by clear and convincing evidence of the defendant's "aggravated" or "outrageous" conduct. *Masaki*, 71 Haw. at 6.

Professional Liability. Punitive damages may be recovered when a wrongful act is done willfully, wantonly or maliciously or is characterized by some aggravating circumstances. *Howell v. Associated Hotels, Ltd.*, 40 Haw. 492, 495–96 (1954). Creditors may be liable for punitive damages in an amount not to exceed \$10,000, for failure to comply with the Fair Credit Extension statutory provisions. Haw. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 477E-4 (2015). Punitive damages may be recovered in an action for medical malpractice. See generally *Ditto v. McCurdy*, 44 P.3d 274 (Haw. 2002).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes. Haw. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 431:10-240 (2015) provides that any policy of insurance in Hawaii shall not be construed to provide coverage for punitive or exemplary damages unless specifically included. By implication, policies must specifically include coverage for such damages if a policy is to respond to a punitive damages award.

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Punitive damages need not bear any relation to the damages allowed by way of compensation. However, the measure of such damages should be the degree of malice, oppression, or gross negligence that forms the basis for the award, and the amount of money necessary to punish the defendant considering his financial condition. *Howell v. Associated Hotels, Ltd.*, 40 Haw. 492, 501 (Haw. 1954); see also *Kang*, 587 P.2d at 293. "Further, in determining that degree, the analysis is limited to an examination of defendant's state of mind at the time of the act." *Kang*, 587 P.2d at 293. The jury's determination of punitive damages is given deference. *Howell*, 40 Haw. at 501 ("The amount is primarily a question for the jury whose verdict will not be lightly disturbed.").

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Appellate courts will review punitive damages awards to determine "if the award was not palpably supported by the evidence or is so excessive and outrageous when considered with the circumstances of the case as to demonstrate that the jury in assessing damages acted against rules of law or suffered their passions or prejudices to mislead them." *Kang*, 587 P.2d at 292 (quotations omitted).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

There is no statutory authority declaring that the state shall be entitled to a portion of any punitive damages award. The common law fails to specify whether the recipient of a punitive damages award must be the plaintiff alone, or whether a spouse or parent may collect on a punitive damages award. However, under the Fair Credit Extension Act, the aggrieved applicant for punitive damages is entitled to the payment. Haw. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 477E-4 (a). Additionally, suits instituted under the Hawaii Environmental Response Law in which punitive damages are sought are filed by the director of the department of health to recover funds expended by the environmental response revolving fund.



IDAHO

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. See I.C. § 6-1604; *Curtis v. Firth*, 850 P.2d 749, 755–56 (Idaho 1993).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Punitive damages may be awarded when a defendant's conduct is found to be oppressive, fraudulent, malicious or outrageous. *Thurston Enters. v. Safeguard Bus. Sys.*, 164 Idaho 709, 725 (2019) (citing I.C. § 6-1604); cf. *Cummings v. Stephens*, 336 P.3d 281, 296 n.5 (2014) (explaining since the enactment of the punitive damages statute, gross negligence or deliberate or willful conduct is not sufficient for an award of punitive damages any longer).

The decision of whether to instruct the jury on punitive damages is within the discretion of the trial judge. *Payne v. Wallace*, 136 Idaho 303, 308 (2001) (citing *Curtis*, 850 P.2d at 755). In reviewing the trial court's decision to so instruct the jury, the Idaho appellate court must examine the sufficiency of the evidence and determine whether the record contains substantial evidence to support an award of punitive damages. *Curtis*, 850 P.2d at 756. Punitive damages are not favored in the law and should be awarded only in the most unusual and compelling circumstances, and are to be awarded cautiously and within narrow limits. *Payne v. Wallace*, 136 Idaho 303, 307 (Ct. App. 2001).

Standard of Proof. § 6-1604(1) of the Idaho Code requires that a plaintiff claiming punitive damages demonstrate by "clear and convincing evidence" the oppressive, fraudulent, malicious, or outrageous conduct by the party against whom the claim for punitive damages is asserted. The inclusion of a prayer for punitive damages is prohibited in any initial pleading by § 6-1604(2). The court shall allow motion to amend pleadings if after weighing the evidence presented the court concludes the moving party has established a reasonable likelihood of proving facts at trial sufficient to support an award of punitive damages. I.C. § 6-1604(2). No judgment for punitive damages shall exceed the greater of \$250,000 or an amount which is three times the compensatory damages contained in such judgment. I.C. § 6-1604(3). If a case is tried to a jury, the jury shall not be informed of this limitation. *Id.*

Actions Against State. Governmental entities and their employees are not liable for punitive damages under the Idaho Tort Claims Act. I.C. § 6-918. However when a claim is brought pursuant to the Idaho Human Rights Act ("IHRA"), I.C. § 67-5909, "[s]hould the court find 'that unlawful discrimination has occurred,' it may, among other remedies, enter 'an order for punitive damages, not to exceed one thousand dollars (\$ 1,000) for each willful violation.'" *Paterson v. State*, 128 Idaho 494, 499 (1996). The court in *Paterson* held "'the more specific imposition of liability under IHRA controls over the more general immunity contained in § 6-918.'" *Id.* at 502.

Breach of Contract. "It is well established that punitive damages are unavailable in routine, ordinary breach of contract cases, however, this "should not be construed as a blanket prohibition against punitive damages in breach of contract claims.'" *Thurston Enters*, 164 Idaho at 725 (citing *Myers v. Workmen's Auto Ins. Co.*, 140 Idaho 495, 503 (2004)). Numerous situations occur where the breaking of a promise may be an extreme deviation from standards of reasonable conduct, and, when done with knowledge of its likely effects, may be grounds for an award of punitive damages. *Id.* at 505. The issue revolves around whether the plaintiff is able to establish the requisite intersection of two factors: a bad act and a bad state of mind. *Myers*, 140 Idaho at 503.

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. To recover punitive damages against a corporation, one must show that an officer or director participated in, or ratified, the conduct underlying the punitive damage award. *Weinstein v. Prudential Prop. & Cas. Ins. Co.*, 149 Idaho 299, 313 (2010); see also *Openshaw v. Oregon Auto Inc.*, 487 P.2d 929, 932 (Idaho 1971) (a principal cannot be held vicariously liable for punitive damages against an agent unless: (1) the principal's conduct was itself wrongful in relation to the agent's conduct or (2) the principal participated in or authorized or ratified the agent's acts). There is not a need for direct evidence that an officer or director participated in or ratified the wrongful conduct in order to sustain an award of punitive damages against the corporation. *Id.* at 314.



Environmental Liability. In any action for punitive damages, the plaintiff must show by “clear and convincing evidence, oppressive, fraudulent, malicious or outrageous conduct by the party against whom the claim for punitive damages is asserted.” I.C. § 6-1604. There is no statute or case on point stating that punitive damages may not be imposed as a consequence of a party’s environmental liability.

Insurer’s Bad Faith. An insurer may be liable for punitive damages where the company refuses to pay a claim and the company’s refusal is an extreme deviation from reasonable standards of conduct, performed with an understanding of its consequences. *Linscott v. Rainer Nat’l Life Ins. Co.*, 606 P.2d 958, 962 (Idaho 1980); see *Garnett v. Transamerica Ins. Servs.*, 118 Idaho 769 (1990) (upholding punitive damages for first-party insurance bad faith); see also *Myers v. Workmen’s Auto Ins. Co.*, 140 Idaho 495 (2004) (upholding punitive damages for third-party insurance bad faith).

Product Liability. Punitive damages may be awarded in actions for strict liability and negligence. *Sliman v. Aluminum Co. of America*, 731 P.2d 1267, 1270, 1275–76 (Idaho 1986) (holding that the trial court did not abuse its discretion in submitting punitive damages to the jury where there was expert testimony that defendant’s conduct amounted to “an extreme deviation from customary and usual action taken by manufacturers of consumer products”).

Punitive damages may also be awarded in cases of “repeated or flagrant violations” of the Idaho Consumer Protection Act. See I.C. § 48-608(1). This statutory “repeated or flagrant” standard is separate and independent of the common law standards. *Mac Tools, Inc. v. Griffen*, 879 P.2d 1126, 1131 (Idaho 1994) (upholding the punitive damages award where jury awarded plaintiff \$40,000 in compensatory damages and \$500,000 in punitive damages).

When claims are brought pursuant to the Assistive Technology Warranty Act (“ATWA”), I.C. § 48-1407, punitive damages are precluded from being awarded.

Professional Liability. In any action for punitive damages, the plaintiff must show by “clear and convincing evidence, oppressive, fraudulent, malicious or outrageous conduct by the party against whom the claim for punitive damages is asserted.” I.C. § 6-1604. There is no statute or case on point stating that punitive damages may not be imposed as a consequence of a party’s professional liability.

Tort Actions in Child Abuse. Per I.C. § 6-1703, punitive damages are available in child abuse actions for malicious and outrageous conduct.

Wrongful Death. The Idaho Supreme Court held that punitive damages are encompassed by the wrongful death statutory language, which provides that “such damages may be given as under all the circumstances of the case may be just.” I.C. § 5-311(1); see *Gavica v. Hanson*, 101 Idaho 58 (1980) *overruled in part*, *Sterling v. Bloom*, 111 Idaho 211 (1986) (allowing punitive damages for wrongful death).

C. If not, in what circumstances?

Death of a Wrongdoer. Where a cause of action arises out of injury to person or property, or death, caused by a wrongful act or negligence of another, and the wrongdoer subsequently dies, the injured parties may proceed with an action against the personal representative of the wrongdoer, but punitive damages are not available. I.C. § 5-327(1)

Small Claims Department. Pursuant to I.C. § 1-2301, the small claims department of the magistrate division must not award punitive damages.

Agricultural Food Products. Pursuant to I.C. § 6-2003(3), punitive damages are disallowed for actions relating to the disparagement of perishable agricultural food products.

Mortgage Recovery Fund. I.C. § 26-31-112 provides that the mortgage recovery fund is to be used to reimburse persons to whom an Idaho court awards actual damages resulting from acts constituting violations by a mortgage broker, lender or loan originator. Pursuant to I.C. § 26-31-109 precludes the recovery of punitive damages from the mortgage recovery fund.



II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes. Noting the public policy of deterrence and punishment upon which many courts rely in holding punitive damages uninsurable, the Supreme Court of Idaho nevertheless decided that the countervailing policy of affording a fund from which to compensate injured persons sufficiently tipped the balance in favor of coverage. See *Abbie Uriguen Oldsmobile Buick v. U.S. Fire Ins. Co.*, 511 P.2d 783, 789 (Idaho 1973).

B. If not generally, insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable. See II.A. above.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

There must be a reasonable relationship between the amount of compensatory damages awarded and the amount of punitive damages allowed. *Hall v. Farmers Alliance Mut. Ins. Co.*, 179 P.3d 276 (Idaho 2007). The proper inquiry is there is a reasonable relationship between the punitive damages award and the harm likely to result from the defendant's conduct as well as the harm that actually has occurred. *Id.* (citing *BMW of North America v. Gore*, 517 U.S. 559, 581 (1996)).

Further, nominal damages, which also require a showing that a legally protected interest has been invaded, can support a basis for punitive damages. *Myers*, 140 Idaho at 503 (citing *Davis v. Gage*, 106 Idaho 735, (Ct. App. 1984)).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

I.C. § 6-1604(3) provides that "no judgment for punitive damages shall exceed the greater of \$250,000 or an amount which is three times the compensatory damages contained in such judgment. If a case is tried to a jury, the jury shall not be informed of this limitation." I.C. § 6-1604(3).

When a claim is brought pursuant to the IHRA, an order for punitive damages is not to exceed one thousand dollars (\$1,000) for each willful violation under the Act. See I.C. § 67-5908(3)(e).

With regard to civil action brought against a person for intentional violations of statutes protecting disabled persons, pursuant to I.C. § 56-705, "a successful plaintiff shall be awarded punitive damages in an amount equal to all other damages suffered by the plaintiff, but in no event less than five hundred dollars (\$500)."

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Generally, an award of punitive damages is payable to the plaintiff pursuant to § 6-1604.

F. Can punitive damages be apportioned?

In Idaho, the jury may return verdicts for punitive damages separately against each defendant. Joint and several liability does not apply to punitive damages. See *Highland Enters. v. Barker*, 133 Idaho 330 (1999); *Shields v. Martin*, 109 Idaho 132 (1985) (upholding separate punitive damages awards against individual defendants).



ILLINOIS

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. While punitive damages are not generally available for medical malpractice, legal malpractice, intentional infliction of emotional distress, and loss of consortium, they are generally available for other causes of action.

The Illinois Compiled Statutes, specifically Section 5/2-1115 (2008), expressly prohibits punitive damages in medical or legal malpractice cases. See *Loitz v. Remington Arms Co.*, 138 Ill. 2d 404, 150 Ill. Dec. 510, 563 N.E.2d 397 (1990). Section 5/2-1115 provides “Punitive damages not recoverable in healing art and legal malpractice cases. In all cases, whether in tort, contract or otherwise, in which the plaintiff seeks damages by reason of legal, medical, hospital, or other healing art malpractice, no punitive, exemplary, vindictive or aggravated damages shall be allowed.” 735 ILCS 5/2-1115.

Punitive damages are not available for intentional infliction of emotional distress or loss of consortium. See *Frazier v. Harris*, 266 F. Supp. 2d 853 (C.D. Ill. 2003); see also *O’Neill v. Gallant Ins. Co.*, 329 Ill. App. 3d 1166 (5th Dist. 2002); see also *Hammond v. N. Amer. Asbestos Corp.*, 454 N.E.2d 210 (Ill. 1983). Because of their penal nature, punitive damages are disfavored, and courts need to be careful not award them unwisely. *Ainsworth v. Century Supply Co.*, 693 N.E.2d 510, 512 (Ill. App. Ct. 1998). Punitive damages may be awarded where a defendant has committed a tort with actual malice. *Int’l Union of Operating Eng’rs, Local 150 v. Lowe Excavating Co.*, 870 N.E.2d 303 (Ill. 2006).

B. If so, under what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Punitive damages may be awarded when a tort is committed with “fraud, actual malice, deliberate violence or oppression or when the defendant acts willfully or with such gross negligence as to indicate a wanton disregard for the rights of others or for conduct involving some element of outrage similar to that found in a crime.” *Ainsworth v. Century Supply Co.*, 693 N.E.2d 510, 515 (Ill. App. Ct. 1998) quoting *Homewood Fishing Club v. Archer Daniels Midland Co.*, 605 N.E.2d 1140 (Ill. App. Ct. 1992); *Nutmeg Ins. Co. v. E. Lake Mgmt. & Dev. Corp.*, No. 05C1328, 2006 WL 3409156, at *5 (N.D. Ill. Nov. 22, 2006) *aff’d on other grounds*, 260 F. App’x 914 (7th Cir. 2008)

Standard of Proof. While Illinois codified a “clear and convincing evidence” standard of proof for punitive damages as part of its 1995 tort reform efforts, the legislation was deemed unconstitutional by the Illinois Supreme Court. *Best v. Taylor*, 689 N.E. 2d 1057 (Ill. 1997). The clear and convincing evidence standard is therefore not applicable, and a preponderance of the evidence standard applies. *Brdar v. Cottrell, Inc.*, 867 N.E. 2d 1085, 1102 (Ill. App. Ct. 2007); *Midwest Sanitary Serv. v. Sandberg*, 2022 IL 127327. For actions on account of bodily injury or property damage involving non-intentional torts, and for product liability actions based on strict tort liability, a plaintiff must establish “a reasonable likelihood of proving facts at trial sufficient to support an award of punitive damages.” 735 ILCS 5/2-604.1. For all other cases, the usual standard of persuasion that the proposition is “more probably true than not” applies. *Estate of Ragen*, 398 N.E.2d 198 (Ill. App. Ct. 1979) (discussing and comparing degrees of proof).

Actions Against State and Public Officials. Punitive damages are not allowed against a local or public entity. 745 ILCS 10/2-102. Additionally, no public official is liable to pay punitive damages in any action arising out of an act or omission made while serving in an official executive or legislative capacity. *Id.*

Breach of Contract. Illinois does not ordinarily allow punitive damages in breach of contract actions. A plaintiff must prove an independent tort to recover exemplary damages. *Cox v. Doctor’s Associates, Inc.*, 245 Ill. App. 3d 186, 217, 613 N.E.2d 1306, 1327 (1993). An exception to this rule arises when conduct causing the breach amounts to an independent willful tort for which punitive damages are recoverable. *Id.*; see also *Wallace v. Prudential Ins. Co.*, 12 Ill. App. 3d 623, 630 (1973).



Damages for breach will not be given as compensation for mental suffering, except where the breach was wanton or reckless and caused bodily harm, or where the defendant had reason to know, when the contract was made, that its breach would cause mental suffering for reasons other than mere pecuniary loss. Even in cases where plaintiffs have sued builders and contractors over construction defects in their homes, courts have refused to award punitive damages unless the conduct causing the breach is also a tort. The breach must amount to an independent tort and there must be proper allegations of malice, wantonness or oppression. See *Parks v. Wells Fargo Home Mortgage, Inc.*, 398 F.3d 937 (Seventh Cir. 2005).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under Illinois law, punitive damages may be awarded against an employer for the act of an employee if: (a) the employer authorized the doing and the manner of the act, or (b) the employee was unfit and the employer was reckless in employing him, or (c) the employee was employed in a managerial capacity and was acting in the scope of his employment, or (d) the employer or a managerial agent of the employer ratified or approved the act. *Mattyasovszky v. West Towns Bus Co.*, 61 Ill.2d 31 (1975)(citing Restatement (Second) of Agency § 271C (1958)).

Environmental Liability. Punitive damages may be recovered against a person who violates the Illinois Environmental Protection Act. See 415 ILCS 5/1; *People v. NL Indus.*, 604 N.E.2d 349 (Ill. 1992).

Product Liability. Punitive damages may be assessed against the manufacturer of a product injuring the plaintiff if the injury is attributable to conduct that reflects a flagrant indifference to the public safety. *Moore v. Remington Arms Co.*, 427 N.E.2d 608 (Ill. App. Ct. 1981). Punitive damages were awarded against a drug manufacturer when it knew of the adverse effects of a drug and promoted and developed the off- label use of the drug with financial and technical assistance to doctors. The manufacturer then used the doctors' case reports (prepared with the manufacturer's assistance) to promote the drug. *Proctor v. Davis Co.*, 682 N.E.2d 1203, 1216 (Ill. App. Ct. 1997). In a product liability action, "willful and wanton conduct" required for a punitive damages award has been defined as a course of action that shows utter indifference to, or conscious disregard for, the safety of others. *Id.*

Professional Liability. Punitive damages are not recoverable in medical malpractice or legal malpractice cases. 735 ILCS 5/2-1115 (2008); see *Loitz v. Remington Arms Co.*, 138 Ill. 2d 404, 150 Ill. Dec. 510, 563 N.E.2d 397 (1990).

Wrongful Death Actions. As of August 11, 2023, Illinois law has changed dramatically in regard to punitive damages. Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed into law HB 219, which amended 740 ILCS 180/1, 740 ILCS 180/2, and 755 ILCS 5/27-6, to allow for the recovery of punitive damages in wrongful death and survival actions. The availability of punitive damages will apply to cases filed on or after August 11, 2023.

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

No. Public policy prohibits insuring against liability for punitive damages that arise from the insured's own misconduct. *Beaver v. County Mut. Ins. Co.*, 420 N.E.2d 1058 (Ill. App. Ct. 1981); *Crawford Labs. v. St. Paul Ins. Co.*, 715 N.E.2d 653 (Ill. App. Ct. 1999).

Also, note, courts in Illinois have also recognized that independent counsel is necessary when the underlying lawsuit seeks punitive damages that would dwarf compensatory damages and the insurance policy does not cover punitive damages, creating the possibility that an insurer might find it more economically efficient to put forth a less than vigorous defense of the compensatory damages, leaving the insured exposed to high punitive damages. See *Nandorf, Inc. v. CNA Ins. Co.*, 134 Ill. App. 3d 134, 479 N.E.2d 988, 992, 88 Ill. Dec. 968 (Ill. App. Ct. 1985).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

No. An employer may insure against vicarious liability for punitive damages assessed in consequence of his employees' wrongful conduct. *Beaver v. Country Mut. Ins. Co.*, 420 N.E.2d 1058 (Ill. App. Ct. 1981); see also *Warren v. Lemay*, 144 Ill. App. 3d 107, 116, 494 N.E.2d 206, 212 (1986).



C. What is the relationship of punitive damages to compensatory damages?

Illinois does not recognize a cause of action for punitive damages alone. *Kemner v. Monsanto Co.*, 217 Ill. App. 3d 188, 199, 576 N.E.2d 1146, 1153 (1991). As such, an award of compensatory damages must accompany a punitive damages award. *Mitchell v. Elrod*, 655 N.E.2d 1104 (Ill. App. Ct. 1995).

An award for one dollar in damages does not support punitive damages. *Kemner v. Monsanto*, 576 N.E.2d 1146 (Ill. App. Ct. 1991). Punitive damages need not bear a proportional relationship to the amount of actual damages. *Tower Oil & Tech. Co. v. Buckley*, 425 N.E.2d 1060 (Ill. App. Ct. 1981); *Loitz v. Remington Arms Co.*, 563 N.E.2d 397 (Ill. 1990).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

No, there is currently no statutory cap on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded in Illinois. The 1995 tort reform legislation imposed a statutory limitation on punitive damages of three times the amount awarded for economic damages. The limitation itself and the legislation as a whole were, however, deemed unconstitutional. *Lebron v. Gottlieb Memorial Hosp.*, 237 Ill.2d 217 (Ill., 2010) (recognizing 735 ILCS 5/2-1115.1 as unconstitutional); *Best v. Taylor Mach. Works*, 179 Ill. 2d 367, 689 N.E. 2d 1057 (1997).

Pursuant to 735 ILCS 5/2-1207, the trial court may, in its discretion, with respect to punitive damages, determine whether a jury award for punitive damages is excessive, and if so, enter a remittitur and a conditional new trial. 735 Ill. Comp. Stat. Ann. 5/2-1207.

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

The trial court has discretion, which seldom is used in practice, to apportion punitive damages among the plaintiff, the plaintiff's attorney and the State of Illinois Department of Human Services. The amount of the award paid from the punitive damages to the plaintiff's attorney shall be reasonable and without regard to any contingent fee contract, except that such amount shall not exceed the amount authorized by the contingent fee contract. In apportioning punitive damages as provided in this Section, the court shall consider, among other factors it deems relevant, whether any special duty was owed by the defendant to the plaintiff. 735 ILCS 5/2-1207 (2010).

Common law actions for punitive damages do not survive the death of the injured person, except where punitive damages are provided in the statute under which the plaintiff has sued (as in the Public Utilities Act). See *Froud v. Celotex*, 456 N.E.2d 131 (Ill. 1983); *Vincent v. Alden-Park Strathmoor, Inc.*, 399 Ill. App. 3d 1102, 1103, 928 N.E.2d 115, 117 (2010) aff'd, 241 Ill. 2d 495, 948 N.E.2d 610 (2011) (construing the Illinois Survival Act).



INDIANA

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. *Forte v. Connerwood Healthcare, Inc.*, 745 N.E.2d 796, 799 (Ind. 2001); *Ford Motor Co. v. Ammerman*, 705 N.E.2d 539 (Ind. Ct. App. 1999).

B. If so, under what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. To come within the embrace of a punitive damages claim the defendant must have “subjected other persons to probable injury, with an awareness of such impending danger and with heedless indifference of the consequences. *Sims v Pappas*, 73 NE3d 700, 706 (Ind. 2017); *Yost v. Wabash Coll.*, 3 N.E.3d 509, 523 (Ind. 2014) (quotation omitted). The tortious conduct must be marked by malice, fraud, gross negligence, or oppressiveness not resulting from «mistake of law or fact, honest error of judgment, overzealousness, mere negligence or other such noniniquitous human failing.” *Id.* at 524.

Standard of Proof. Indiana first restricted common-law punitive damage awards in 1984, when it required them to be proved by “clear and convincing evidence.” I.C. §§ 34-4-34-1, -2 (Supp. 1984). But the current Punitive Damages Act’s sweeping limitations were enacted in 1995, “as part of a comprehensive tort-reform package” aimed at “the tort and products liability fields.” *Weinberger v. Estate of Barnes*, 2 N.E.3d 43, 48-49 (Ind. Ct. App. 2013), trans. denied (quoting Andrew P. Wirick & Ann Marie Waldron Piscione, *Tort Law Reform (?) and Other Developments in Indiana Tort Law*, 29 Ind. L. Rev. 1097, 1097 (1996)) (internal quotation marks omitted). The Act’s goals were to “discourage plaintiffs from bringing punitive damages claims,” to “decrease the plaintiff’s windfall recovery” and “protect defendants from excessive punitive damage awards,” and generally to “combat perceived ills associated with the rising number of punitive damage awards.” *Id.* (citations omitted). And it used three mechanisms to accomplish those objectives: requiring proof by “clear and convincing evidence,” I.C. § 34-51-3-2 (2008); capping awards at the greater of three times compensatory damages or \$50,000, I.C. § 34-51-3-4; and diverting three-fourths of the punitive damage award to the State, I.C. § 34-51-3-6. In each regard, the Act—both in its goals and its mechanisms—were targeted at the type of discretionary, open-ended punitive damage awards available at common law, which the Legislature had concluded were being sought and awarded too liberally. Since punitive damages are a creation of common law, limiting (or even prohibiting) their recoverability is within the Legislature’s discretion. *Cheatham v. Pohle*, 789 N.E.2d 467, 471-72 (Ind. 2003).

Actions Against State. Punitive damages are not permitted against a governmental entity or an employee of a governmental entity acting within the scope of her employment. Ind. Code Ann. § 34-13-3-4.

Breach of Contract. Indiana follows “the rule of no punitive damages in contract cases. *Andrews v Mor/Ryde Intl., Inc.*, 10 NE3d 502, 505 (Ind 2014); *Erie Ins. Co. v. Hickman*, 622 N.E.2d 515, 519 (Ind. 1993), unless the claimant “plead[s] and prove[s] the existence of an independent tort of the kind for which Indiana law recognizes that punitive damages may be awarded,» *Miller Brewing Co. v. Best Beers of Bloomington, Inc.*, 608 N.E.2d 975, 984 (Ind. 1993) (emphasis added). “Bad faith” breach of a contract will not support punitive damages unless there is a «special relationship» between the parties (such as the sometimes arms-length, sometimes-fiduciary relationship between an insurer and its insured) «to support imposition of a tort duty.» *Hickman*, 622 N.E.2d at 518.

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. In order to award punitive damages against the employer, there must be evidence of positive or collusive action by the employer as indicated by the Restatement sections quoted above, such as prior authorization of the doing and the manner of the agent’s act; that the agent was unfit and the employer was reckless in employing and/or retaining the agent; that the agent was employed in a managerial capacity and was acting within the scope of his or her employment when the tort was committed; or that the employer ratified or approved the agent’s action after the fact. These situations are consistent with Indiana law that an award of punitive damages against an individual ordinarily requires a finding of willful and wanton conduct. See *Estate of Mayer v Lax, Inc.*, 998 NE2d 238, 261 (Ind Ct App 2013) citing *Davidson v. Bailey*, 826 N.E.2d 80, 89 (Ind. Ct. App. 2005).



Environmental Liability. Pursuant to Ind. Code Ann. § 13-25-4-10, a person that is liable for a release or threat of release of a hazardous substance; and fails, without sufficient cause, to properly provide removal or remedial action upon order of a court under section 9 [IC 13-25-4-9] of this chapter; is liable for punitive damages.

Insurer's Bad Faith. An insurer's intentional denial of insurance coverage when the plaintiff is financially vulnerable can be a sufficient basis for punitive damages. *Michigan Mut. Ins. Co. v. Sports, Inc.*, 698 N.E.2d 834 (Ind. Ct. App. 1998). An insurer's negligence alone cannot support awarding punitive damages, but intentionally failing to conduct an investigation presents a genuine issue of material fact regarding insurer's bad faith. *Gooch v. State Farm Mut. Automobile Ins. Co.*, 712 N.E.2d 38, 41 (Ind. Ct. App. 1999).

To prove bad faith, the plaintiff must establish, with clear and convincing evidence, that the insurer had knowledge that there was no legitimate basis for denying liability. See *WellPoint, Inc. v Natl. Union Fire Ins. Co.*, 29 NE3d 716 (Ind 2015) citing *Freidline v. Shelby Ins. Co.*, 774 N.E.2d 37, 40 (Ind. 2002).

Product Liability. Punitive damages have been upheld where plaintiffs proved by clear and convincing evidence that a car manufacturer engaged in a course of action that showed "utter indifference" for the rights of consumers when it sold dangerous and defective cars. See *Ford Motor Co. v. Ammerman*, 705 N.E.2d 539 (Ind. Ct. App. 1999).\

Professional Liability. The Indiana Medical Malpractice Act does not prohibit awards of punitive damages against medical professionals. *Cacdac v. West*, 705 N.E.2d 506 (Ind. 1999) (citing Ind. Code Ann. § 34-18-14-3).

Wrongful Death. An action for wrongful death of an "adult person" may not include recovery of punitive damages. Ind. Code Ann. § 34-23-1-2 (West).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Punitive damages are uninsurable under Indiana law. See, *Wellpoint, Inc. v. Cont'l Cas. Co.*, 2012 Ind. Super. LEXIS 119, *58 citing *Exec. Builders. Inc. v. Motorists Ins. Co.*, No. IP00-0018-C-T/G, 2001 WL 548391, at *5-6 (S.D. Ind. Mar. 30, 2001) (Indiana law); see also *Commercial Union Ins. Co. v. Ramada Hotel Operating Co.*, 852 F.2d 298, 306 (7th Cir.1988) (noting it is against Indiana public policy for misconduct which serves as the basis for punitive damages to be covered under insurance).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Likely not. See *Est. of Mayer v. Lax, Inc.*, 998 N.E.2d 238, 259 (Ind. Ct. App. 2013) ("[I]f an employer is held directly liable for punitive damages by virtue of its own misconduct, then an insurance company should not cover such damages, but if punitive damages are vicariously imposed solely because of an employee's misconduct, then insurance should cover them"); *Norfolk & W.R. Co. v. Hartford Acc. & Indemn. Co.*, 420 F.Supp. 92, 96 (N.D. Ind. 1976) ("There is . . . a distinction to be made in Indiana law between liability for punitive damages directly imposed and such liability when vicariously imposed.") (granting the insured's motion for summary judgment because the insured's policy provided coverage for vicarious liability for punitive damages).

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

A punitive damages claim can be sustained only if it is accompanied by a viable claim for compensatory damages. See *Yost v. Wabash Coll.*, 976 NE2d 724, 744-745 (Ind Ct App 2012) citing *Cheatham v Pohle*, 789 NE2d 467, 470 (Ind 2003); See also, *Crabtree ex rel. Kemp v. Est. of Crabtree*, 837 N.E.2d 135, 137 (Ind. 2005)



D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Pursuant to Ind. Code Ann. § 34-51-3-4, a punitive damages award may not be more than the greater of (1) three times the amount of compensatory damages awarded in the action or (2) \$50,000.

Indiana has adopted the three-part test laid out in *BMW of N. Am. v. Gore*, 517 U.S. 559, 573 (U.S. 1996) in order to determine whether a punitive damages award is grossly excessive: (1) the degree of reprehensibility of the conduct at issue, (2) the disparity between the harm or potential harm suffered by the complaining party and the punitive damages the complaining party received, and (3) the difference between the punitive damages remedy and the civil penalties authorized or imposed in comparable cases. *Ford Motor Co. v. Ammerman*, 705 N.E.2d 539, 561-62 (Ind. Ct. App. 1999), (citing *BMW*, 517 U.S. at 574-75, 116 S. Ct. at 1598-99), *trans. denied, cert. denied*, 529 U.S. 1021, 120 S. Ct. 1424 (2000).

Current law recognizes that punitive damages may serve the societal objective of deterring similar conduct by the defendant or others by way of example." Therefore, "if punitive damages are appropriate, the wealth of the defendant has for many years been held relevant to a determination of the appropriate amount. However, although "a defendant's wealth cannot justify an otherwise unconstitutional punitive damages award, it is nevertheless an appropriate consideration. See *Sims v Pappas*, 73 NE3d 700, 711 (Ind 2017) citing *Stroud v. Lints*, 790 N.E.2d 440, 445 (Ind. 2003).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Twenty-five percent of a punitive damages award ultimately goes to the plaintiff and seventy-five percent goes to the state. Ind. Code Ann. § 34-51-3-6 provides as follows:

- (a) Except as provided in IC 13-25-4-10, when a finder of fact announces a verdict that includes a punitive damage award in a civil action, the party against whom the judgment was entered shall notify the office of the attorney general of the punitive damage award.
- (b) When a punitive damage award is paid, the party against whom the judgment was entered shall pay the punitive damage award to the clerk of the court where the action is pending.
- (c) Upon receiving the payment described in subsection (b), the clerk of the court shall:
 - (1) pay the person to whom punitive damages were awarded twenty-five percent (25%) of the punitive damage award; and
 - (2) pay the remaining seventy-five percent (75%) of the punitive damage award to the treasurer of state, who shall deposit the funds into the violent crime victims compensation fund established by IC 5-2-6.1-40.
- (d) The office of the attorney general may negotiate and compromise a punitive damage award described in subsection (c)(2).
- (e) The state's interest in a punitive damage award described in subsection (c)(2) is effective when a finder of fact announces a verdict that includes punitive damages.



IOWA

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. Iowa law allows for the award of punitive damages to punish the defendant and to deter the defendant and like-minded people from committing similar acts. *Midwest Home Distrib., Inc. v. Domco Indus. Ltd.*, 585 N.W.2d 735, 743 (Iowa 1998); *State v. Roache*, 920 N.W.2d 93, 108 (Iowa 2018); Iowa Code § 668A.1.

B. If so, under what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Punitive or exemplary damages may be awarded only where the conduct of the defendant from which the claim arose constitutes willful and wanton disregard for the rights or safety of another. Iowa Code § 668A.1 (2021).

Standard of Proof. Punitive damages require proof by a preponderance of clear, convincing and satisfactory evidence that the defendant acted in willful and wanton disregard for the rights or safety of another. Iowa Code § 668A.1.a.; *Wolf v. Wolf*, 690 N.W.2d 887, 893 (Iowa 2005); *Cortes v. Rosales*, No. 14-1342, 2016 Iowa App. LEXIS 7, at *9 (Iowa Ct. App. 2016).

Further, “[t]o receive punitive damages, plaintiff must offer evidence of defendant’s persistent course of conduct to show that the defendant acted with no care and with disregard to the consequences of those acts.” *Hockenberg Equip. Co. v. Hockenberg’s Equip. & Supply Co.*, 510 N.W.2d 153, 156 (Iowa 1993); *Cortes*, 2016 Iowa App. LEXIS 7, at *9.

Actions Against State. Punitive damages are not recoverable against the government. Iowa Code §§ 669.4, 670.4 (2021).

Breach of Contract. Generally, punitive damages are not awarded for breach of contract claims. *Magnusson Agency v. Public Entity Nat’l Co. Midwest*, 560 N.W.2d 20, 29 (Iowa 1997) (“The mere breach of a promise is never enough in itself to establish the fraudulent intent. It may, however, be inferred from the circumstances.”). The exception is when the breach constitutes an intentional tort and is committed maliciously with willful and wanton disregard for the rights or safety of another. *Id.*; see also *Wilson v. Vanden Berg*, 687 N.W.2d 575, 586 (Iowa 2004) (“although a breach of contract will ordinarily not support a punitive damages award, where the breach also constitutes an intentional tort committed maliciously, punitive damages may be given”). Generally, in the absence of a showing of malice, fraud or other illegal actions, punitive damages are generally not awarded in a breach of contract action. *Id.*; see also *Schwickerath v. Anderson*, 2022 Iowa App. LEXIS 904, *27.

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Iowa requires corporate complicity in order to award punitive damages for an employee’s conduct. *Briner v. Hyslop*, 337 N.W.2d 858, 861 (Iowa 1983). Under Iowa law, punitive damages may be awarded against an employer only if:

- (a) the principal authorized the manner or doing of the act, or
- (b) the agent was unfit or the principal was reckless in employing him, or
- (c) the agent was employed in a managerial capacity and was acting in the scope of employment, or
- (d) the principal or the managerial agent of the principal ratified or approved the act.

Id., 337 N.W.2d at 861 (citing Restatement (Second) of Agency § 217C (1958)).



Environmental Liability. Punitive or exemplary damages may only be awarded where the conduct of the defendant from which the claim arose constitutes willful and wanton disregard for the rights or safety of another. Iowa Code § 668A.1. Punitive damages were appropriate where evidence indicated defendant farm-cooperative disregarded plaintiff's rights and left chemical containers strewn around on his property. *Kosmacek v. Farm Service Co-op*, 485 N.W.2d 99, 103–04 (Iowa Ct. App. 1992). Iowa Code §455B.392 allows for punitive damages against a “person having control over a hazardous substance” who is strictly liable if the failure is willful. Punitive damages under Iowa Code §455B.392 are not to exceed triple the cleanup costs incurred by the state or its agents and punitive damages are relieved if “prompt and good faith notification” that the person does not have cleanup resources is made. Iowa Code §455B.392

Insurer's Bad Faith. Punitive damages may be awarded in a case for insurer's bad faith where the defendant's conduct constituted either actual or legal malice. *Gibson v. ITT Hartford Ins. Co.*, 621 N.W.2d 388, 396 (Iowa 2001).

Product Liability. Punitive damages are available in a products liability cases. *Fell v. Kewanee Farm Equipment Co.*, 457 N.W.2d 911 (Iowa 1990). The standard requires clear, convincing and satisfactory proof of a willful and wanton disregard for the rights of another. *Mercer v. Pittway Corp.*, 616 N.W.2d 602, 618 (Iowa 2000) A manufacturer's failure to institute a warning campaign for many years despite knowledge of numerous similar occurrences constitutes willful and wanton disregard for the rights of others and supported a punitive damages award. *Lovick v. Wil-Rich*, 588 N.W.2d 688, 699 (Iowa 1999); see also *Mercer v. Pittway Corp.*, 616 N.W.2d 602 (Iowa 2000) (in a product liability suit against a manufacturer of a smoke detector, plaintiffs failed to provide sufficient evidence that defendant's conduct was willful and wanton as to warrant submission of a punitive damages question to the jury).

Professional Liability. Punitive damages for professional liability are allowed in Iowa. Plaintiffs may be awarded punitive damages in a legal malpractice action where the attorney acts with willful or wanton conduct by pursuing a course of action with knowledge that it is contrary to the plain text of the law. See *Miranda v. Said*, 836 N.W.2d 8 (Iowa 2013). Further, Iowa Code §602.10113 provides, “An attorney and counselor who is guilty of deceit or collusion, or consents thereto, with intent to deceive a court or judge or a party to an action or proceeding, is liable to be disbarred, and shall forfeit to the injured party treble damages to be recovered in a civil action.” A physician responding in good faith to inquiries from a child abuse investigator is entitled to immunity from punitive damages under Iowa Code §232.73 (2021). *Nelson v. Lindaman*, 867 N.W.2d 1, 9–10 (Iowa 2015). However, Iowa Code § 668A.1 specifically addresses punitive damages and various health professionals, see below. A court found sufficient evidence to support a jury's verdict of punitive damages where a pharmacy had misfilled a prescription. *McClure v. Petersen*, 613 N.W.2d 225 (Iowa 2000).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes. Iowa decisions have permitted insurance coverage of punitive damages. Specifically, the Supreme Court of Iowa interpreted “damages” in a CGL policy as referring to both punitive and compensatory damages, and allowed coverage for punitive damages awarded against an insured. *A.Y. McDonald Indus. v. Ins. Co. of N. Am.*, 475 N.W.2d 607 (Iowa 1991); *Grinnell Mut. Reinsurance Co. v. Jungling*, 654 N.W.2d 530 (Iowa 2002); see also *Skyline Harvestore Sys., Inc. v. Centennial Ins. Co.*, 331 N.W.2d 106, 109 (Iowa 1983) (“If the parties wish to contract for coverage of punitive damages, they may. If the insurance companies do not wish to provide such coverage, then they must exclude coverage of punitive damages specifically.”).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable. See II. A. above.



C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Punitive damages are not compensatory; they are for punishment and deterrence and must be related to the defendant's wrongful conduct. *Beeman v. Manville Corp. Asbestos Disease Comp. Fund*, 496 N.W.2d 247 (Iowa 1993). Under Iowa law, a plaintiff is not required to recover actual damages in order to qualify for a punitive damages award, but is only required to "show" actual damage. See *Ryan v. Arneson*, 422 N.W.2d 491 (Iowa 1988). Punitive damages must be reasonably related to actual damages. *Id.* at 496. "The primary focus in review of a punitive damage award is the relationship between the punitive damage award and the wrongful conduct of the offending party." *Jaeger v. Schuchat*, 2001 Iowa App. LEXIS 193, *11.

In ruling on motions for new trial based on excessive or inadequate punitive damages, Iowa courts have "broad but not unlimited discretion in determining whether the verdict does substantial justice between the parties." *Cowan v. Flannery*, 461 N.W.2d 155, 158 (Iowa 1990) ("A verdict should not be set aside as either too large or too small simply because the reviewing court would have reached a different conclusion."). When the jury's verdict falls within a reasonable range as indicated by the evidence, courts do not interfere "with what is primarily a jury question." *Id.* ("The determinative question posed is whether under the record, giving the jury its right to accept or reject whatever portions of the conflicting evidence it chose, the verdict effects substantial justice between the parties.").

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Yes. Punitive damages for spilling hazardous waste are not to exceed three times the cleanup costs incurred by the state and its political subdivisions. See Iowa Code § 455B.392 (2010). Punitive damages for bad faith retention of a deposit by a landlord capped at twice the monthly rental payment. Iowa Code § 562A.12. In 2023, Iowa

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Effective February 16, 2023, Iowa Code § 668A.1 was amended so as to allow a plaintiff to keep 100% of punitive damages rather than requiring 75% to be placed in a state fund. Amended Iowa Code § 668A.1 states as follows:

1. In a trial of a claim involving the request for punitive or exemplary damages, the court shall instruct the jury to answer special interrogatories or, if there is no jury, shall make findings, indicating all of the following:
 - a. Whether, by a preponderance of clear, convincing, and satisfactory evidence, the conduct of the defendant from which the claim arose constituted willful and wanton disregard for the rights or safety of another.
 - b. Whether the conduct of the defendant was directed specifically at the claimant, or at the person from which the claimant's claim is derived.
2. An award for punitive or exemplary damages shall not be made unless the answer or finding pursuant to subsection 1, paragraph "a", is affirmative. If such answer or finding is affirmative, the jury, or court if there is no jury, shall fix the amount of punitive or exemplary damages to be awarded, and such damages shall be ordered paid as follows:
 - a. If the answer or finding pursuant to subsection 1, paragraph "b", is affirmative, or if the claim is against any physician and surgeon, osteopathic physician and surgeon, dentist, podiatric physician, optometrist, pharmacist, chiropractor, physician assistant, or nurse, licensed under chapter 147, or a hospital licensed under chapter 135B, arising out of patient care, then the full amount of the punitive or exemplary damages awarded shall be paid to the claimant.



- b. If the answer or finding pursuant to subsection 1, paragraph “b”, is negative, and if the claim is not against any physician and surgeon, osteopathic physician and surgeon, dentist, podiatric physician, optometrist, pharmacist, chiropractor, physician assistant, or nurse, licensed under chapter 147, or a hospital licensed under chapter 135B, arising out of patient care, then after payment of all applicable costs and fees, an amount not to exceed twenty-five percent of the punitive or exemplary damages awarded may be ordered paid to the claimant, with the remainder of the award to be ordered paid into a civil reparations trust fund administered by the state court administrator. Funds placed in the civil reparations trust shall be under the control and supervision of the executive council, and shall be disbursed only for purposes of indigent civil litigation programs or insurance assistance programs.
3. The mere allegation or assertion of a claim for punitive damages shall not form the basis for discovery of the wealth or ability to respond in damages on behalf of the party from whom punitive damages are claimed until such time as the claimant has established that sufficient admissible evidence exists to support a prima facie case establishing the requirements of subsection 1, paragraph “a” Iowa Code § 668A.1.



KANSAS

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes, generally in Kansas, punitive damages can be awarded. Kan. Stat. Ann. § 60-3702. See *Adamson v. Bicknell*, 295 Kan. 879, 287 P.3d 274 (2012). Punitive damages are used to punish a defendant for malicious, vindictive conduct, or the willful and wanton invasion of another's rights, with the ultimate purpose of deterring others from committing similar wrongful conduct. *Id.*

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. To warrant an award of punitive damages, a plaintiff has the burden of proving to the trier of fact, via clear and convincing evidence, that the defendant acted toward the plaintiff with willful conduct, wanton conduct, fraud, or malice. *Alain Ellis Living Trust v. Harvey D. Ellis Living Trust*, 308 Kan. 1040, 1047-48 (2018) citing Kan. Stat. Ann. § 60-3702(c).

Standard of Proof. Clear and convincing evidence is required to sustain an award of punitive damages. *Reeves v. Carlson*, 969 P.2d 252 (Kan. 1988).

Actions Against State. No recovery is permitted for punitive or exemplary damages or interest in actions against the state. Kan. Stat. Ann. § 75-6105 (2010).

Breach of Contract. Generally, an insured individual in Kansas cannot recover in a breach of contract claim against an insurer because Kansas law does not usually permit non-economic losses to be considered a recoverable damage in contract cases. Kan. Stat. Ann. § 40-256. See *Hass v. Preferred Risk Mut. Ins. Co.*, 214 Kan. 747, 522 P.2d 438 (1974) and *Frickey v. Equity Mut. Ins. Co.*, 2 Kan. App. 2d 163, 576 P.2d 702 (1978) (disallowing punitive damages for the breach of an insurance contract).

However, such damages are allowable, if there is an independent tort indicating malice, fraud or wanton disregard of the rights of others. *Farrell v. Gen. Motors Corp.*, 815 P.2d 538, 549 (Kan. 1991); *Cornwell v. Jespersen*, 708 P.2d 515, 523 (Kan. 1985).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under Kansas law, punitive damages are typically not allowed to be assessed against an employer for the acts or an agent or employee. Kan. Stat. Ann. § 60-3701(d) (1). This is because the employer, under these circumstances, would not be able to protect himself against this type of punitive damages. The employer is not the actual wrongdoer, he did not have knowledge of the wrong, he did not acquiesce in the wrong." *Flint Hills Rural Elec. Coop, Ass'n v. Federated Rural Elec. Ins. Co.*, 941 P.2d 374,380 (Kan. 1997). Citing Kan. Stat. Ann. § 60-3701(d) (1).

However, there are four specific instances where an employer's conduct can in turn make an employer liable for the payment of punitive damages. *Hartford Accident & Indem. Co. v. American Red Ball Transit Co.*, 938 p.2d 1281, 1292 (1997). Citing Kan. Stat. Ann. § 60-3701(d)(1). These instances include: (1) when the corporation or its managerial agent authorized the doing and manner of the act, (2) when the employee was unfit and the corporation or its managerial agent was reckless in employing or retaining him, (3) when the employee was employed in a managerial capacity and was acting in the scope of employment, and (4) when the corporation or its managerial agent ratified or approved the act of the employee.

Authorization under section 60-3701(d)(1) may be either express or implied and generally is accomplished before or during the employee's questioned conduct. *Smith v. Printup*, 866 P.2d 985, 1003 (Kan. 1993).

Ratification under section 60-3701(d)(1) may be either express or implied and may be accomplished before, during, or after the employee's questioned conduct. *Smith v. Printup*, 866 P.2d at 1003. It may be based on an express ratification or based on a course of conduct indicating the approval, sanctioning, or confirmation of the questioned conduct. *Id.*



Environmental Liability. Punitive damages may be permitted in cases where the defendant is found liable for environmental damages, however, the defendant's conduct must be "willful and intentional and in utter disregard of the rights of the plaintiffs and the laws of the state." *Wendtlandt v. National Co-operative Refinery Ass'n*, 216 P.2d 209, 214 (Kan. 1950). See, e.g., *Rusch v. Phillips Petroleum Co.*, 180 P.2d 270 (Kan. 1947) (Court held that evidence raised a jury question on the issue of punitive damages where seepage from slush ponds caused pollution damages to land leased for farming and stock-raising purposes).

Product Liability. Punitive damages may be recovered in Kansas product liability actions, only if the plaintiff proves, via clear and convincing evidence that the manufacturer acted with willful or wanton conduct, fraud, or malice. *Tetuan v. Alt. Robins Co.*, 738 P.2d 1210, 1239 (Kan. 1987).

Manufactures are most likely to be imposed with punitive damages in instances where they engage in wanton behavior, while recognizing the dangers they created to others, yet fail to take any steps to prevent injury due to indifference as to whether an injury would occur. *Wooderson v. Ortho Pharmaceutical Corp.* 681 P.2d 1038, 1061 (Kan. 1984).

In assessing punitive damages, the nature, extent and enormity of the wrong, and the intent of the party committing the wrong, may be considered to reduce damages. See *Brand v. Mazda Motor Corp.*, 978 F. Supp. 1382, 1392 (D. Kan. 1997) (punitive damages were not awarded because no reasonable jury could have found that the Mazda Motor Corp. deliberately or recklessly failed to either correct the defect or prevent the injury).

Professional Liability. In an action for malpractice, punitive damages may be permitted only if the defendant acted with willful or wanton conduct, fraud or malice. See Kan. Stat. Ann. § 60-3701(c) (2010); *McConwell v. FMG, Inc.*, 861 P.2d 830, 841 (Kan. Ct. App. 1993).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

In Kansas, the insurability of punitive damages is not allowed, as it directly opposes Kansas public policy surrounding punitive damages. *Wardrip v. Hart*, 28 F. Supp. 2d 1213, 1215 (D. Kan. 1998). Ensuring the payment of such damages "rests ultimately as well as nominally on the party who committed the wrong." Therefore, allowing insurance coverage for punitive damages would "excuse the consequences of a defendant's reckless behavior." *St. Paul Surplus Lines Ins. Co. v. International Playtex, Inc.* 777 P.2d 1259, 1269 (Kan. 1989).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

No. It is not against public policy to obtain insurance to cover liability for punitive damages or exemplary damages assessed against an insured as a result of the acts of employees, agents, servants or any other person for whom the insured is vicariously liable. KAN. STAT. ANN. § 40-2,115 (2010); see also *Hartford*, 938 P.2d at 1290.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

A verdict for actual damages is a prerequisite to an award of punitive damages. *Enlow v. Sears, Roebuck & Co.*, 822 P.2d 617, 624 (Kan. 1991); *Floyd v. Gen. Motors Corp.*, 960 P.2d 763, 767 (Kan. Ct. App. 1998).



To determine the amount of exemplary damages to be awarded under this section, the court may consider:

1. The likelihood at the time of the alleged misconduct that serious harm would arise from the defendant's misconduct.
2. The degree of the defendant's awareness of that likelihood.
3. The profitability of the defendant's misconduct
4. The duration of the misconduct and any intentional concealment of it
5. The attitude of and conduct of the defendant upon discovery of the misconduct
6. The financial condition of the defendant; and
7. The total deterrent effect of other damages and punishment imposed upon the defendant as a result of the misconduct, including, but not limited to, compensatory, exemplary and punitive damages awards to persons in situations similar to those of the claimant, and the severity of the criminal penalties to which the defendant has been or may be subjected. Kan. Stat. Ann. § 60-3701(b).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Kansas does have statutory limits regarding the award of punitive damages. Kan. Stat. Ann. § 60-3701(e) (2010). The plaintiff's punitive damage amount is limited to the lesser of: (1) the annual gross income earned by defendant, as determined by the court based upon the defendant's highest gross annual income earned for any one of five years immediately before the act for which such damages are awarded, or (2) \$ 5 million. *Id.* If the court determines that the value for option (1) is too low, as it does not sufficiently punish the defendant, the court can instead award up to 50% of the defendant's net worth or \$5 million, whichever is the lower number. *Id.*

It is important to note that if the court finds that the profitability of the defendants misconduct exceeds or is expected to exceed these limitations, the limitation on the amount of exemplary or punitive damages that the court may award shall be equal to one and a half times the amount of profit that the defendant gained, or is expected to gain as a result of the defendant's misconduct. Kan. Stat. Ann. § 60-3701(f). *See also Acker v. Burlington N. and Santa Fe Ry. Co.*, 215 F.R.D. 645, 654 (D. Kan. 2003), (plaintiff's request to amend so that she could add punitive damages totaling \$50 million was granted because, despite the limitation provided in 60-3701(e), the court found that the profitability of the defendants' misconduct exceeded or was expected to exceed the limitation of subsection (e), and therefore subsection (f) applies).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Generally, an award of punitive damages is payable to the plaintiff who is the party claiming them.



KENTUCKY

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes, punitive damages are available in Kentucky. KY. REV. STAT. §§ 411.184, 411.186 (LexisNexis 2023). See *Horton v. Union Light, Heat & Power Co.*, 690 S.W.2d 382 (Ky. 1985); *Bisset v. Goss*, 481 S.W.2d 71 (Ky. 1972); *Cont'l Ins. Cos. v. Hancock*, 507 S.W.2d 146 (Ky. 1973); *Klepper v. First Am. Bank*, 916 F.2d 337 (Sixth Cir. 1990).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Punitive damages are authorized only when the circumstances surrounding a tortious act indicate malice, willfulness or a reckless or wanton disregard for the rights of others. See *Holloway Constr. Co. v. Smith*, 683 S.W.2d 248 (Ky. 1984). See also *Sand Hill Energy, Inc. v. Smith*, 142 S.W.3d 153 (Ky. 2004); *Fowler v. Mantooth*, 683 S.W.2d 250, 253 (Ky. 1984) (assessment of punitive damages requires consideration of the nature of the defendant's acts and the extent of the harm resulting from those acts); *Ostendorf v. Clark Equip. Co.*, 122 S.W.3d 530 (Ky. 2003) (the required *mens rea* is intentional conduct or gross negligence); *Harrod v. Fraley*, 289 S.W.2d 203 (Ky. 1956). See also *Simpson County Steeplechase Ass'n Roberts*, 898 S.W.2d 523 (Ky. Ct. App. 1995); *Holliday v. Campbell*, 873 S.W.2d 839 (Ky. Ct. App. 1994).

The following factors should be considered when awarding punitive damages:

1. The likelihood at the time of such misconduct that serious harm would arise from it
2. The degree of awareness of that likelihood
3. The profitability of the misconduct
4. The duration of the misconduct and any concealment of it
5. Any actions to remedy the misconduct once it became known.

Standard of Proof. The party seeking punitive damages must prove, by clear and convincing evidence, that the defendant from whom such damages are sought acted toward the plaintiff with oppression, fraud or malice. See KY. REV. STAT. 411.184(2) (LexisNexis 2023). See also *Ostendorf v. Clark Equip. Co.*, 122 S.W.3d 530 (Ky. 2003).

Actions Against State. Kentucky statutory law does not prohibit punitive damages against the state. See Ky. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 411.184 (LexisNexis 2023) ("this statute supersedes any and all existing statutory or judicial law insofar as such law is inconsistent with the provisions of this statute"). See also Ky. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 411.186 (sections 411.184 and 186 "are applicable to all cases in which punitive damages are sought").

Assault and Battery. Punitive damages may be awarded in assault and battery actions where the assault is willful, malicious and without justification. KY. REV. STAT § 411.010. See *Bank v. Fritsch*, 39 S.W.3d 474 (Ky. 2001).

Breach of Contract. Punitive damages are prohibited in breach of contract claims. KY. REV. STAT. ANN. § 411.184(4).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under Kentucky law, punitive damages may not be assessed against an employer for the act of an employee unless the employer authorized or ratified or should have anticipated the conduct in question. KY. REV. STAT. ANN. § 411.184(3).



Environmental Liability. Punitive damages are expressly permitted in an action involving alleged discharge of hazardous waste. KY REV. STAT § 411.470 (LexisNexis 20123). In a nuisance claim, punitive damages are only available where the party against whom such damages are sought engaged in “misconduct involving something more than merely commission of the tort.” *Radcliff Homes v. Jackson*, 766 S.W.2d 63 (Ky. Ct. App. 1989) citing *Fowler v. Mantooth*, 683 S.W.2d 250 (Ky. 1984). Also, a plaintiff must prove a present physical injury. *Wood v. Wyeth Aerst Labs*, 82 S.W.3d 849 (Ky. 2002).

Insurer’s Bad Faith. Three aspects of a bad faith case include whether the action is one of contract or tort, what are the proper measures of damages, and whether the question is one of law for the court or of fact for the jury. One additional factor for which an insurer may be liable for punitive damages is unreasonable delay. See *Deaton v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 548 S.W.2d 162 (Ky. Ct. App. 1977). Where there is a reasonable basis for an insurer to deny an insured’s claim, even if found incorrect, it is improper to allow punitive damages absent some proof that the insurer acted intentionally, willfully, or in reckless disregard. See *Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Ky., Inc. v. Whitaker*, 687 S.W.2d 557 (Ky. Ct. App. 1985).

Product Liability. An award of punitive damages in a product liability case requires assessing the nature of the defendant’s act and the extent of the harm to the plaintiff. See *Owens-Corning Fiberglas Corp. v. Golightly*, 976 S.W.2d 409 (Ky. 1998). *Suffix, USA Inc. v. Cook*, 128 S.W.3d 838 (Ky. 2004) (punitive damages should be awarded when a defendant acted recklessly with conscious disregard of a substantial risk, and when it inadequately tested a product that could cause serious bodily harm). *Owens-Corning Fiberglas Corp. v. Golightly*, 976 S.W.2d 409 (Ky. 1998) (a defendant should not be relieved from paying punitive damages simply because other plaintiffs have previously recovered damages arising out of the same conduct).

Professional Liability. An award of punitive damages in professional circumstances is permissible in Kentucky. See *Childers v. Geile*, 367 S.W.3d 576 (Ky. 2012) (Many other torts are grounded in negligence, such as medical malpractice, and can also be done recklessly, which can lead to a punitive damages instruction. The conduct must be reckless and directly and cause personal injury). *Osborne v. Keeney*, 399 S.W.3d 1 (Ky. 2012) (We...hold that a legal-malpractice plaintiff, in the same vein as any other plaintiff, must show that the attorney was grossly negligent in handling the case and acted with oppression, fraud, fraud or malice).

For suits in concealment resulting in misconduct, the damages must be separate and distinct damages from those flowing from the malpractice. *Hardway Mgmt. v. Southerland*, 977 S.W.2d 910 (Ky. 1998). Attorney’s fraud exacerbated the damages suffered by the plaintiff-client in the underlying suit. Therefore, an award of \$50,000 in punitive damages was supported by a claim independent from the negligence action. See *Bierman v. Klapheke*, 967 S.W.2d 16 (Ky. 1998).

Wrongful Death. Punitive damages may be awarded in wrongful death actions. KY. REV. STAT. ANN. § 411.130. A party seeking punitive damages in a wrongful death cause of action must show that the defendant acted willfully or with gross negligence. KY. REV. STAT. ANN. § 411.130(2).

Comparative Fault and Punitive Damages. Where a party’s wrongful acts merit the award of punitive damages alongside compensatory damages, that party’s comparative fault is not relevant to the determination of punitive damages. See *Louisville SW Hotel, LLC v. Lindsey*, 636 S.W.3d 508 (Ky. 2021).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes. Kentucky courts may permit the insurability of punitive damages if either (1) public policy favors such an award or (2) the language of the insurance policy is broad enough to encompass such an award. See *Md. Cas. Co. v. Baker*, 200 S.W.2d 757 (Ky. 1947); *Grimes v. Nationwide Mut. Ins. Co.*, 705 S.W.2d 926 (Ky. 1985). In addition, punitive damages may be insurable where the underlying conduct is not intentional, but simply grossly negligent. See *Cont’l Ins. Cos. v. Hancock*, 507 S.W.2d 146, *supra*.



B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable. See II. A. above.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

It appears that the plaintiff must recover at least nominal damages to be entitled to a punitive damages award. *Fowler v. Mantooth*, 683 S.W.2d 250 (Ky. 1984). Punitive damages need bear no reasonable relation to actual damages, but there must exist a reasonable basis for concluding that a prejudiced, impassioned jury did not award them. See *Henderson v. Henderson Funeral Home Corp.*, 320 S.W.2d 113 (Ky. 1958).

However, an award of punitive damages need not bear reasonable relation to actual damages sustained, which might warrant only “nominal” damages, if the claimant’s evidence regarding the extent of conscious wrongdoing is sufficient to sustain the award. *Fowler v. Mantooth*, 683 S.W.2d 250, *supra*.

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

There are no statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded.

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

The Constitution of Kentucky and various Kentucky statutes authorize awards of punitive damages to the plaintiff.

In no case shall punitive damages be assessed against a principal or employer for the act of an agent or employee unless such principal or employer authorized or ratified or should have anticipated the conduct in question. KY. REV. STAT. § 411.184(3) (KY. REV. STAT. § 411.184(1)(c) unconstitutional by *Williams v. Wilson*, 972 S.W.2d 260 (Ky. 1998).)



LOUISIANA

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes, punitive damages may be awarded under Louisiana law, however, the general public policy is against punitive damages. See *Chauvin v. Exxon Mobil Corp.*, 158 So. 3d 761, 768 (La. 2014), (citing) *Ross v. Conoco, Inc.*, 828 So. 2d 546, 555 (La. 2002). Therefore punitive damages may *only* be awarded when expressly authorized by a statute. *Simmons v. Cornerstone Invs., LLC* 282 So. 3d 199, 205 (La. 2019), (citing) *Ross v. Conoco, Inc.*, 828 So. 2d 546, 555 (La. 2002). Even in the circumstances where punitive damages may be expressly allowed by a statute, such a statute must be strictly construed. *Id.*

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. With punitive damages being awarded via a strict reading of Louisiana's relevant statute, there is no universal standard within the state to determine when punitive damages should be awarded. See *Hoffman v. 21st Century N. AM. Ins. Co.*, 209 So. 3d 702, 706 (La. 2015), (citing) *Gagnard v. Baldrige*, 612 So. 2d 732, 736 (La. 1993). Rather, each individual statute will provide the specific language and/or elements required for punitive damages to be awarded. *Id.* For example, punitive damages can be awarded in the case of an injury resulting from an intoxicated driver, only if there is proof the injury was caused by the intoxicated driver's wanton or reckless disregard for the safety of others. La. Civ. Code Ann. 2315.4.

There are currently twenty-three distinct statutes that apply to awarding punitive damages within Louisiana, including: (1) La. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 15:1312, allowing punitive damages for illegal electronic surveillance, (2) La. Rev. Stat. Ann § 46.440.3, allowing punitive damages for violations of whistleblower protections, (3) La. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 46.2163, allowing punitive damages to victims of human trafficking, (4) La. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 51:2613, allowing punitive damages to private individuals under LA Equal Housing Opportunity Act, and (5) La. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 51:2614, allowing the LA Attorney General to recover punitive damages under the LA Equal Housing Opportunity Act.

Standard of Proof. Generally, punitive damages merely require proof by a preponderance of the evidence. *Rivera v. U.S. Gas Pipeline Co.*, 697 So.2d 327, 335 (La. Ct. App. 5th Cir., 1997), (citing) *Galjour v. Gen. Am, Tank Car Corp.*, 764 F. Supp. 1093 (E.D. La, 1991).

Actions Against State. No Louisiana statute specifically permits or prohibits punitive damages against the state. There is, however, a \$500,000 cap in actions against the state. La. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 13:5106

Breach of Contract. Under Louisiana law, there is no specific statute which allows for punitive damages to be awarded as a result of a breach of contract claim. Without a state statute expressly listing breach of contract as an action that would allow for punitive damages, they will *not* be awarded. *Simmons* So. 3d, 205 (La. 2019), (citing) *Ross* So. 2d, 555 (La. 2002).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under Louisiana law, employers are answerable for the damage occasioned by their employees in the exercise of the functions in which they are employed. This responsibility only attaches, however, when the employer might have prevented the act which caused the damage, but did not do so. See *Romero v. Clarendon Am, Ins. Co.*, 54 So. 3d 789, 791-92 (La. Ct. App. 3rd Cir. 2010), (citing) La. Civ. Code Ann. Art. 2320.

Environmental Liability. Punitive damages are no longer permitted in hazardous and toxic substance cases. Act 2 of 1996, repealing La. Civ. Code Ann. art. 2315.3. See Philip Ackerman, [Some Don't Like It Hot: Louisiana Eliminates Punitive Damages for Environmental Torts](#), 72 Tul. L. Rev, 327 (1997).



Insurer's Bad Faith. By statute, Louisiana permits punitive damages to be assessed for an insurer's bad faith. Specifically, the statute provides that: "In addition to any general or special damages to which a claimant is entitled for breach of the imposed duty, the claimant may be awarded penalties assessed against the insurer in an amount not to exceed two times the damages sustained or five thousand dollars, whichever is greater." La. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 22:1973 (2010).

Intoxicated Defendant. Punitive damages may be awarded upon proof that the injuries on which the action is based were caused by a wanton or reckless disregard for the rights and safety of others. LA. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 13:5106 (2010).

Product Liability. Punitive damages are not permitted for products liability. Under Louisiana law, punitive damages are not allowable unless expressly authorized by statute. "The Louisiana Products Liability Act provides the statutory framework for a products liability claim and does not authorize punitive damages." *Brookshire Bros. Holding Inc. v. Total Containment, Inc.*, 455 F. Supp. 2d 541, 543 (W.D. La. 2006).

Professional Liability. Punitive damages are not expressly authorized by statute for cases involving professional liability.

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Public policy in Louisiana strictly prohibits an individual from insuring against punitive damages that are a result of their own intentional acts. *Leon Lowe & Sons, Inc. v. Great Am. Surplus Lines Ins. Co.*, 572 So. 2d 206, 210 (La. Ct. App. 1st Cir. 1990), (citing) *Swindle v. Haughton Wood Co., Inc.*, 458 So. 2d 992, 995 (La. Ct. App. 2nd Cir. 1984). However, Louisiana does allow the insurance against punitive damages stemming from vicarious liability for the intentional action(s) of another individual. *Id.* The reasoning behind this is the court believing "public policy will be better served by giving effect to the insurance contract, rather than by creating an exclusion based on a judicial precision of public policy not expressed by the legislature." *Creech v. Aetna Cas. & Sur. Co.*, 516 So. 2d 1168, 1174 (La. Ct. App. 2nd Cir. 1987).

More specifically dealing with the context of uninsured motorist coverage, Louisiana allows for coverage of punitive damages under an insured motorist policy. *Mosing v. Domas* 798 So. 2d 1105, 1119 (La. App. 3 Cir. 2001). Nevertheless, Louisiana allows an uninsured motorist policy to exclude punitive damage coverage. *Cazenave v. ANPAC La. Ins. Co.*, 2016 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 175728, (citing) La. R.S. § 22:1295(1)(a).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable. See Section II(A) above.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Punitive damages must be reasonably related to the reprehensibility of the defendant's conduct and to the compensatory damages awarded to the plaintiffs; punitive damages turn on the recovery of compensatory damages. *Allison v. Citgo Petro. Corp.*, 151 F.3d 402, 417-18 (Fifth Cir. 1998); *Grefer v. Alpha Tech.*, 901 So. 2d 1117, 1148 (La. Ct. App. 2005) (citing *State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co. v. Campbell*, 538 U.S. 408, 426 (2003)). It has been made clear that punitive damages and compensatory damages are separate categories. While punitive damages relate directly to the conduct of an individual, compensatory damages are related to the injury in question. *Chauvin v. Exxon Mobil Corp.*, 158 So. 3d 761, 763 (La. 2014).



D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

No; *Mosing v. Domas*, 830 So.2d 967, 974-75 (La. 2002) (legislature deliberately left the assessment on the amount to the discretion of the jury).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Generally, an award of punitive damages is payable to the plaintiff who is the party claiming them.



MAINE

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. Punitive damages are allowed in Maine and governed by common law. Punitive damages survive in Maine because it continues to “serve the useful purposes of expressing society’s disapproval of intolerable conduct and deterring such conduct where no other remedy would suffice.” *Rand v. Bath Iron Works Corp.*, 832 A.2d 771, 775 (Me. 2003) (quoting *Tuttle v. Raymond*, 494 A.2d 1353, 1355 (Me. 1985)); see *Kopenga v. Davric Maine Corp.*, 727 A.2d 906, 911 (Me. 1999). “To recover punitive damages, the plaintiff must demonstrate that the defendant acted with malice.” *McAlister v. Slosberg*, 658 A.2d 658, 660 (Me. 1995). As such, punitive damages are impermissible absent an award of compensatory damages. *Zemero Corp. v. Hall*, 831 A.2d 413, 416 (Me. 2003).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. A plaintiff seeking to recover punitive damages “must prove by clear and convincing evidence that the defendant acted with malice.” *St. Francis De Sales Fed. Credit Union v. Sun Ins. Co. of N.Y.*, 818 A.2d 995, 1001 (Me. 2003) (quoting *Tuttle v. Raymond*, 494 A.2d 1353, 1354 (Me. 1985)); see *Newbury v. Virgin*, 802 A.2d 413, 418 (Me. 2002); *Palleschi v. Palleschi*, 704 A.2d 383, 385-6 (Me. 1998); *Batchelder v. Realty Res. Hospitality, LLC*, 914 A.2d 1116 (Me. 2007). “Malice can be express or implied. Express malice exists when the “defendant’s tortious conduct is motivated by ill will toward plaintiff.” Implied malice arises when “deliberate conduct by the defendant, although motivated by something other than ill will toward any particular party, is so outrageous that malice toward a person injured as a result of that conduct can be implied. Implied malice, however[,] is not established by the defendant’s mere reckless disregard of the circumstances.” *St. Francis De Sales Fed. Credit Union v. Sun Ins. Co. of N.Y.*, 818 A.2d 995, 1001 (Me. 2003) (quoting *Tuttle v. Raymond*, 494 A.2d 1353, 1361 (Me. 1985)). Punitive damages are not recoverable for gross negligence or reckless indifference. See *Batchelder*, 2007 ME 25, P13, 914 A.2d at 1125; *DiPietro v. Boynton*, 628 A.2d 1019, 1025 (Me. 1993); *Spickler v. Key Bank of Southern Maine*, 618 A.2d 204, 207 (Me. 1992).

Standard of Proof. Clear and convincing evidence is required to obtain punitive damages. *St. Francis De Sales Fed. Credit Union v. Sun Ins. Co. of N.Y.*, 818 A.2d 995 (Me. 2003). See *Batchelder v. Realty Res. Hospitality, LLC*, 914 A.2d 1116 (Me. 2007); see also *Tuttle v. Raymond*, 494 A.2d 1353 (Me. 1985).

Actions Against State. Punitive damages are not recoverable against a governmental entity. Me. Rev. Stat. Ann. tit. 14, § 8105(5) (2010).

Breach of Contract. No matter how egregious the breach, punitive damages are unavailable under Maine law for breach of contract. *Stull v. First Am. Title Ins. Co.*, 745 A.2d 975, 981 (Me. 2000) (quoting *Drinkwater v. Patten Realty Corp.*, 563 A.2d 772, 776 (Me. 1989)). See also *Halco v. Davey*, 919 A.2d 626 (Me. 2007); see also *Halco v. Davey*, 2007 ME 48, ¶ 14, 919 A.2d 626, 631.

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. An employer is not vicariously liable for the conduct of its employees unless such conduct is authorized by the employer, the employee was acting within the scope of its employment, the employer was reckless in employing the employee or the employer ratified or approved the employee’s actions. See *Angelica v. Drummond*, 2003 Me. Super. (LexisNexis 197) (Me. Super. Ct. Sept. 9, 2003) (citing Restatement (Second) of Agency, § 217C); see also *Robinson v. Maine Med. Ctr.*, 1998 Me. Super. (LexisNexis 30), at *11 (Me. Super. Ct. Feb. 4, 1998) (applying Restatement (Second) of Torts § 909(a)-(d)).



The two restatement sections cited by the Maine courts are similar in content. Section 909 provides that “[p]unitive damages can properly be awarded because of an act by an agent if, but only if:

1. the principal or a managerial agent authorized the doing and the manner of the act, or
2. the agent was unfit and the principal or a managerial agent was reckless in employing or retaining him, or
3. the agent was employed in a managerial capacity and was acting in the scope of employment, or
4. the principal or a managerial agent of the principal ratified or approved the act.”

Restatement (Second) of Torts § 909. Similarly, Restatement (Second) of Agency § 217 (C) provides that “[p]unitive damages can properly be awarded against a master or other principal because of an act by an agent if, but only if:

1. the principal authorized the doing and the manner of the act, or
2. the agent was unfit and the principal was reckless in employing him, or
3. the agent was employed in a managerial capacity and was acting in the scope of employment, or
4. the principal or a managerial agent of the principal ratified or approve the act.”

Restatement (Second) of Agency § 217 (C).

Environmental Liability. The state may seek punitive damages from a defendant if a defendant fails, without sufficient cause, to undertake a removal or remedial action promptly in accordance with a clean-up order (Me. Rev. Stat. Ann. tit. 38 § 568(4)(B) (2010)), or if a defendant fails, without sufficient cause, to abate or remedy an order to abate lead paint (Me. Rev. Stat. Ann. tit. 38 § 1296 (2010)).

Insurer’s Bad Faith. Maine courts refuse “to recognize an independent tort of bad faith resulting from an insurer’s breach of its duty to act in good faith and deal fairly with an insured.” *Marquis v. Farm Family Mut. Ins. Co.*, 628 A.2d 644, 652 (Me. 1993) (“[W]e believe sufficient motivation presently exists to stifle an insurer’s bad faith tendencies without the further imposition of the specter of punitive damages under an independent tort cause of action.”). This rule extends to claims by third-parties, affected by a breach, against the insurer. *Stull v. First Am. Title Ins. Co.*, 2000 ME 21, ¶ 14, 745 A.2d 975, 980.

Product Liability. Punitive damages are available for product liability cases when actual or implied malice is proven. *Tuttle v. Raymond*, 494 A.2d 1353, 1361 (Me. 1985) (“We hold that punitive damages are available based upon tortious conduct only if the defendant acted with malice.”).

Professional Liability. Punitive damages are available if the plaintiff establishes by clear and convincing evidence that the defendant acted with malice. *St. Francis De Sales Fed. Credit Union v. Sun Ins. Co. of N.Y.*, 818 A.2d 995 (Me. 2003); see *McAlister v. Slosberg*, 658 A.2d 658, 660 (Me. 1995) (holding punitive damages available for severe emotional distress arising out of a legal malpractice action where attorney acted with malice in making misrepresentations to client.); see also *Palleschi v. Palleschi*, 704 A.2d 383, 385 (Me. 1998).

Wrongful Death. By statute, punitive damages are recoverable in wrongful death actions and capped at \$250,000. Me. Rev. Stat. Ann. tit. 18-A M.R.S. § 2-804 (West 2004).



II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the wrongdoer)?

Probably Not.

The U.S. District Court for the District of Maine held that the language of an automobile liability policy that provided for payment of "all sums" paid as "damages," included both compensatory and punitive damages. *Concord General Mut. Ins. Co. v. Hills*, 345 F. Supp 1090 (D. Me. 1972).

However, it should be noted that after *Concord General Mut. Ins. Co. v. Hills* the Supreme Court of Maine in *Brale v. Berkshire Mut. Ins. Co.* specifically analyzed the "all sums" language of the insurance contract. The Court concluded that punitive damages are not awarded as compensation "for bodily injury," even though proof of some injury is generally a prerequisite for an award of punitive damages and so the phrase "all sums for bodily injury" should be construed to cover only awards of actual or compensatory damages. *Brale v. Berkshire Mut. Ins. Co.*, 440 A.2d 359, 361-362 (Me. 1982). The Supreme Court of Maine has held that: "Under Maine law deterrence of the tortfeasor is "the proper justification" for an award of punitive damages. *Foss v. Maine Turnpike Authority*, Me., 309 A.2d 339, 345 (1979) (emphasis in original). Allowing punitive damages to be awarded against an insurance company can serve no deterrent function because the wrongdoer is not the person paying the damages." *Brale v. Berkshire Mut. Ins. Co.*, 440 A.2d 359, 362 (Me. 1982) (holding, in an uninsured motorist coverage case, that punitive damages for reckless conduct were not insurable).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

No. In *Gagne v. D. E. Jonsen, Inc.*, the Court noted that it is neither the law in Maine nor the First Circuit that punitive damages are not available on vicarious liability claims. *Gagne v. D. E. Jonsen, Inc.*, 298 F. Supp. 2d 145, 148 (D. Me. 2003).

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Punitive damages are impermissible absent an award of compensatory damages. *Zemero Corp. v. Hall*, 831 A.2d 413, 416 (Me. 2003). The amount awarded by the jury in punitive damages will not be disturbed unless the punitive damages assessed are clearly excessive. *Haworth v. Feigon*, 623 A.2d 150 (Me. 1993).

Factors in determining the propriety of the award of punitive damages are the degree of reprehensibility of the conduct, the disparity between the punitive award and the actual harm, and the amount of sanctions generally imposed for comparable conduct. *Shrader v. Miller*, 855 A.2d 1139, 1145 (Me. 2000) (citing *Harris v. Solely*, 756 A.2d 499, 508 (Me. 2000)). When addressing disparity, Maine courts may begin with a determination of the ratio between the punitive damages award and the compensatory damages. According to the Supreme Judicial Court in *Harris*, the ratio may be high, so long as not "breathtaking." *Harris v. Solely*, 756 A.2d 499, 508 (Me. 2000) (citing *BMW of N. Am. v. Gore*, 517 U.S. 559, 583 (1996)). Specifically, in *Harris*, the Court found a 16:1 ratio between punitive and compensatory damages was not excessive where a landlord had practiced unmitigated abuse of tenants for several months.

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Yes. By statute, punitive damages caps apply. See 18-A Me. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 2-804(b) (caps punitive damages in wrongful death actions at \$250,000); 38 Me. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 568(4)(B) (2010) (caps punitive damages at three times the clean-up costs in certain environmental matters); and 38 Me. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 1296 (caps punitive damages at three times the amount the state expended to take proper action, including the abatement or remediation that should have been conducted by the party so ordered by the court).



Otherwise, the amount of an award of punitive damages is within the sound discretion of the fact finder. The amount awarded by the jury in punitive damages will not be disturbed unless the damages assessed are “clearly excessive.” A punitive damages award should reflect the degree of outrage with which the fact finder views the defendant’s tortious conduct, as well as other relevant aggravating and mitigating factors. *Haworth v. Feigon*, 623 A.2d 150 (Me. 1993).

Maine Human Rights Act (MHRA) Damage Caps. On June 22, 2023, Governor Janet Mills signed Legislative Document (L.D.) 1423, which more than doubled the limits on potential compensatory and punitive damages awards for violations of the MHRA. The new legislation follows recent case law in Maine and the First Circuit Court of Appeals that allows “stacking” of state and federal statutory damages. See *Bell v. O’Reilly Auto Enters., LLC*, 626 F. Supp. 3d 141, 185-187 (Me. 2022); *Rodriguez-Torres v. Caribbean Forms Mfr., Inc.*, 399 F.3d 52. (1st Cir. 2005).

E. To whom are they payable?

Generally, an award of punitive damages is payable to the plaintiff. *Tuttle v. Raymond*, 494 A.2d 1353 (Me. 1985).



MARYLAND

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes, punitive damages are available in Maryland. *Hoffman v. Stamper*, 867 A.2d 276 (Md. 2005).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Proof of actual malice is required to sustain a punitive damages award. *Hoffman v. Stamper*, 867 A.2d 276 (Md. 2005) (although an alternative mental state of reckless indifference may suffice to support a finding of fraud, “it does not suffice to justify an award of punitive damages”). “Actual malice” is defined as conduct of the defendant characterized by evil motive, intent to injure, ill will, or fraud. *Darcars Motors of Silver Spring, Inc. v. Marcin Borzym*, 841 A.2d 828 (Md. 2004).

Standard of Proof. Punitive damages may be awarded only when a plaintiff has demonstrated by clear and convincing evidence that the defendant acted with actual malice. *Darcars Motors of Silver Spring, Inc. v. Marcin Borzym*, 841 A.2d 828 (Md. 2004).

Actions Against State. Punitive damages are not permitted in actions against the state. Md. Code Ann., Cts. & Jud. Proc. § 5-522 (2010).

Breach of Contract. Punitive damages are recoverable in a suit arising out of a contractual relationship only upon proof of actual malice. Punitive damages are prohibited in a pure action for breach of contract. *Carter v. Aramark Sports & Entm’t Servs.*, 835 A.2d 262, 268 (Md. Ct. Spec. App. 2003); *Schaefer v. Miller*, 587 A.2d 491 (Md. 1991); *Battista v. Sav. Bank of Baltimore*, 507 A.2d 203 (Md. 1986).

If an independent tort arises out of a contractual relationship, punitive damages may be proper. *Gen. Motors Corp. v. Piskor*, 381 A.2d 16 (Md. 1977). See also *First Union Nat’l Bank v. Steele Software Sys. Corp.*, 838 A.2d 404 (Md. Ct. Spec. App. 2003) (punitive damages are only allowable when there is a valid award of compensatory damages based on a tort). Where recovery of punitive damages is based on a tort arising out of a contractual relationship, however, plaintiff must prove actual malice. *Nunes v. Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner & Smith, Inc.*, 609 F. Supp. 1055 (D. Md. 1985). See also *Darcars Motors of Silver Spring, Inc. v. Borzym*, 841 A.2d 828 (Md. 2004) (when conversion occurs in the absence of actual malice, punitive damages are not appropriate).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under Maryland law, an employer ordinarily is responsible for the tortious conduct of an employee committed while the employee was acting within the scope of the employment relationship. This rule of *respondereat superior* arises from the relationship of principal and subordinate and rests on the power of control and direction which the superior has over the subordinate. Maryland permits the assessment of punitive damages against an employer for its employee’s conduct, regardless of whether the employer authorized or ratified that conduct. *Embrey v. Holly*, 442 A.2d 966, 970 (Md. 1982).

Environmental Liability. A responsible person who fails without sufficient cause to comply with a final order issued under subtitle § 7-266 is subject to punitive damages, not exceeding three times the amount of any costs that are incurred by the State. MD. CODE ANN. ENVIRONMENT § 7-266.1 (2010).

Product Liability. In product liability cases, “actual malice” necessary to support an award of punitive damages is actual knowledge of a defect (or willful refusal to know) and deliberate disregard of consequences; the standard looks to the state of mind of the defendant. *ACandS v. Godwin*, 667 A.2d 116 (Md. 1995). In product liability cases, the equivalent of the “evil motive,” “intent to defraud” or “intent to injure” that generally characterizes “actual malice” is actual knowledge of defect and deliberate disregard of the consequences. *Owens-Ill., Inc.*, 601 A.2d 633 (Md. 1992), *supra*.



Professional Liability. Punitive damages may be awarded in an action for deceit where the wrong involved some violation of duty springing from a relationship of trust or confidence, or where the fraud is gross. *Finch v. Hughes Aircraft Co.*, 57 Md. App. 190, 247, 469 A.2d 867, 896 (1984). In attorney malpractice cases, punitive damages may be awarded against an attorney for violating his fiduciary duties. *Finch v. Hughes Aircraft Co.*, 57 Md. App. 190, 247, 469 A.2d 867, 896 (1984). In medical malpractice claims, punitive damages may be awarded by the Health Claims Arbitration Committee, as well as the court. *Bishop v. Holy Cross Hosp.*, 410 A.2d 630 (Md. Ct. Spec. App. 1980).

Wrongful Death. Punitive damages are not recoverable under the wrongful death statute. *Cohen v. Rubin*, 460 A.2d 1046 (Md. Ct. Spec. App. 1983); *Estate of Saylor v. Regal Cinemas, Inc.*, 54 F. Supp. 3d 409, 424 (D. Md. 2014)

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes. Public policy is no bar to liability insurance coverage for exemplary damages assessed against the insured. *First Nat'l Bank v. Fid. & Deposit Co.*, 389 A.2d 359 (Md. 1978). An intermediate appellate court has held that punitive damages are insurable even if they are assessed as a result of criminal conduct. See *Med. Mut. Liab. Ins. Soc. v. Miller*, 451 A.2d 930 (Md. Ct. Spec. App. 1982).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable. See II. A. above.

C. What is the relationship of punitive damages to compensatory damages?

Punitive damages must be predicated upon an award of at least nominal compensatory damages. *Darcars Motors of Silver Spring, Inc. v. Borzym*, 841 A.2d 828 (Md. 2004); *V.F. Corp. v. Wrexham Aviation Corp.*, 715 A.2d 188 (Md. 1998). Punitive damages should be apportioned among multiple wrongdoers depending upon degree of culpability and pecuniary status of each. *Embrey v. Holly*, 442 A.2d 966 (Md. 1982). It is proper for the court to consider the pecuniary circumstances of a defendant before imposing exemplary damages to punish the defendant for a wrong. *Crawford v. Mindel*, 469 A.2d 454 (Md. Ct. Spec. App. 1984). See also *Hoffman v. Stamper*, 385 Md. 1 (Md., 2005). In personal injury cases, however, evidence of a defendant's financial means is not admissible until there has been a finding of liability and that punitive damages are supported under the facts. MD. CODE CTS. & JUD. PROC. § 10-913 (a) (2010).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

There are no statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded in Maryland, though awards may not be grossly excessive in relation to the State's interest in punishment and deterrence. *Bowden v. Caldor, Inc.*, 350 Md. 4, 26, 710 A.2d 267, 277 (1998). The standard that is followed is that the award should be (1) in an amount that will deter the defendant and others from similar conduct (see *Owens-Ill., Inc. v. Zenobia*, 601 A.2d 633, *supra*); (2) proportionate to the wrongfulness of the defendant's conduct and the defendant's ability to pay; and (3) not designed to bankrupt or financially destroy a defendant. See *Fraidin v. Weitzman*, 611 A.2d 1046 (Md. Ct. Spec. App. 1992), *cert. denied*, 617 A.2d 1055 (Md. 1993); *Elerin v. Fairfax Sav. Bank, F.S.B.*, 652 A.2d 1117 (Md. 1995). The amount of a punitive damages award does not violate due process when the punitive damages awarded are proportionate to the compensatory damages award, and the trial judge reviews and explains the reasons for allowing the punitive damages award to stand. *Mkt. Tavern, Inc. v. Bowen*, 610 A.2d 295, *cert. denied*, 614 A.2d 84 (Md. 1992).



Maryland courts generally consider punitive damages in the context of nine non-exclusive legal principles articulated by the Court of Appeals in *Bowden v. Caldor, Inc.*, 350 Md. 4, 710 A.2d 267 (1998). The factors are “guideposts to assist a court in reviewing an award” *Id.* at 41. The nine *Bowden* factors are:

1. The defendant’s ability to pay
2. The relationship of the award to statutorily imposed criminal fines
3. The amount of the award in comparison to other final punitive damages awards in the jurisdiction and, in particular, in somewhat comparable cases
4. The gravity of the defendant’s conduct
5. The deterrent value of the award with respect to both the defendant and the general public
6. Whether compensatory damages, including litigation expenses, sufficiently compensate the plaintiff
7. Whether a reasonable relationship exists between compensatory and punitive damages
8. Whether evidence of other final and satisfied punitive damages awards against the same defendant for the same conduct should be considered
9. If separate torts are implicated, whether they grew out of a single occurrence or episode. *Id.*

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Punitive damages are generally payable to the plaintiff. Punitive damages are also recoverable in survivorship cases (by the estate), but not in wrongful death suits (by the next of kin). *Potomac Elec. Power Co. v. Smith*, 558 A.2d 768, cert. denied, 564 A.2d 407 (Md. 1989).



MASSACHUSETTS

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. Massachusetts consistently has maintained that punitive damages are allowable only when expressly authorized by statute, and not at common law. See *Porcaro v. Chen*, 2004 Mass. Super. (LexisNexis 576) (Mass. Super. Ct., 2004); *Santana v. Registrars of Voters*, 502 N.E.2d 132 (Mass. 1986); *Torres v. Attorney Gen.*, 460 N.E.2d 1032, 1039 (Mass. 1984); *USM Corp. v. Marson Fastener Corp.*, 467 N.E.2d 1271 (Mass. 1984); *Int'l Fld. Ins. Co.*, 443 N.E.2d 1308 (Mass. 1983); *Lowell v. Mass. Bonding & Ins. Co.*, 47 N.E.2d 265 (Mass. 1943). See also *Jensen v. Jordan*, 1994 Mass. App. Div. 82 (Mass. Dist. Ct. 1994). Notably, punitive damages are not favored in Massachusetts. See *Pine v. Frederic W. Rust, Third*, 535 N.E.2d 1247 (Mass. 1989). Massachusetts, however, has long-standing statutes providing for treble damages.

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. The conduct required to obtain an award of punitive damages in Massachusetts is set for each cause of action by the statute authorizing the award of punitive damages. *Santana v. Registrars of Voters*, 502 N.E.2d 132 (Mass. 1986).

Standard of Proof. Massachusetts has not specifically addressed the standard of proof in the context of punitive damages. In this context, it is likely that the traditional Massachusetts burden of proof in civil cases, a preponderance of the evidence, would apply. See *LaLonde v. LaLonde*, 566 N.E.2d 620 (Mass. App. Ct. 1991).

Actions Against State. There is no statute expressly authorizing punitive damages against the state. "Absent statutory language that indicates by express terms a waiver of sovereign immunity the Legislature's intent to subject the Commonwealth to liability may be found only when such an intent is clear 'by necessary implication' from the statute's terms." *DeRoche v. Mass. Comm'n Against Discrimination*, 848 N.E.2d 1197, 1206 (Mass. 2006) (citing *Woodbridge v. Worcester State Hosp.*, 423 N.E.2d 782 (Mass. 1981)). However, in an action brought for unlawful discrimination under General Laws of Massachusetts, chapter 151B, section 1, punitive damages may be awarded. *DeRoche*, 848 N.E.2d at 1206 (citing *Bain v. Springfield*, 678 N.E.2d 155 (1997)) (interpreting the statutory language of the General Laws of Massachusetts, chapter 151B, section 1). See also MASS. GEN. L. ANN. c. 93A.

Breach of Contract. Punitive damages are not available in breach of contract cases. *DeRose v. Putnam Mgmt. Co.*, 496 N.E.2d 428, 432 (Mass. 1986) (citing *Hall v. Paine*, 112 N.E. 153 (Mass. 1916)).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Massachusetts courts have yet to address the extent to which punitive damages may be assessed against an employer for the wrongful acts of an employee.

Employment Liability. Punitive damages may be awarded in discrimination cases where the defendant's conduct is outrageous or egregious so as to justify punishment and not merely compensation. Courts, in making an award, should determine that the award is needed to deter such behavior. *Kiely v. Teradyne, Inc.*, 85 Mass. App. Ct. 431, 435-36, 13 N.E.3d 615, 620 review denied, 469 Mass. 1108, 20 N.E.3d 610 (2014).

Courts consider several factors in determining whether a plaintiff committed outrageous or egregious conduct, including: (1) whether there was a conscious or purposeful effort to demean the plaintiff because he or she is a member of a class; (2) whether the defendant was aware that the discriminatory conduct would likely cause serious harm, or recklessly disregarded the likelihood that serious harm would arise; (3) the actual harm to the plaintiff; (4) the defendant's conduct after learning that the initial conduct would likely cause harm; and (5) the duration of the wrongful conduct and any concealment of that conduct by the defendant. *Kiely v. Teradyne, Inc.*, 85 Mass. App. Ct. 431, 436, 13 N.E.3d 615, 620 review denied, 469 Mass. 1108, 20 N.E.3d 610 (2014)



Environmental Liability. MASS. GEN. L. ANN. c. 131, § 5C (2005) allows for punitive damages in claims alleging interference with a lawful taking of fish or wildlife.

General Liability. The statute addressing actions for death by negligence allows for punitive damages “in an amount of not less than \$5,000 in such case as the decedent’s death was caused by the malicious, willful, wanton or reckless conduct of the defendant or by the gross negligence of the defendant.” MASS. GEN. L. ANN. c. 229, § 2. A decedent’s negligence is not taken into account in assessing punitive damages under MASS. GEN. L. ANN. c. 229, § 2. *Lane v. Meserve*, 482 N.E.2d 530 (Mass. App. Ct. 1985). See also *Brockman v. Sweetheart Cup Co.*, 2005 Mass. Super. (LexisNexis 250) (Mass. Super. Ct., 2005).

Massachusetts law denying punitive damages in personal injury actions while allowing them in wrongful death actions does not violate equal protection where there is a rational basis for the distinction in reducing the possibility of excessive damages being awarded in cases where injuries do not result in death. *Freeman v. World Airways, Inc.*, 596 F. Supp. 841 (D.C. Mass. 1984).

Insurer’s Bad Faith. Punitive damages are allowable where evidence warrants a finding of willful or knowing unfair and deceptive insurance practices. *Cohen v. Liberty Mut. Ins. Co.*, 673 N.E.2d 84 (Mass. App. Ct. 1996). See also *Kapp v. Arbella Mut. Insur. Co.*, 689 N.E.2d 1347 (Mass. 1998) (automobile liability insurer’s refusal to settle claim without insisting on release for insured was a knowing, willful and deceptive insurance practice and justified punitive damages).

Product Liability. Punitive damages are not recoverable against manufacturers under Massachusetts law unless expressly authorized by statute. *Moser v. Bostitch Div. of Textron, Inc.*, 609 F. Supp. 917 (D. Mass. 1985); see also *Caperci v. Huntoon*, 397 F.2d 799 (1st Cir. 1968).

Liability under the Massachusetts Consumer Protection Act for intentional misrepresentation or breach of warranty does not automatically trigger an award of punitive damages. *Cambridge Plating Co., Inc. v. Napco, Inc.*, 85 F.3d 752 (First Cir. 1996). See also *Lyon v. Triram Corp.*, 18 Mass. L. Rep. 419 (Mass. Super. Ct., 2004).

Professional Liability. Punitive damages are recoverable against a professional in an action authorized under a specific statute.

See, e.g., MASS. GEN. L. ANN. c. 142A § 7 (2010).

In Massachusetts, any person who engages in the conduct of any trade or commerce and who suffers any loss of money or property, real or personal, as a result of the use or employment by another person who engages in any trade or commerce of an unfair method of competition or an unfair or deceptive act or practice may seek treble damages if the court finds that the use or employment of the method of competition or the act or practice was a willful or knowing violation of chapter 93A. MASS. GEN. L. ANN. c. 93A § 11.

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Probably. Massachusetts law does not reflect any public policy against an insurer indemnifying its insured for punitive damages awarded in a wrongful death case based on a finding that reckless or grossly negligent conduct caused bodily injury and thus death. *Williamson-Green v. Interstate Fire & Cas. Co.*, 2017 Mass. Super. LEXIS 70, *6. The Supreme Judicial Court held that liability arising from harm caused by reckless misconduct is insurable, and that there is not “any public policy against” a policy indemnifying an insured against liability for recklessness. *Id.* at *6-7

However, Massachusetts courts have given limited treatment to the question of the insurability of punitive damages. See *Santos v. Lumbermens*, 556 N.E.2d 983 (Mass. 1990). Based on the uninsured motor vehicle statute and the language of insurance policies, the Santos court held that directly assessed punitive damages were not generally recoverable under the terms of the plaintiff’s uninsured motorist policy.



Drawing on the decision in *Santos*, a Massachusetts court held that it would not enforce agreements which require indemnification against another party's gross negligence. *CSX Transp., Inc. v. Massachusetts Bay Transp. Auth.*, 697 F. Supp. 2d 213, 227 (D. Mass. 2010). Although CSX was not an insurance matter, the Court's holding suggests that Massachusetts would find punitive damages arising out of an insured's gross negligence to be uninsurable.

In *Andover Newton Theological School Inc. v. Continental Casualty Co.*, the Supreme Judicial Court held that M.G.L. c 175 § 47 (prohibiting insurer from insuring "any person against legal liability for causing injury, other than bodily injury, by his deliberate or intentional crime or wrongdoing") prohibits insurance coverage only if the insured knew that the act was wrongful. *Andover Newton Theological Sch. Inc. v. Cont'l Cas. Co.*, 409 Mass. 350 (1991).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable. See Section II A.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

In Massachusetts, punitive damages may be awarded without an award of compensatory damages. See *Robin Bain v. City of Springfield*, 678 N.E.2d 155 (Mass. 1997) ("There is no requirement that punitive damages may only be awarded if there is an award of compensatory damages."). See also *Gasior v. Mass. Gen. Hosp.*, 846 N.E.2d 1133 (Mass. 2006) (discussing that the purpose of punitive damages has been described as punishment and deterrence, rather than compensation of an injured party). However, the Massachusetts Court of Appeals, recently noted in an employment discrimination claim, that one of the factors determining whether defendant's conduct justified an award of punitive damages was the actual harm to plaintiff, suggesting that it may be difficult for a court to award punitive damages, but not compensatory damages. *Kiely v. Teradyne, Inc.*, 85 Mass. App. Ct. 431, 436, 13 N.E.3d 615, 620 review denied, 469 Mass. 1108, 20 N.E.3d 610 (2014).

Where both compensatory and punitive damages are awarded, Massachusetts courts recognize that single-digit multipliers are more likely to comport with due process than significantly larger ratios. *Ciccarelli v. Sch. Dep't of Lowell*, 70 Mass. App. Ct. 787, 797-98, 877 N.E.2d 609, 619 (2007); *State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co. v. Campbell*, 538 U.S. 408, 123 S. Ct. 1513, 155 L. Ed. 2d 585 (2003). Courts have, however, found that punitive awards of \$100,000, even where no compensatory damages were awarded, did not necessarily exceed rationality. *Borne v. Haverhill Golf & Country Club, Inc.*, 58 Mass. App. Ct. 306, 791 N.E.2d 903 (2003)

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Any such limitations or caps on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded are addressed specifically in each Massachusetts statute that authorizes an award of punitive damages. See, e.g., MASS. GEN. L. ANN. c. 258, § 2, which limits punitive damages to \$100,000 in actions against municipal entities; MASS. GEN. L. ANN. c. 15C, § 22A, which limits punitive damages to \$100,000 in actions against the state student loan authority; MA. ST. 23A§2-164, which limits punitive damages to \$100,000 in actions against the state home mortgage finance authority.

In some cases, no caps are applicable. *Ciccarelli v. Sch. Dep't of Lowell*, 70 Mass. App. Ct. 787, 797, 877 N.E.2d 609, 618 (2007) (noting there is no statutory cap on the amount of punitive damages available in a retaliation claim. Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 151B, § 9.). Where there is no cap on punitive damages, a judge or an appellate court must scrutinize the relationship between actual damages and the award of punitive damages to determine whether the punitive damages awarded are excessive. *Id.* In doing so, courts examine three factors: (1) the degree of reprehensibility of the defendant's conduct, (2) the ratio of the punitive damage award to the actual harm inflicted on the plaintiff; and (3) a comparison of the punitive damages award and the civil or criminal penalties that could be imposed for comparable misconduct. *Ciccarelli v. Sch. Dep't of Lowell*, 70 Mass. App. Ct. 787, 797-98, 877 N.E.2d 609, 619 (2007).



E. To whom are they payable?

Where a decedent has no spouse or issue, the next of kin may recover consortium-like damages only, but any punitive damages and damages for conscious pain and suffering are recoverable by the decedent's estate. See *Santos, supra*. See also *Lyon v. Triram Corp.*, 18 Mass. L. Rep. 419 (Mass. Super. Ct. 2004) (a defendant found liable under General Laws of Massachusetts chapter 22, section 2 is liable for punitive damages) 419, *supra*.; *Burt v. Meyer*, 508 N.E.2d 598 (Mass. 1987) (punitive damages of \$200,000 were awarded to the widow of a decedent who left all of his property in his will to his wife and nothing to his children).



MICHIGAN

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

No. It is well established that only compensatory damages are available in Michigan, and punitive sanctions may not be imposed. *Rafferty v. Markovitz*, 602 N.W.2d 367 (Mich. 1999); *McAuley v. Gen. Motors Corp.*, 578 N.W.2d 282 (Mich. 1998).

While statutory exemplary damages may be permitted, these exemplary damages are recoverable as compensation and not as punishment. *McPeak v. McPeak*, 593 N.W.2d 180, 184 (Mich. Ct. App. 1999). Exemplary damages are proper if they compensate for the humiliation, sense of outrage, and indignity resulting from injustices maliciously, willfully, and wantonly inflicted upon the other party. *Id.* at 490.

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. In order to verify an award of exemplary damages, the act complained of must be voluntary and inspire feelings of humiliation, outrage and indignity. *McPeak*, 593 N.W.2d at 183; *Veselenak v. Smith*, 327 N.W.2d 261 (Mich. 1982). The act or conduct must be malicious or so willful and wanton as to demonstrate a reckless disregard of the plaintiff's rights. *McPeak*, 593 N.W.2d at 183; *Bailey v. Graves*, 309 N.W.2d 166, 169 (Mich. 1981). It is not essential to prove direct evidence of an injury to the plaintiff's feelings. *Id.* at 184. Rather, the question is whether the injury to feelings and mental suffering are natural and proximate in view of the nature of the defendant's conduct. *Id.*, *Green v. Evans*, 401 N.W.2d 250 (Mich. Ct. App. 1985).

Standard of Proof. Exemplary damages are only recoverable if the plaintiff has proven by a preponderance of the evidence, malice, willful and wanton misconduct or negligence so great as to indicate reckless disregard of the rights of another. *Id.* at 152; *Bailey v. Graves*, 411 Mich. 309 N.W.2d 166 (1981).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under Michigan law, the same analysis as above applies - exemplary or punitive damages are recoverable as compensation to the plaintiff, not as punishment of the defendant. Standard vicarious liability principles apply.

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Not applicable. See I.A. above. However, because of the compensatory rather than punitive character of exemplary damages, the public policy disfavoring the shifting of punishment arguably does not apply to exemplary damages awards. No case or statute, however, specifically addresses this point.

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

It is likely that an award of exemplary damages that are assessed vicariously would be insurable for the reasons stated above in II.A., *supra*.



C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Exemplary damages are a class of compensatory damages that allow for compensation for injury to feelings. *McPeak*, 593 N.W.2d 180.

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

There is no cap on the amount of exemplary damages that may be awarded.

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Exemplary damages are payable to the party claiming them as compensation. *McPeak*, 593 N.W.2d 180.



MINNESOTA

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes, Minnesota allows punitive damages to be awarded to a plaintiff. Minn. Stat. Ann. § 549.20(1) – (4) (2010).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. For a plaintiff to receive a punitive damage award, the action in question must be: (1) civil in nature, and (2) there must be clear and convincing evidence that the defendant “showed deliberate disregard for the rights or safety of others.” Minn. Stat. Ann. § 549.20(1) (2010). If both prongs referenced above are satisfied, the next step would be to analyze ten different factors outlined in Minn. Stat. Ann. § 549.20(3), that have a bearing upon whether a punitive damage should be awarded, and the amount of the award.

These ten factors are as follows: (1) the seriousness of hazard to the public arising from the defendant’s misconduct, (2) the profitability of the misconduct to the defendant, (3) the duration of the misconduct, (4) the concealment of any misconduct, (5) the degree of the defendant’s awareness of the hazard and of its excessiveness, (6) the attitude and conduct of the defendant upon discovery of the misconduct, (7) the number and level of employees involved in causing or concealing the misconduct, (8) the financial condition of the defendant, (9) the total effect of other punishment likely to be imposed upon the defendant as a result of the misconduct, including compensatory and punitive damage awards to the plaintiff and other similarly situated persons, and (10) the severity of any criminal penalty to which the defendant may be subject. Minn. Stat. Ann. § 549.20(3).

Standard of Proof. “Clear and convincing evidence” that the acts of the defendant show deliberate disregard for the rights or safety of others is required to obtain punitive damages. Minn. Stat. § 549.20(1(a) (2010). Clear and convincing evidence is that which is more than a preponderance, but less than proof beyond a reasonable doubt. *Hammond v. Northland Counseling Ctr., Inc.*, 1998 U.S. Dist. (LexisNexis 9133) (D. Minn. Feb. 27, 1998). “Where the evidence is sufficient to permit the jury to conclude that it is ‘highly probable’ that the defendant acted with deliberate disregard to the rights or safety of others, the ‘clear and convincing’ standard would be satisfied. *Weber v. Anderson*, 269 N.W.2d 892, 895-96 (Minn. 1978).

Pleading Requirements. Minnesota law requires that upon commencement of a civil action, the plaintiff “must” not seek punitive damages in their initial complaint and/or pleading. Minn. Stat. §§ 549.191-.20 (1990). Only after filing their initial suit, may a party amend their pleadings to claim an award for punitive damages, if the court finds a prima facie evidence supporting such a damage award. *Id.* Within a motion for punitive damages, the part must “allege the applicable legal basis” under Minn. Stat. §§ 549.20, or another law for awarding punitive damages in an action. *Id.* This motion must be accompanied by one or more affidavits, showing the factual basis for the claim. *Id.*

Actions Against State. In Minnesota, “the state will not pay punitive damages” on any claim asserted against them. Minn. Stat. § 3.736 (Subd. 2. Procedure).

Breach of Contract. Under Minnesota law, punitive damages are not permitted for a breach of contract action, unless (1) the punitive damages are authorized by a specific statute, or (2) the contract breach involves an independent tort. *Minnesota-Iowa Television Co. v. Watonwan T.V. Improv. Asso.* 294 N.W. 2d 297, 309 (Minn. 1980), (citing) *Haagenson v. National Farmers Union Property and Casualty Co.*, 277 N.W.2d 648, 652 (Minn. 1979).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Minnesota law allows for the award of punitive damages against a principal or employer based upon vicarious liability for the acts of their agent or employee, only when one of four specific factors are satisfied. *Potthoff v. Jefferson Lines, Inc.*, 363 N.W.2d 771, 778 (Minn. Ct. App. 1985).



The factors are as follows: (1) the employer authorized the employee's actions, (2) the employee was unfit and the employer deliberately disregarded a high probability that the employee was unfit, (3) the employee was employed in a managerial capacity and acted within the scope of that employment, or (4) the employer or a managerial agent of the employer, approved the employee's actions. Minn. Stat. Ann. § 549.20(1), (2).

Product Liability. Minnesota law permits the award of punitive damages in a product liability action, only if the plaintiff can provide "clear and convincing evidence showing that the defendant acted with a deliberate disregard for the rights or safety of others." Minn. Stat. Ann. § 549.20; *Berczyk v. Emerson Tool Co.*, 291 F. Supp. 2d 1004, 1008 (D. Minn. 2003); see also *Hodder v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.*, 426 N.W.2d 826, 835 (Minn. 1988), (held punitive damages award is proper where manufacturer's conduct exhibited willful indifference to safety of others).

Professional Liability. No statute or case law prohibits or otherwise limits imposition of punitive damages against professionals. Punitive damages are available against professionals under agency principles, along with other categories of defendants under general statutory authority. Accordingly, punitive damages may be assessed against professionals "upon clear and convincing evidence that the acts of the defendant show deliberate disregard for the rights or safety of others." Minn. Stat. § 549.20(1)(a) (2010).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

The insurability against punitive damages (to the benefit of the wrongdoer) is contingent upon the manner in which the court assess the damages in question. Minn. Stat. Ann. § 60A.06(4). Punitive damages assessed as vicarious damages are legally insurable to the principal/employer, to allow for protection against the misconduct of their agent/employee. *Perl v. St. Paul Fire & Marine Ins. Co.*, 345 N.W.2d 209, 216 (Minn. 1984) (permitting insurance to cover law firm's vicarious liability for forfeited fees, but denying insurance coverage to an attorney for fees the attorney was required to forfeit due to the attorney's own misconduct and stating that "while the law firm, quite properly, is held liable to the client for the misconduct of one of its partners or members, we see no reason why the law firm should not be free to acquire insurance, if it can, protecting itself from vicarious liability for the misconduct").

Alternatively, insurance does not cover punitive damages that are assessed directly to the plaintiff, without the use of the vicarious liability doctrine. This would be a case where "the conduct stems from an intentional act." See *Caspersen v. Webber*, 298 Minn. 93, 213 N.W.2d 327, 330 (Minn. 1973) (disallowing insurance coverage of punitive damages for assault).

It is important to note however, that the court in *Seren Innovations, Inc. v. Transon Ins. Co.*, explained that "absent policy language providing coverage for punitive damages, we will not create coverage where coverage does not exist, even if such coverage would fall within the vicarious-liability exception to the punitive-damages-coverage prohibition." *Seren Innovations, Inc. v. Transon Ins. Co.*, 2006 Minn. App. Unpub. LEXIS 535 (Minn. Ct. App. May 23, 2006).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not necessarily. As explained in II (A) above, Minnesota law offers the ability for a wrongdoer to insure against the award of punitive damages in a case where the punitive damages are vicariously assessed. Minn. Stat. Ann. § 60A.06 (4).

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Punitive damages are not available without compensatory damages. *Meixner v. Buecksler*, 13 N.W.2d 754, 757 (Minn. 1944). See also *Bucko v. First Minn. State Bank*, 452 N.W.2d 244 (Minn. Ct. App. 1990), *aff'd in part, and rev'd in part*, 471 N.W.2d 95 (punitive damages award reversed because plaintiff "did not demonstrate any compensable loss").



D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

No, there is no overt cap via state statute that caps the amount of punitive damages awarded within Minnesota. Minn. Stat. Ann. § 549.20(4). All that is required from the trial court, is to review the award amount, and determine how that amount relates to the specific factors outlined in Minn. Stat. Ann. § 549.20(3). Via an analysis of these 10 factors, the award amount is then weighed in relation to the gravity of the conduct that gave rise to the punitive damage award. § 549.20(4). The court follows a guideline by which “the amount awarded should not exceed the level necessary to punish and deter the wrongful conduct. Id

Once the trial court has made their determination on the amount of punitive damages that should be awarded to the plaintiff(s), the appellate court is tasked with reviewing the award amount “for an abuse of discretion.” Minn. Stat. Ann. § 549.20(5). The appellate court will not change the amount of punitive damages decided by lower court, unless, they determine the amount to be unreasonably excessive. Id. See also *Hammerstein v. Reiling*, 115 N.W.2d 259, 266 (Minn. 1962).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Punitive damages are payable to the plaintiff, and perhaps to “other similarly situated persons.” See Minn. Stat. § 549.20 subd. 3 (2010). Minnesota also allows punitive damages in wrongful death cases to be payable to the surviving spouse and next of kin in proportion to the pecuniary loss severally suffered by the death. MINN. STAT. § 573.02 subd. 1); *Swenson v. Emerson Elec. Co.*, 374 N.W.2d 690, (Minn. 1985); *Montpetit v. Allina Health Sys.*, 2000 Minn. App. (LexisNexis 1051) (Minn. Ct. App. October 10, 2000).



MISSISSIPPI

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes, punitive damages are available in Mississippi. MISS. CODE ANN. § 11-1-65 (2010).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Punitive damages may be awarded only if a claimant proves that the defendant against whom punitive damages are sought acted with actual malice, gross negligence that evidences a willful, wanton or reckless disregard for the safety of others, or committed actual fraud. MISS. CODE ANN. § 11-1-65(1)(a). See also *J.C. Johnson v. Diversified Health Servs., Inc.*, 735 So. 2d 1051, 1052 (Miss. 1999) (directed verdict on punitive damages was not in error where no reasonable fact finder could be convinced that appellees defrauded appellants or that their conduct was grossly negligent); *Wallace*, 672 So. 2d at 728. See also *Spann v. Robinson Prop. Group, L.P.*, 970 F. Supp. 564 (N.D. Miss. 1997) (customer at a casino could not recover punitive damages for injuries sustained when cocktail waitress spilled hot coffee on his back, where the customer admitted that someone bumped into the waitress and that the waitress did not act with gross negligence). Punitive damages may be awarded where there is a finding of intentional infliction of damage or aggravated conduct that amounts to infliction of harm, such as willfulness, wantonness, malice, gross negligence, oppression, gross fraud or reckless disregard. See *U.S. Indus., Inc. v. McClare Furniture Co.*, 371 So. 2d 391, 393 (Miss. 1979). See also *Weems v. American Sec. Ins. Co.*, 486 So. 2d 1222, 1226 (Miss. 1986); *Caldwell v. Alfa Ins. Co.*, 686 So. 2d 1092, 1095 (Miss. 1996); *Universal Life Ins. Co. v. Veasley*, 610 So. 2d 290, 293 (Miss. 1992); *Deliefde v. Nixon*, 2021 WL 41264680, *10 (S.D. Miss. September 13, 2021).

In determining an award of punitive damages, the trier of fact is required to consider the following:

1. Defendant's financial condition and net worth
2. The nature and reprehensibility of the defendant's wrongdoing, for example, the impact of the defendant's conduct on the plaintiff, or the relationship of the defendant to the plaintiff
3. The defendant's awareness of the amount of harm being caused and the defendant's motivation in causing such harm
4. The duration of the defendant's misconduct and whether the defendant attempted to conceal such misconduct
5. Any other circumstances shown by the evidence that bear on determining a proper amount of punitive damages.

MISS. CODE ANN. § 11-1-65(1)(e) (2010).

Standard of Proof. To obtain punitive damages, clear and convincing evidence is required that the defendant against whom punitive damages are sought acted with actual malice, gross negligence that evidences a willful, wanton or reckless disregard for the safety of others, or committed actual fraud. MISS. CODE ANN. § 11-1-65(1)(a).

Actions Against State. Punitive damages are not permitted against a governmental entity or its employee for any act or omission for which immunity is waived. Miss. Code Ann. § 11-46-15 (2010).

Breach of Contract. Although punitive damages are not ordinarily recoverable in cases involving breach of contract, punitive damages are recoverable where the breach results from an intentional wrong, insult, or abuse, as well as from such gross negligence as constitutes an independent tort. *Sessoms v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 634 So. 2d 516, 519 (Miss. 1993). In these instances, punitive damages act to punish and are to set an example, thereby discouraging others from similar behavior. As such, punitive



damages are allowed only with caution and within narrow limits. *Am. Funeral Assur. Co. v. Hubbs*, 700 So. 2d 283, 285-86 (Miss. 1997), *reh'g denied*, 700 So. 2d 331; *see also Snow Lake Shores Prop. Owners v. Smith*, 610 So. 2d 357, 362 (Miss. 1992); and *Sessoms v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 634 So. 2d 516, 519 (Miss. 1993). The issue of punitive damages in suits for tortious breach of contract, breach of fiduciary duties and fraud is governed by the common law, not by the provisions of § 11-1-65(1). This is because § 11-1-65(2)(a) specifically exempts contract actions from the provisions of the statute. *Hurst v. Sw. Miss. Legal Servs. Corp.*, 708 So. 2d 1347, 1348 (Miss. 1998).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. In Mississippi, punitive damages can be assessed against an employer for an employee's actions within the scope of employment, when the employer acted with actual malice, gross negligence which evidences a willful, wanton or reckless disregard for the safety of others, or committed actual fraud. *Doe v. Salvation Army*, 835 So. 2d 76, 77 (Miss. 2003) (Upholding the trial court's determination that a punitive damages claim against an employer would not be submitted to the jury, where the trial court found no actual malice, no intentional acts and no gross negligence by the employer). *See also*, Miss. Code Ann. § 11-1-65 (a) (specifying the proof required for punitive damages to be awarded). However, punitive damages cannot be awarded on the basis of vicarious liability if an employer has already admitted such. *See Carothers v. City of Water Valley*, 242 So. 3d 138, 144 (Miss. Ct. App. 2017) ("the [defendant] admitted vicarious liability. Thus, there was no need to show that it was negligent in hiring, training, retaining, or entrusting [the defendant employee].").

Environmental Liability. Punitive damages are permitted in the context of environmental liability. Miss. Code Ann. § 17-17-29.

Insurer's Bad Faith. Mississippi courts have upheld punitive damages awards in insurance bad faith suits. *See Mut. Life Ins. Co. v. Estate of Wesson by Hall*, 517 So. 2d 521, 533 (Miss. 1987), *cert. denied*, 486 U.S. 1043 (1988) (court reduced punitive damages recovery to life insurance policy's beneficiaries from \$8 million to \$1.5 million, but did allow the punitive damages against the insurer for bad faith refusal to pay the value of the policy); *Ross-King-Walker, Inc. v. Henson*, 672 So. 2d 1188, 1191 (Miss. 1996) (workers' compensation agent misrepresentation is sufficient to support punitive damages award against insurer); *Valley Forge Ins. Co./CNA Ins. Co. v. Strickland*, 620 So. 2d 535, 541 (Miss. 1993) (auto insurer's breach of a duty to seriously injured insured justified an award of punitive damages); *Bankers Life & Cas. Co. v. Crenshaw*, 483 So. 2d 254, 270 (Miss. 1985) (denial of insured's claim based on exclusion known to be invalid under Mississippi law); *Standard Life Ins. Co. v. Veal*, 354 So. 2d 239, 248 (Miss. 1977) (refusal to pay legitimate claim). The test to award punitive damages "is the same in bad faith refusal cases as in any other case where punitive damages are sought." *Weems v. Am. Sec. Ins. Co.*, 486 So. 2d 1222, 1226 (Miss. 1986).

Libel and Slander. Mississippi courts allow for recovery of punitive damages in libel and slander actions. *See Journal Publ'g Co. v. McCullough*, 743 So. 2d 352 (Miss. 1999).

Product Liability. In product liability matters, the seller of a product other than the manufacturer shall not be liable for punitive damages unless the seller exercised substantial control over that aspect of the design, testing, manufacture, packaging or labeling of the product that caused the harm for which recovery of damages is sought; the seller altered or modified the product, and the alteration or modification was a substantial factor in causing the harm for which recovery of damages is sought; the seller had actual knowledge of the defective condition of the product at the time he supplied same; or the seller made an express factual representation about the aspect of the product that caused the harm for which recovery of damages is sought. Miss. Code Ann. § 11-1-65(2).

Professional Liability. Punitive damages may be recovered against a professional only where the defendant acted with actual malice, gross negligence that evidences a willful, wanton or reckless disregard for the safety of others, or committed actual fraud. Miss. Code Ann. § 11-1-65; *see also Causey v. Sanders*, 998 So. 2d 393 (Miss. 2008) (court found punitive damages were not proper in a medical malpractice action where there was no evidence that the doctor demonstrated a willful or malicious wrong or a gross and reckless disregard for the rights of others).



II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes, in Mississippi, an insurance company's liability for all damages arising from bodily injury includes punitive damages. Insurance coverage of punitive damages does not violate Mississippi public policy. The extent or limit of an insurer's liability for punitive damages is governed by the agreement of the parties as reflected by the actual language in the policy of insurance. *Old Sec. Cas. Ins. Co. v. Clemmer*, 455 So. 2d 781, 783 (Miss. 1984), as corrected 458 So. 2d 732.; see also *Anthony v. Frith*, 394 So. 2d 867, 868 (Miss. 1981).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable, as insurance coverage of punitive damages is permitted in Mississippi. See II.A. above.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Actual damages must be awarded in any case prior to a punitive damages award. *Hopewell v. Trustmark Nat'l Bank*, 680 So. 2d 812, 820 (Miss. 1996); *Miss. Power Co. v. Jones*, 369 So. 2d 1381, 1386-87 (Miss. 1979). Punitive damages may be considered if, but only if, compensatory damages have been awarded. MISS. CODE ANN. § 11-1-65(1)(c) (2010). An award of punitive damages must be reasonable and must be rationally related to the purpose to punish what occurred giving rise to the award and to deter its repetition by the defendant and others. MISS. CODE ANN. § 11-1-65(1)(f)(i). In determining whether an award of punitive damages is excessive, the court shall take into account the following factors:

1. Whether there is a reasonable relationship between the punitive damages award and the harm likely to result from the defendant's conduct, as well as the harm that actually occurred
2. The degree of reprehensibility of the defendant's conduct, the duration of the conduct, the defendant's awareness, any concealment, and the existence and frequency of similar past conduct
3. The financial condition and net worth of the defendant
4. In mitigation, the imposition of criminal sanctions on the defendant for its conduct and the existence of other civil awards against the defendant for the same conduct.

MISS. CODE ANN. § 11-1-65(1)(f)(ii).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Yes, MISS. CODE ANN. § 11-1-65(3) provides as follows:

"In any civil action where an entitlement to punitive damages has been established under applicable laws, no award of punitive damages shall exceed the following:

1. \$20 million for a defendant with a net worth of more than \$1 billion;
2. \$15 million for a defendant with a net worth of more than \$750 million but not more than \$1 billion;
3. \$5 million for a defendant with a net worth of more than \$500 million but not more than \$750 million;



4. \$3.75 million for a defendant with a net worth of more than \$100 million but not more than \$500 million;
5. \$2.5 million for a defendant with a net worth of more than \$50 million but not more than \$100 million; or
6. Two percent (2%) of the defendant's net worth for a defendant with a net worth of \$50 million or less."

The limitations imposed shall not be disclosed to the trier of fact but shall be applied by the court to any punitive damages verdict. MISS. CODE ANN. § 11-1-65(3)(c). The limitations also do not apply to actions for damages or injury resulting from a defendant's acts/failure to act if the defendant was (1) convicted of a felony under the laws of the state or under federal law that caused the damages or injury or (2) while the defendant was under the influence of alcohol or drugs other than lawfully prescribed drugs administered in accordance with a prescription. MISS. CODE ANN. § 11-1-65(3)(d).

Nothing in this statute shall be construed as creating a right to a punitive damages award or to limit the duty of the court, or the appellate courts, to scrutinize all punitive damages awards, ensure that all punitive damages awards comply with applicable procedural evidentiary and constitutional requirements, and to order remittitur where appropriate. MISS. CODE ANN. § 11-1-65(4).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Generally, punitive damages are payable to the plaintiff.



MISSOURI

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes, punitive damages generally are available in Missouri. Mo. Rev. Stat. §510.261, §510.263, §537 (2023); *Litchfield v. May Dep't Stores Co.*, 845 S.W.2d 596, 600 (Mo. Ct. App. 1992). However, where a statute creates a cause of action unknown to common law, punitive damages will not be allowed unless specified in that statute. *Williams-Payton v. Williams*, 12 S.W.3d 302, 307 (Mo. 2000).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. "In a negligence action, punitive damages may be awarded if the defendant knew or had reason to know a high degree of probability existed that the action would result in injury." *Letz v. Turbomeca Engine Corp.*, 975 S.W. 2d 155, 164-65 (Mo. Ct. App. 1998); *Dodson v. Ferrara*, 491 S.W.3d 542, 563 (Mo. 2016). For an award of punitive damages in a negligence action, "plaintiff must show (1) defendant knew or should have known, based on the surrounding circumstances that its conduct created a high degree of probability of injury, and (2) defendant showed complete indifference to, or conscious or reckless disregard for, the safety of others." *Litchfield v. May Dep't Stores Co.*, 845 S.W.2d 596, 599 (Mo. Ct. App. 1992). Punitive damages are not appropriate for mere inadvertence, mistake or errors of judgment that constitute ordinary negligence. *Id.* at 600, quoting Restatement (Second) of Torts § 908 (1979). The necessary mental state for punitive damages is "when a person intentionally does a wrongful act without just cause or excuse." *Hallmark Cards, Inc. v. Monitor Clipper Partners, LLC*, 758 F.3d 1051, 1060 (8th Cir. 2014) quoting *Entwistle v. Mo. Youth Soccer Ass'n*, 259 S.W.3d 558, 573 (Mo. Ct. App. 2008); see also *Jo Ann Howard & Assocs., P.C. v. Cassity*, 146 F. Supp. 3d 1048, 1064 (E.D. Mo. 2015), *aff'd in part, rev'd in part*, 868 F.3d 637 (8th Cir. 2017). When a person intentionally commits a wrong and knew it was wrong at the time, evil motive and wanton behavior is established. *Id.* Evil intent can also be found when a person recklessly disregards the rights and interests of another. *Id.* While punitive damages may not be used for the purpose of punishing a defendant for harming others which are not the plaintiff, a plaintiff may show harm to others in order to demonstrate reprehensibility which is party of the punitive damages equation. *Kirk v. Schaeffler Grp. USA, Inc.*, No. 3:13-cv-5032-DGK, 2016 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 22149, at *7 (W.D. Mo. Feb. 24, 2016).

Standard of Proof. Clear and convincing evidence is required to obtain punitive damages. *Smoot v. Sinclair Oil Corp.*, No. ED 74302, 1999 WL 1219882 at *38 (Mo. Ct. App. Dec. 21, 1999). Because punitive damages are extraordinary and harsh, the Missouri Supreme Court concluded that the higher "clear and convincing" standard of proof is required. *Rodriguez v. Suzuki Motor Corp.*, 936 S.W.2d 104, 111 (Mo. 1996). A defendant "shall only be severally liable for the percentage of punitive damages for which fault is attributed to such defendant by the trier of fact." Mo. Rev. Stat. § 537.067 (2023).

Actions Against State. Under the Missouri Revised Statutes, there shall be no award for punitive or exemplary damages on any claim against a public entity within the scope of sections 537.600 to 537.650. Mo. Rev. Stat. § 537.610(3) (2023); see also *Sykes v. City of Pine Lawn*, 2015 WL 4162775, at *4-5 (E.D. Mo. 2015); *Amalgamated Transit Union Div. 788 v. Bi-State Development Agency of Missouri-Illinois Metropolitan District, .*, No. 4:15-CV-00455-AGF, 2015 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 74908, at *6 (E.D. Mo. June 10, 2015).

Arbitration. An arbitrator is empowered to settle the matter with the same set of remedies available in court including compensatory, statutory, and punitive damages, injunctive and other equitable relief, and attorneys' fees and costs. *Lopez v. H & R Block, Inc.*, 491 S.W.3d 221, 223 (Mo. App. 2016).

Breach of Contract. Missouri recognizes an exception to the general rule that punitive damages are not available for breach of contract, and permits punitive damages when the plaintiff alleges and proves conduct in addition to the breach of contract that amounts to an independent and willful tort. *Ladeas v. Carter*, 845 S.W.2d 45 (Mo. Ct. App. 1992).



Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under Missouri law, an employer may be vicariously liable for punitive damages related to employee misconduct in the same manner as the employer would be liable for compensatory damages. See *Peak v. W. T. Grant Co.*, 386 S.W.2d 685, 691 (Mo. Ct. App. 1964). Accordingly, an employer may be found liable for the act of an employee where the act was done in the scope of his employment, and to accomplish the purpose of that employment, even if it was done contrary to the express orders of the employer. *Id.* at 690.

Environmental Liability. Punitive damages may be recovered in the context of environmental liability. See Mo. Rev. Stat. § 260.530 (2023); *Bower v. Hog Builders, Inc.*, 461 S.W.2d 784 (Mo. 1970). In *Bower*, the Missouri Supreme Court held that property owners were entitled to recover punitive damages against a hog farm that allowed waste to overflow from the farm to the plaintiffs' properties and contaminate their wells.

Fraudulent Misrepresentation. Punitive damages may be awarded in cases of fraudulent misrepresentation and breach of contract. *United States of America v. Julie R. Bernet*, No. 2:15-cv-04245-NKL, 2016 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 59894, at *2 (W.D. Mo. May 5, 2016).

Insurer's Bad Faith. Punitive damages may be recovered against an insurer for bad faith. Mo. Rev. Stat. § 375.420 (2023); *Smith v. AF & L Ins. Co.*, 147 S.W.3d 767 (Mo. Ct. App. 2004).

§ 375.420. **Vexatious refusal to pay claim, damages for, exception** provides: In any action against any insurance company to recover the amount of any loss under a policy of automobile, fire, cyclone, lightning, life, health, accident, employers' liability, burglary, theft, embezzlement, fidelity, indemnity, marine or other insurance except automobile liability insurance, if it appears from the evidence that such company has refused to pay such loss without reasonable cause or excuse, the court or jury may, in addition to the amount thereof and interest, allow the plaintiff damages not to exceed twenty percent of the first fifteen hundred dollars of the loss, and ten percent of the amount of the loss in excess of fifteen hundred dollars and a reasonable attorney's fee; and the court shall enter judgment for the aggregate sum found in the verdict.

Product Liability. To submit punitive damages to the jury in a product liability case, a plaintiff must present evidence that the defendant placed in commerce an unreasonably dangerous product with actual knowledge of the product's defect. *Letz*, 975 S.W.2d 155, 164-165, *supra*. Failure to recall may be a basis for a claim of punitive damages in products liability cases. *Hackethal v. Harbor Freight Tools USA, Inc.*, No. 4:15CV01398 ERW, 2016 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 20923, at *5 (E.D. Mo. Feb. 22, 2016).

Under Missouri law the test for punitive damages is a strict one. Inadequate warnings does not amount to conscious disregard. Punitive damages may be awarded in a negligence case or a products liability case. Punitive damages are appropriate under either theory of recovery only if the defendant showed a complete indifference to or conscious disregard for the safety of others. Ultimately, the defendant must have acted with some degree of wantonness or bad motive. A contention that a defendant could not be subject to punitive damages because the FDA expressly approved the marketing and labeling of a product is not dispositive. Thus, even though defendants arguably complied with regulatory programs, plaintiffs presented sufficient evidence of defendants' evil motives or reckless disregard to submit the claim of punitive damages to the jury.

B.F. v. Abbott Laboratories, Inc., No. 4:12-CV-1760 CAS, 2016 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 47618, at *7 (E.D. Mo. Apr. 8, 2016).



Professional Liability. Any resident of a convalescent, nursing or boarding home who is deprived of any right created by statute may seek punitive damages. Mo. Rev. Stat. § 198.093 (2023).

Punitive damages were proper in a case where a nonregistered pharmacist filled a prescription without supervision of a registered pharmacist. *Duensing v. Huscher*, 431 S.W.2d 169 (Mo. 1968). “All actions tried before a jury involving punitive damages, including tort actions based upon improper health care, shall be conducted in a bifurcated trial before the same jury if requested by any party.” Mo. Rev. Stat. § 510.263 (2023).

Wrongful Death. Aggravating circumstances in wrongful death cases are the same as punitive damages. *A.H. v. St. Louis County Mo.*, No. 4:14-CV-2069 (CEJ), 2015 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 93082, at *19 (E.D. Mo. July 17, 2015). Under Missouri statutory law, damages are permitted in wrongful death actions, and,

[i]n every action brought under section 537.080, the trier of the facts may give to the party or parties entitled thereto such damages as the trier of the facts may deem fair and just for the death and loss thus occasioned, having regard to the pecuniary losses suffered by reason of the death, funeral expenses, and the reasonable value of the services, consortium, companionship, comfort, instruction, guidance, counsel, training, and support of which those on whose behalf suit may be brought have been deprived by reason of such death and without limiting such damages to those which would be sustained prior to attaining the age of majority by the deceased or by the person suffering any such loss. In addition, the trier of the facts may award such damages as the deceased may have suffered between the time of injury and the time of death and for the recovery of which the deceased might have maintained an action had death not ensued. The mitigating or aggravating circumstances attending the death may be considered by the trier of facts, but damages for grief and bereavement by reason of the death shall not be recoverable.

Mo. Rev. Stat. § 537.090 (2023) (emphasis added). Aggravating circumstances damages are punitive in nature. *Elliot v. Kesler*, 799 S.W.2d 97, 103 (Mo.App.1990).

*****Missouri Senate Bill 211 (2021): Modifies provisions relating to the availability of punitive damages against certain parties. Introduced in January 2021; Effective date August 28, 2021.** This act provides that no punitive damages shall be awarded in any civil action against the state, a political subdivision of the state, or any official or employee thereof. Specifically, punitive damages shall not be available in cases involving disclosure of library records, disclosure of HIV reports and records, unlawful discriminatory practices, injuries from the dumping or disposal of solid waste or demolition waste, misappropriation of trade secrets, violations of the Uniform Condominium Act, wrongful death, medical malpractice claims, and unauthorized use of wire communications. Additionally, this act repeals the availability of punitive damages in cases brought by persons harmed or damaged by violations of the REAL ID Act and in civil actions resulting from violations and damages that occurred in strip searches.

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Generally, no. Directly assessed punitive damages generally are not insurable in Missouri, except for damages awarded against police officers under a false arrest policy. See *Colson v. Lloyd's of London*, 435 S.W.2d 42 (Mo. Ct. App. 1968); *Crull v. Gleb*, 382 S.W.2d 17, 23 (Mo. Ct. App. 1964) (finding motorist's insurance coverage of punitive damages contrary to public policy).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Likely not. Vicariously assessed punitive damages may be insurable under Missouri law. See *Ohio Cas. Ins. Co. v. Welfare Fin. Co.*, 75 F.2d 58, 60 (8th Cir. 1934) (“In this situation where there was no direct or indirect volition upon the part of the master in the commission of the act, no public policy is violated by protecting him from the unauthorized and unnatural act of his servant.”).



C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

"Punitive damages must be related to the wrongful act and the actual or potential injury, although there is no fixed mathematical relation between actual and punitive damages." *Bigler v. Conn*, 959 S.W.2d 134, 139 (Mo. Ct. App. 1998). In determining whether an award is "grossly excessive" as to violate due process rights, Missouri courts generally consider the following factors: (1) the degree of reprehensibility of the conduct at issue; (2) the ratio of actual harm to punitive damages; and (3) the difference between the punitive damage award and the civil penalties authorized or imposed in comparable cases. *Wilkins v. Bd. of Regents of Harris-Stowe State Univ.*, 519 S.W.3d 526, 546 (Mo. Ct. App. 2017) (quoting *BMW of N. Am., Inc. v. Gore*, 517 U.S. 559, 575 (1996)). See also *Diaz v. Autozoners, LLC*, 484 S.W.3d 64, 89-90 (Mo. Ct. App. 2015) (finding that an award of \$1 million in punitive damages did not violate due process despite a compensatory award of \$75,000); *Ellison v. O'Reilly Auto. Stores, Inc.*, 463 S.W.3d 426, 441 (Mo. Ct. App. 2015) (finding that a punitive damages award of \$2 million was not excessive despite a compensatory award of \$200,000).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Yes. Mo. Ann. Stat. § 510.265 provides:

1. No award of punitive damages against any defendant shall exceed the greater of:

(1) Five hundred thousand dollars; or

(2) Five times the net amount of the judgment awarded to the plaintiff against the defendant.

Such limitations shall not apply if the state of Missouri is the plaintiff requesting the award of punitive damages, or the defendant pleads guilty to or is convicted of a felony arising out of the acts or omissions pled by the plaintiff.

2. The provisions of this section and sections 510.261 and 510.263 shall not apply to civil actions brought under section 213.111 that allege a violation of section 213.040, 213.045, 213.050, or 213.070, to the extent that the alleged violation of section 213.070 relates to or involves a violation of section 213.040, 213.045, or 213.050, or subdivision (3) of subsection 1 of section 213.070 as it relates to housing.

However, the validity of statutory caps on punitive damages as they relate to the Missouri Constitution has previously been questioned. See *Lewellen v. Franklin*, 441 S.W.3d 136, 144 (Mo. 2014) (en banc) (holding that a previous version of Mo. Ann. Stat. § 510.265 infringed on the right to trial by jury as provided for in the Missouri Constitution). But see *Ordinola v. Univ. Physician Assocs.*, 625 S.W.3d 445, 450-51 (Mo. 2021) (holding that the statutory non-economic damage caps provided for in Mo. Ann. Stat. § 538.210 did not violate the Missouri Constitution).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Fifty percent of a punitive damages award is payable to the claimant and fifty percent is payable to the state. Mo. Ann. Stat. § 537.675 provides:

The state of Missouri shall have a lien for deposit into the tort victims' compensation fund to the extent of fifty percent of the punitive damages final judgment which shall attach in any such case after deducting attorney's fees and expenses. . . . The lien shall not be satisfied out of any recovery until the attorney's claim for fees and expenses is paid.

. . . Twenty-six percent of all payments deposited into the tort victims' compensation fund and all interest accruing on the principal regardless of source or designation shall be transferred to the basic civil legal services fund established in section 477.650.



MONTANA

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes, punitive damages are available under Montana law. See M.C.A. § 27-1-221 (2015).

However, on January 12, 2023, the Montana Legislature introduced SB 169: An Act Generally Revising Punitive Damages Laws; Prohibiting the Pleading of Punitive Damages in an Initial Pleading; Providing that a Punitive Damages Award be Equally Divided Between the Injured Party and the State; Requiring Punitive Damages that are Awarded to the State to Be Deposited in the General Fund; Amending Section 27-1-221, MCA, and Providing an Immediate Effective Date and an Applicability Date. The Bill was signed by the Governor of Montana on May 19, 2023.

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Reasonable punitive damages may be awarded when the defendant has been found guilty of actual fraud or actual malice. M.C.A. § 27-1-221(1); *see also Crystal Springs Trout Co. v. First State Bank of Froid*, 732 P.2d 819, 827 (Mont. 1987). “Punitive or exemplary damages are allowed where the defendant has been guilty of oppression, fraud, or malice, actual or presumed, for the sake of example and by way of punishing the defendant. Exemplary damages shall be used when the defendant clearly shows that he is deserving of such special treatment and punishment.” *Sacco v. High Country Indep. Press*, 896 P.2d 411, 428 (Mont. 1995).

A defendant is guilty of actual malice if the defendant has knowledge of facts or intentionally disregards facts that create a high probability of injury to the plaintiff and deliberately proceeds to act in conscious disregard or acts with indifference to the high probability of injury to the plaintiff. M.C.A. § 27-1-221(2).

A defendant is guilty of actual fraud if the defendant makes a representation with knowledge of its falsity or conceals a material fact with the purpose of depriving the plaintiff of property or legal rights, or otherwise causing injury. M.C.A. § 27-1-221(3).

Standard of Proof. All elements of a claim for punitive damages must be proved by clear and convincing evidence, which means there is no serious or substantial doubt about the correctness of the conclusions drawn from the evidence. M.C.A. § 27-1-221(5); *Cartwright v. Equitable Life Assurance Soc’y*, 914 P.2d 976, 993 (Mont. 1996).

Liability for punitive damages is to be determined by the trier of fact, whether judge or jury. M.C.A. § 27-1-221(6). Evidence regarding a defendant’s financial affairs, financial condition and net worth is not admissible in a trial to determine whether a defendant is liable for punitive damages. M.C.A. § 27-1-221(7)(a) (2007). When the jury returns a verdict finding a defendant liable for punitive damages, the amount of punitive damages must then be determined by the jury in an immediate, separate proceeding and be submitted to the judge for review. *Id.* In the separate proceeding to determine the amount of punitive damages to be awarded, the defendant’s financial affairs, financial condition and net worth must be considered. *Id.*

Actions Against State. Punitive damages are not permitted against the state and other governmental entities. M.C.A. § 2-9-105 (2010). The division of punitive damages amendment to M.C.A. § 27-1-221 does not apply to actions against the state. See S.B. 169 (2023); M.C.A. § 27-1-221(12).

Breach of Contract. Pursuant to statute, punitive damages may not be recovered in any action arising from contract or breach of contract. M.C.A. § 27-1-220(2)(a)(ii). This is based on the theory that an aggrieved party in a contract case should be placed in the same economic position as if the contract had been performed, but not a better position. *Romo v. Shirley*, 2022 MT 249, at *P42 (Mont. 2022). Montana courts, however, have allowed recovery of punitive damages in tort actions involving underlying contracts, i.e., tortious interference with business relations, conversion or fraud or breach of its implied covenant of good faith or fiduciary



duty. See *Daniels v. Dean*, 833 P.2d 1078, 1084 (Mont. 1992); *Lane v. Dunkle*, 753 P.2d 321, 324 (Mont. 1988); *Purcell v. Auto. Gas Distrib., Inc.*, 673 P.2d 1246, 1251 (Mont. 1983); see also *Romo*, 2022 MT 249 (“We have consistently held, however, that a party may recover punitive damages for tort claims, even if the relationship between the tortfeasor and injured party at some point involved a contract.”).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. An employer is liable in exemplary damages for the willful and malicious acts of one of its employees. *Rickman v. Safeway Stores*, 227 P.2d 607, 613–14 (Mont. 1951).

Environmental Liability. Punitive damages may be recovered in the context of environmental liability. *Ferguson v. Town Pump*, 580 P.2d 915, 921 (Mont. 1978) (discussing the availability of exemplary damages, but holding they were inapplicable under the facts of the case), overruled on other grounds by *Bohrer v. Clark*, 590 P.2d 117 (Mont. 1978); see also *Sunburst School Dist. No 2 v. Texaco, Inc.* 338 Mont. 259, 285–87 (2007).

Insurer’s Bad Faith. Under Montana law, punitive damages are recoverable in insurer bad faith actions. *Bostwick v. Foremost Ins. Co.*, 539 F. Supp. 517, 520 (D. Mont. 1982); *Gibson v. W. Fire Ins. Co.*, 682 P.2d 725, 731 (Mont. 1984).

Product Liability. Punitive damages are generally recoverable in product liability actions. See M.C.A. § 27-1-220.

Professional Liability. Punitive damages are generally recoverable in professional liability actions. See M.C.A. § 27-1-220.

Other exclusions: Punitive damages are excluded by statute under limited circumstances, such as: § 18-1-404 (state immune), § 20-3-332 (school district trustees acting in official capacity immune), § 27-1-210 (interest not available on punitive damages), § 30-14-1112 (violation of plain language in contracts statute), § 27-1-711 (minor person or person of unsound mind not liable), § 41-1-201 (minor not liable in exemplary damages unless capable of knowing act was wrongful), § 37-51-503 (no punitive damages payable from recovery account in satisfaction of judgments against licensed, or purportedly licensed, real estate brokers).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes, punitive damages are insurable under Montana law. *First Bank (N.A.) of Billings v. Transamerica Ins. Co.*, 679 P.2d 1217 (Mont. 1984). Punitive damages may be covered by an insurance policy, and insurance coverage of punitive damages does not violate Montana public policy. *Id.* The Montana Legislature has codified the rule, stating that insurance may cover punitive damages, but only on the express condition that the insurance policy specifically states that punitive damages are covered. M.C.A. § 33-15-317(1).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable, as punitive damages are insurable under Montana law. See II.A. above.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Compensatory damages are a predicate for punitive damages under MCA §27-1-220(1). *Folsom v. Montana Pub. Employees’ Ass’n, Inc.*, 388 Mont. 307 (2017). Without a finding of actual damages, however, punitive damages are improper. *Doll v. Major Muffler Ctrs., Inc.*, 687 P.2d 48, 55 (Mont. 1984).

When punitive damages are awarded by the judge, the judge must clearly state the reasons for making the award in findings of facts and conclusions of law, demonstrating consideration of the following issues: (1) the nature and reprehensibility of the defendant’s wrongdoing; (2) the extent of the defendant’s wrongdoing; (3) the intent of the defendant in committing the wrong; (4) the profitability of the defendant’s wrongdoing, if applicable; (5) the amount of actual damages awarded by the jury; (6)



the defendant's net worth; (7) previous awards of punitive or exemplary damages against the defendant based upon the same wrongful act; (8) potential or prior criminal sanctions against the defendant based upon the same wrongful act; and (9) any other circumstances that may operate to increase or reduce, without wholly defeating, punitive damages. See M.C.A. § 27-1-221 (7)(b). The same list of factors is considered by the judge when reviewing a jury's award of punitive damages. Upon review of the jury's award, the judge has the authority to change the amount awarded based on clearly stated findings of facts and conclusions of the law. M.C.A. § 27-1-221(7)(c).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Yes. "An award for punitive damages may not exceed \$10 million or 3% of a defendant's net worth, whichever is less. This subsection does not limit punitive damages that may be awarded in class action lawsuits." M.C.A. § 27-1-220(3). "The explicit wording of the statute indicates that the cap is individual to each defendant because it states that the cap is either \$10 million or 3% of a defendant's—singular—net worth. There is no indication from the Legislature that the cap is to be applied to a defendant group. Instead, the statutory purpose of punitive damages is written with an eye toward individual conduct. Juries award punitive damages 'for the sake of example and for the purpose of punishing a defendant.' Not every defendant's conduct may be equally reprehensible, if at all." *Romo v. Shirley*, 2022 MT 249 (Mont. 2022).

The award of punitive damages exceeding \$200,000 will be divided between the successful party and the State. The costs of litigation related to the award of punitive damages may be deducted from the full award, as are reasonable attorney's fees; however, attorney's fees deducted from the State's share may not exceed 20% of the State's share after costs. The award to the State will be deposited in the general fund. See M.C.A. § 27-1-221(9).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Punitive damages are payable to the party claiming them. *Cartwright v. Equitable Life Assur. Soc. of U.S.*, 914 P.2d 976, 996 (1996).



NEBRASKA

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

No. Punitive damages are unconstitutional under the Nebraska constitution. NEB. CONST. ART. VII § 5; see also *Enron Corp. v. Lawyers Title Ins. Corp.*, 940 F.2d 307 (Eighth Cir. 1991); *Distinctive Printing & Packaging Co. v. Cox*, 443 N.W.2d 566 (Neb. 1989) (punitive, vindictive or exemplary damages contravene state constitutional provision). See also *O'Brien v. Cessna Aircraft Co.*, 298 Neb. 109 (2017). But see (I. B.) below for exceptions.

Negligence: Damages. Nebraska law does not permit a plaintiff to obtain punitive damages over and above full compensation for the plaintiff's injuries. [*Golnick v. Callender*, 290 Neb. 395, 397 \(2015\)](#). See also *Sanford v. Ektelon/Prince Sports Group, Inc.*, 1999 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 17458 (D. Neb. Nov. 5, 1999).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

By statute, treble damages may be awarded for unlawful restraint of trade. See, e.g., *Barish v. Chrysler Corp.*, 3 N.W.2d 91 (Neb. 1942).

Where the action is grounded on a federal constitutional right and is brought in federal court, it may not violate Nebraska public policy to award punitive damages. See *Gilliam v. Ohama*, 331 F. Supp 4 (D. Neb. 1971), *rev'd on other grounds*, 459 F.2d 63 (Eighth Cir. 1972).

In a negligence case, evidence intended to punish a defendant's conduct or deter similar conduct is not at issue. Nebraska courts have upheld a district court's mistrial order because the plaintiff suggested that the defendant's intoxication was the reason that he negligently caused a vehicular accident when the defendant had admitted to negligently causing the accident and the court had precluded the intoxication evidence. *Golnick v. Callender*, 290 Neb. 395, 404 (2015)

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Not applicable.

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Not applicable.

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Not applicable.

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Not applicable.



NEVADA

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes, punitive damages are available under Nevada law. N.R.S. §§ 42.001, *et seq.*; see *Ace Truck & Equip. Rentals v. Kahn*, 746 P.2d 132 (Nev. 1987). Punitive damages provide a means by which the community, usually a jury, can express community outrage or distaste for the misconduct of an offensive, fraudulent or malicious defendant and by which others may be deterred and warned that such conduct will not be tolerated. *Id.* at 135. The allowance of punitive damages provides a benefit to society by punishing undesirable conduct that is not punishable by the criminal law. *Id.*; *Phillips v. Lynch*, 704 P.2d 1083, 1084 (Nev. 1987) (“fraudulent nature of the wrongdoers’ misconduct sounds in tort and justifies a claim for punitive damages”).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. By statute, punitive damages are available for breach of obligations not arising from contract if the wrongdoer is guilty of “oppression, fraud or malice, express or implied.” See N.R.S. § 42.005(1). “‘Oppression’ means despicable conduct that subjects a person to cruel and unjust hardship with conscious disregard of the rights of the person.” N.R.S. § 42.001(4). “‘Fraud’ means an intentional misrepresentation, deception or concealment of a material fact known to the person with the intent to deprive another person of his or her rights or property or to otherwise injure another person.” N.R.S. § 42.001(2). “Malice, express or implied” means conduct that is intended to injure a person or despicable conduct that one engages in with a conscious disregard of the rights or safety of others. See N.R.S. § 42.001(3). Section 42.001(1) plainly requires evidence that a defendant acted with a culpable state of mind, and therefore denotes conduct that, at a minimum, must exceed mere recklessness or gross negligence. *Countrywide Home Loans, Inc. v. Thitchener*, 192 P.3d 243, 255 (Nev. 2008)

These damages are designed not to reward the victim but to punish the wrongdoer and deter fraudulent, malicious or oppressive conduct. *Turnbow v. State Dept. of Human Res.*, 853 P.2d 97, 99 (Nev. 1993); *Coughlin v. Tailhook Ass’n*, 818 F. Supp. 1366, 1370–71 (D. Nev. 1993) (finding that a claim for punitive damages may proceed where plaintiff alleges that defendant acted with conscious disregard for known safety standards and measures); *Miller v. Schnitzer*, 371 P.2d 824, 829 (Nev. 1962) (holding that punitive damages are recoverable in a malicious prosecution case); see *Allen v. Anderson*, 562 P.2d 487, 489 (Nev. 1977) (noting that while punitive damages claims survive the aggrieved party’s death against a living tortfeasor, punitive damages claims do not survive the death of the tortfeasor and cannot be sought from the deceased tortfeasor’s estate); see *Bergerud v. Progressive Cas. Ins.*, 453 F. Supp. 2d 1241, 1251 (Nev. 2006) (finding that punitive damages are available when an insurer breaches the implied covenant of good faith).

Standard of Proof. Punitive damages may be awarded when it is proven by clear and convincing evidence that the defendant has been guilty of oppression, fraud or malice, express or implied. N. R.S. § 42.005(1).

Actions Against State. Punitive damages are not permitted in actions sounding in tort brought against a present or former officer or employee of the State or any political subdivision, immune contractor or State Legislator arising out of an act or omission within the scope of the person’s public duties or employment. N.R.S. § 41.035.

Breach of Contract. Nevada law does not permit punitive damages for breach of contract. See N.R.S. § 42.005; see also *S.J. Amoroso Constr. Co. v. Lazovich & Lazovich*, 810 P.2d 775, 777 (Nev. 1991) (noting that punitive damages are not available on a count for breach of contract and are precluded in the absence of compensatory damages for a claim sustaining the punitive award).



Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under Nevada law, an employer is not liable for exemplary or punitive damages arising from an employee's misconduct unless:

1. The employer had advance knowledge that the employee was unfit for the purposes of the employment and employed the employee with a conscious disregard of the rights or safety of others;
2. The employer expressly authorized or ratified the wrongful act of the employee for which the damages are awarded; or
3. The employer is personally guilty of oppression, fraud or malice, express or implied.

N.R.S. § 42.007(1). Moreover, if the employer is a corporation, the employer is not liable for exemplary or punitive damages unless one or more of the elements specified above are met by an officer, director, or managing agent of the corporation who was expressly authorized to direct or ratify the employee's conduct on behalf of the corporation. *Id.*

Environmental Liability. Punitive damages may be awarded in any action for the breach of an obligation not arising from contract, including actions involving environmental liability, where it is proven by clear and convincing evidence that the defendant has been guilty of oppression, fraud or malice, express or implied. See N.R.S. § 42.005. The statutory cap on punitive damages, set forth in § 42.005(1) does not apply to actions brought against a person for damages or an injury caused by the emission, disposal or spilling of a toxic, radioactive or hazardous material or waste. N.R.S. § 42.005(2)(d).

General Liability. In an action for wrongful death, punitive damages may be awarded. N.R.S. § 41.085(5)(b). Punitive damages may also be recovered in an action for personal injury where the defendant caused an injury by the operation of a motor vehicle after willfully consuming or using alcohol or another substance, knowing that he would thereafter operate the motor vehicle. N.R.S. § 42.010(1).

Insurer's Bad Faith. Punitive damages may be awarded in any action for the breach of an obligation not arising from contract, where it is proven by clear and convincing evidence that the defendant has been guilty of oppression, fraud or malice, express or implied. N.R.S. § 42.005. The statutory cap on punitive damages, set forth in section 42.005(1), does not apply to actions brought against an insurer who acts in bad faith regarding its obligations to provide insurance coverage. N.R.S. § 42.005(2)(b).

Product Liability. In a product liability context, malice in fact warranting punitive damages may be established by showing that the defendant consciously and deliberately disregarded known safety measures in reckless disregard of possible results. *Jeep Corp. v. Murray*, 708 P.2d 297, 304 (Nev. 1985); *cf. Granite Constr. Co. v. Rhyne*, 817 P.2d 711, 713 (Nev. 1991) (holding a contractor who ignored highway safety requirements liable for punitive damages). The statutory cap on punitive damages set forth in § 42.005(1), does not apply to actions brought against a manufacturer, distributor or seller of a defective product. N.R.S. § 42.005(2)(a).

Professional Liability. Punitive damages may be awarded in any action for the breach of an obligation not arising from contract, including professional liability, where it is proven by clear and convincing evidence that the defendant has been guilty of oppression, fraud or malice, express or implied. N.R.S. § 42.005(1).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes, punitive damages may be insured against, as long as the punitive damages do not arise from a wrongful act of the insured committed with intent to cause injury to another. N.R.S. § 681A.095.



B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

It is unclear whether vicariously assessed punitive damages are insurable. To date there is no statutory or case law in Nevada indicating whether the prohibition against indemnification applies to those whose liability is vicarious. Nevertheless, it is generally believed that this provision is designed to permit insurance for punitive damages for parties (e.g., employers) who are held vicariously liable for another's conduct. See 19-128 Appleman on Insurance § 128.29[C] (NRS 681A.095 permits the insuring of vicarious liability for punitive damages). However, the plain language of the statute does not indicate that it *only* applies to employers who are vicariously liable for punitive damages.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

An award of compensatory damages is needed before punitive damages are authorized. *S.J. Amoroso Constr. Co v. Lazovich & Lazovich*, 810 P.2d 775, 777 (Nev. 1991); *Miller v. Schnitzer*, 371 P.2d 824, 829 (Nev. 1962). The amount of punitive damages appropriate to the stated purpose of punishment and deterrence lies in the discretion of the fact-finder. *Ace Truck & Equip. Rentals, Inc. v. Kahn*, 746 P.2d 132, 134 (1987). Since punitive damages are not, as in the case of compensatory damages, awarded to compensate the plaintiff for harm incurred, they need not bear any relationship or be proportional to the compensatory damages award. *Ace Truck & Equip. Rentals, Inc. v. Kahn*, 746 P.2d 132, 135 (Nev. 1987); *Hale v. Riverboat Casino*, 682 P.2d 190, 195 (Nev. 1984); see also N.R.S. § 42.010(1) (permitting recovery of punitive damages and compensatory damages for injury caused by an intoxicated person operating a motor vehicle for the purpose of punishing an offender).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Yes, N.R.S. § 42.005 provides that an award of exemplary or punitive damages may not exceed (1) three times the amount of compensatory damages awarded to the plaintiff if the amount of compensatory damages is \$100,000 or more, or (2) \$300,000 if the amount of compensatory damages awarded to the plaintiff is less than \$100,000.

These limitations, however, do not apply to an action brought against:

1. A manufacturer, distributor or seller of a defective product;
2. An insurer who acts in bad faith regarding its obligations to provide insurance coverage;
3. A person for violating a state or federal law prohibiting discriminatory housing practices, if the law provides for a remedy of exemplary or punitive damages in excess of the limitations prescribed in § 42.005(1);
4. A person for damages or an injury caused by the emission, disposal or spilling of a toxic, radioactive or hazardous material or waste; and
5. A person for defamation.

However, even if any award falls below the statutory cap, the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment may still prohibit the award as grossly excessive or arbitrary. To protect against unconstitutional punitive damages awards, the Court should consider the following: (1) "the degree of reprehensibility of the defendant's conduct," (2) the ratio of the punitive damage award to the "actual harm inflicted on the plaintiff," and (3) how the punitive damages award compares to other civil or criminal penalties "that could be imposed for comparable misconduct." *Bongiovi v. Sullivan*, 138 P.3d 433, 451-52 (Nev. 2006) (quoting *BMW of North America, Inc. v. Gore*, 517 U.S. 559, 575 (1996)). The Nevada Supreme Court concluded that the federal standard must be adopted for judicial economy's sake, and that the proper standard for reviewing excessiveness of a punitive damages award in Nevada is the federal standard's three guideposts. *Bongiovi v. Sullivan*, 138 P.3d at 452.



E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

In Nevada, a punitive damages award is payable to the plaintiff. In a wrongful death action, the personal representative of the decedent on behalf of the estate may recover any punitive damages that the decedent would have recovered if he had lived. N.R.S. § 41.085.



NEW HAMPSHIRE

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. Punitive damages may be awarded under New Hampshire law, but only where expressly authorized by statute. N.H. REV. STAT. ANN. § 507:16 (*LexisNexis 2022*); *see also Aubert v. Aubert*, 529 A.2d 909, 914 (N.H. 1987) (“No damages are to be awarded as a punishment to the defendant or as a warning and example to deter him and others from committing like offenses in the future”). When the act involved is wanton, malicious or oppressive, the compensatory damages awarded may reflect the aggravating circumstances. Such damages are termed liberal compensatory damages and are available only in exceptional cases. The mere fact that an intentional tort is involved is not sufficient. *See Micro Data Base Sys. v. Dharma Sys.*, 148 F.3d 649 (Seventh Cir. 1998) (applying N.H. law).

B. In what circumstances may liberal compensatory damages be awarded?

Standard of Conduct. Courts are permitted to order liberal compensatory damages where malice or fraud is involved. “Liberal compensatory damages”, sometimes called “enhanced compensatory damages”, (which technically are not punitive damages because they are awarded to compensate plaintiff rather than to punish defendant) may be awarded “when the act involved is wanton, malicious, or oppressive.” *Aubert v. Aubert*, 529 A.2d 909, 914 (N.H. 1987) (quoting *Vratsenes v. N.H. Auto, Inc.*, 289 A.2d 66, 68 (N.H. 1972)). To award “liberal compensatory damages,” there must be ill will, hatred, hostility, or evil motive on the part of the defendant. *Aubert*, at 914.

Standard of Proof. Enhanced compensatory damages may be awarded only in exceptional cases. “The mere fact that an intentional tort is involved is not sufficient; there must be ill will, hatred, hostility, or evil motive on behalf of the defendant.” *Stewart v. Bader*, 154 N.H. 75, 87, 907 A.2d 931 (2006) (defendant convicted of first-degree murder acted in a deliberate and premeditated manner that, as a matter of law, was wanton, malicious and oppressive). Wanton conduct arises where “the actor is aware that his actions are causing a great risk of harm to others.” *See Johnson v. The Capital Offset Co., Inc.*, 2012 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 29046, 2012 WL 781000, at *1 (D.N.H. Mar. 6, 2012) *citing Thompson v. Forest*, 136 N.H. 215, 220, 614 A.2d 1064 (1992).

C. In what circumstances may punitive damages be awarded?

Standard of Conduct. Punitive damages for general liability claims are recoverable only if specifically provided by statute. N.H. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 507:16 (2022).

Actions Against State. By statute, punitive damages are not recoverable against a governmental unit for bodily injury, personal injury or property damage. N.H. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 507-B:4 (2022).

Breach of Contract. Punitive damages are generally not recoverable in breach of contract cases. “In an action for a breach of contract, damages are not recoverable for loss beyond an amount that the evidence permits to be established with reasonable certainty.” *Joseph Finn Co., Inc. v. P.H. Precision Products Corp.*, 2010 N.H. Super Lexis 79 (Merrimack Cty. 2010) (denying claim for liberal compensatory damages), *citing Clipper Affiliates, Inc. v. Checovich*, 138 N.H. 271, 274, 638 A.2d 791 (1983); RESTATEMENT (SECOND) OF CONTRACTS § 352 (1981).

But see N.H. REV. STAT. ANN. § 339-E:3 (2022) (recovery of exemplary damages of up to three times the commission owed against a principal who breaches a contract with its sales representative relating to the payment of a sales commission); N.H. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 356-B:65 provides a civil remedy to a purchaser who has been defrauded by a developer or seller of a condominium unit on account of misrepresentations or misleading statements or omissions of fact in a registration statement or public offering



statement. The purchaser can also obtain all reasonable costs and attorney's fees, as well as up to \$5000 in exemplary damages; and N.H. REV. STAT. ANN. § 359-D:11 (2022) (recovery of punitive damages where a consumer is injured pursuant to laws governing credit services organizations or by the breach of a contract by a credit services organization).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. A jury is permitted to assess punitive damages in an action under 42 USC §1983 when the defendant's conduct is shown to be motivated by evil motive or intent, or when it involves reckless or callous indifference to the federally protected rights of others. *Porter v. Manchester*, 151 N.H. 30, 46 (2004). The Supreme Court of New Hampshire in the context of employer liability for sexual harassment of an employee by a co-worker held that even if an employer's managing agent has acted with the requisite "malice" or "reckless indifference" to subject it to liability for punitive damages, an employer will be absolved from liability if the managing agent has acted contrary to the employer's good-faith efforts to comply with sexual harassment law. *Madeja v. MPB Corp.*, 821 A.2d 1034, 1048 (N.H. 2003) (citing *Kolstad v. Am. Dental Ass'n*, 527 U.S. 526, 545 (1999)).

Environmental Liability. N.H. REV. STAT. ANN. §149-I:23 (2022) permits recovery of treble damages by the owner for the malicious or wanton injury to any part of any sewer system, stormwater treatment, conveyance and discharge system, or sewage disposal plant. N.H. REV. STAT. ANN. § 231:189 (2022) permits recovery of treble damages against any person who wantonly and maliciously injures any aqueduct, or the pipes, logs or other property of any gaslight company, aqueduct company or person.

General Liability. The following New Hampshire statutes expressly permit punitive damages: (a) N.H. REV. STAT. ANN. § 167:61-b (2022) permits recovery of a civil fine and treble damages for fraudulently claiming public assistance benefits or otherwise defrauds the Department of Health and Human Services; (b) N.H. REV. STAT. ANN. § 350-B:3 (2022) permits recovery of exemplary damages, as defined, for willful and malicious misappropriation of trade secrets; (c) N.H. REV. STAT. ANN. § 359-B:16 (2022) permits recovery of punitive damages by the consumer against a consumer reporting agency or user of information that willfully fails to comply with the consumer credit reporting act; (d) N.H. REV. STAT. ANN. § 539:3 (2022) permits recovery of treble damages against anyone who knowingly throws down, damages, or leaves open any fence, gate or bar belonging to or enclosing land held in common, or belonging to another person); and (e) N.H. REV. STAT. ANN. § 539:4 (2022) permits recovery of treble damages against anyone who willfully and unlawfully digs or carries away any stone, including stone from a stone wall, ore, gravel, clay, sand, turf, mold or loam upon or from land held in common or from the land of another person.

Insurer's Bad Faith. Punitive damages are not recoverable in cases claiming that an insurer acted in bad faith. See *Jarris v. Prudential Ins. Co.*, 448 A.2d 407 (N.H. 1982). See also *Lawton v. Great Sw. Fire Ins. Co.*, 392 A.2d 576 (N.H. 1978) (claim for breach of contract may present circumstances that also give rise to a separate tort claim).

Product Liability. Punitive damages are not recoverable in product liability cases.

Professional Liability. Punitive damages are not recoverable in professional liability matters, but liberal compensatory damages may be awarded for wanton, malicious or oppressive conduct. See *Weeks v. St. Paul Fire and Marine Ins. Co.*, 673 A.2d 772 (N.H. 1996) (attorney general sought civil penalties and compensatory surcharges against trustee of nursing home for mismanagement of nursing home's funds).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes. Punitive damages are insurable under New Hampshire law. Specifically, municipalities may insure against punitive damages assessed pursuant to federal statutes. *Am. Home Assurance Co. v. Fish*, 451 A.2d 358 (N.H. 1982). Further, in *Weeks v. St. Paul Fire and Marine Ins. Co.*, 673 A.2d 772 (1996), the Superior Court ruled that a health care professional liability policy (PLP) provides coverage for civil penalties sought by the attorney general. Although the civil penalties and the compensatory surcharges sought by the attorney general were penal in nature, and therefore neither "damages" as defined by the CGL nor "compensation for injury or death" covered under the PLP, the New Hampshire court held an insurance company liable for exemplary damages where fines and penalties are not expressly excluded by the policy language.



B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

New Hampshire permits insurance coverage for punitive damages as discussed above.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Punitive damages are generally not recoverable in New Hampshire, except where provided by statute. See N.H. REV. STAT. ANN. § 507:16 (LexisNexis 2022). As noted above, New Hampshire statutes that permit punitive damages generally impose treble damages.

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Yes, recovery of punitive damages may be limited by statute. Where a statute permits recovery of punitive damages, the statute may set forth the limitations or permit damages “as the court may allow.” See N.H. REV. STAT. ANN. § 359-B:16 (willful noncompliance with consumer credit reporting act) (“such amount of punitive damages as the court may allow”).

E. To whom are they payable?

State statute sets forth the individuals or entities that may recover punitive damages. See, e.g., N.H. REV. STAT. ANN. § 359-B:16 (allowing recovery of punitive damages by consumer against consumer reporting agency or user of information that willfully failed to comply with consumer credit reporting act); N.H. REV. STAT. ANN. § 149-I:23 (permitting recovery of treble damages by owner for malicious or wanton injury to part of sewer system or sewage disposal plant); and N.H. REV. STAT. ANN. § 167:61 (permitting recovery of punitive damages by state for fraudulently obtaining public assistance benefits).



NEW JERSEY

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes, punitive damages are available in New Jersey. The Punitive Damages Act is codified at N.J.S.A. § 2A:15-5.9 to § 2A:15-5.17. “Punitive or exemplary damages are sums awarded apart from compensatory damages and are assessed when the wrongdoer’s conduct is especially egregious.” *Leimgruber v. Claridge Assocs., Ltd.*, 375 A.2d 652, 654 (N.J. 1997). They are awarded upon a theory of punishment to the offender for aggravated misconduct and to deter such conduct in the future. *Id.*

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. N.J.S.A. § 2A:15-5.12 provides as follows:

Punitive damages may be awarded to the plaintiff only if the plaintiff proves, by clear and convincing evidence, that the harm suffered was the result of the defendant’s acts or omissions, and such acts or omissions were actuated by actual malice or accompanied by a wanton and willful disregard of persons who foreseeably might be harmed by those acts or omissions. This burden of proof may not be satisfied by proof of any degree of negligence including gross negligence.

Standard of Proof. Clear and convincing evidence is required to obtain punitive damages. N.J.S.A. § 2A:15-5.12. *See also Rivera v. Valley Hosp., Inc.*, 280 A.3d 299 (N.J. 2022) (holding that a reasonable jury must be able to find by clear and convincing evidence that punitive damages are warranted based on the facts); *Longo v. Pleasure Productions, Inc.*, 71 A.3d 775 (N.J. 2013) (noting that the jury must weigh defendant’s conduct against the clear and convincing evidence standard). In determining whether punitive damages are appropriate, the trier of fact is to consider all relevant evidence including, but not limited to: (1) the likelihood at the relevant time that serious harm would arise from the defendant’s action; (2) the defendant’s awareness of reckless disregard of the likelihood that serious harm would arise from the defendant’s conduct; (3) the conduct of the defendant upon learning that its initial conduct would likely cause harm; and (4) the duration of the conduct or any concealment of it by the defendant. N.J.S.A. § 2A:15-5.12(b). If the trier of fact determines that punitive damages should be awarded, the trier of fact is responsible for determining the amount of those damages. In reaching a decision on the amount of punitive damages, the trier of fact must consider all relevant evidence, including, but not limited to: (1) all aforementioned factors considered in determining whether punitive damages should be awarded; (2) the profitability of the misconduct to the defendant; (2) when the misconduct was terminated; and (4) the financial condition of the defendant. N.J.S.A. § 2A:15-5.12(c).

Actions Against State. Punitive damages are not recoverable against a public entity. N.J.S.A. § 59:9-2(c).

Administrative Proceedings. Punitive damages are not available in an administrative proceeding arising out of alleged violation of civil rights. *Maczik v. Gilford Park Yacht Club*, 638 A.2d 1322 (N.J. Super. Ct. App. Div. 1994).

Breach of Contract. Punitive damages are not awarded for breach of contract unless there are aggravated circumstances, but may be awarded for torts that may arise out of the contractual activity. *See Fiore v. Sears, Roebuck & Co.*, 364 A.2d 572 (N.J. Super. Ct. 1976); *Cappiello v. Ragen Precision Indus., Inc.*, 471 A.2d 432 (N.J. Super. Ct. App. Div. 1984).

Criminal Conduct. If the tortfeasor’s wrong constitutes a criminal act, punitive damages may effectively supplement the criminal law in punishing the defendant. *See Nappe v. Anshelewitz, Barr, Ansell & Bonello*, 477 A.2d 1224 (N.J. 1984). In order to sustain a claim for punitive damages, a plaintiff would have to show something other than a breach of a good faith obligation (defendant’s conduct must be wantonly reckless or malicious). *Id.*

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under New Jersey law, an employer may be held liable for punitive damages only when the employee’s wrongful conduct was authorized, participated in, or ratified by the employer. *Lehmann v. Toys ‘R’ Us*, 626



A.2d 445, 464 (N.J. 1993). In the context of a hostile work environment discrimination, punitive damages may be assessed against an employer only in the event of actual participation by upper management in the wrongful conduct or willful indifference thereto – i.e. a greater threshold than mere negligence is applied to measure employer liability. *Id.* at 464.

Environmental Liability. There is no express law in New Jersey permitting or denying recovery of punitive damages in the context of environmental liability. However, under New Jersey law, punitive damages may be recovered where “the harm suffered was the result of the defendant’s acts or omissions,” and such acts “were actuated by actual malice or accompanied by a wanton and willful disregard of persons who foreseeably might be harmed by those acts or omissions.” N.J.S.A. § 2A:15-5.12.

General Liability. As noted above, under New Jersey law, punitive damages may be recovered where “the harm suffered was the result of the defendant’s acts or omissions,” and such acts “were actuated by actual malice or accompanied by a wanton and willful disregard of persons who foreseeably might be harmed by those acts or omissions.” N.J.S.A. § 2A:15-5.12. If the tortfeasor’s wrong constitutes a criminal act, punitive damages may effectively supplement the criminal law in punishing the defendant. *Nappe*, 477 A.2d 1224, *supra*.

Insurer’s Bad Faith. Under New Jersey law, to recover punitive damages for insurer’s failure to pay a first-party claim, an insured must show egregious circumstances; for example, it must be shown that the insurer’s conduct was wantonly reckless or malicious. See *Polizzi Meats Inc. v. Aetna Life & Cas. Co.*, 931 F. Supp. 328 (D.N.J. 1996); *Nestle Foods Corp. v. Aetna Cas. & Sur. Co.*, 842 F. Supp 125 (D.N.J. 1993). In the highly regulated area of personal injury protection, absent egregious circumstances, wrongful failure to pay benefits or any other violation of statute does not give rise to a claim for punitive damages. See *Kubiak v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 486 A.2d 879 (N.J. Super. Ct. App. Div. 1984); *Pickett v. Lloyd’s*, 621 A.2d 445 (N.J. 1993); *Nappe*, 477 A.2d 1224, *supra*.

Multiple Defendants. In any action in which there are two or more defendants, an award of punitive damages must be specific as to a defendant, and each defendant is liable only for the amount of the award made against that defendant. N.J.S.A. § 2A:15-5.13(e). In other words, New Jersey’s Punitive Damages Act has abolished joint and several liability for punitive damages. See *Depalma v. Building Inspection Underwriters*, 794 A.2d 848 (N.J. Super. Ct. App. Div. 2001).

Product Liability. Actual knowledge of the defect required to sustain an award of punitive damages in the product liability context. *Fischer v. Johns-Manville Corp.*, 512 A.2d 466 (N.J. 1986) (defendant took affirmative steps to conceal information regarding serious health hazards associated with asbestos from the public). While “strict products liability proofs center on the product,” “punitive damages proofs center on a defendant’s conduct.” *Id.*

Professional Liability. Punitive damages may be awarded for the violation of a fiduciary duty if the violation is an intentional act. See *Albright v. Burns*, 503 A.2d 386 (N.J. Super. Ct. App. Div. 1986). Mere negligence is generally held to be insufficient. *Id.* Fraudulent misrepresentation would be sufficient to warrant punitive damages, since the intent requirement would be satisfied. *Id.* Where fraud is found, damages may be presumed. See *Jewish Ctr. of Sussex City. v. Whale*, 397 A.2d 712 (N.J. Super. Ct. Ch. Div. 1978) *aff’d*, 411 A.2d 475 (N.J. Super. Ct. App. Div. 1980) *aff’d*, 432 A.2d 521 (N.J. 1981).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

No. Directly assessed punitive damages are not insurable under New Jersey law as such damages are intended to punish the wrongdoer and deter aggravated misconduct in the future; thus, insuring against such awards would frustrate public policy. See *Johnson & Johnson v. Aetna Cas. & Sur. Co.*, 667 A.2d 1087 (N.J. Super. Ct. App. Div. 1995).



B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

New Jersey law is unclear on this issue. In *Malanga v. Mfrs. Cas. Inc. Co.*, 146 A.2d 105 (N.J. 1958), the New Jersey Supreme Court considered a policy which stated that an assault and battery would be considered an accident if not committed “by or at the direction of the insured.” *Id.* at 106. While there are arguments that this would constitute an exception to New Jersey’s policy against insurability of punitive damages, at least one appellate division case has rejected this argument. See *Johnson & Johnson*, 667 A.2d 1087, *supra* (stating in dicta that public policy bars coverage, even if the insured was held vicariously liable).

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Punitive damages may be awarded only if compensatory damages have been awarded in the first stage of the trial. N.J.S.A. § 2A:15-5.13(c). Any actions involving punitive damages shall, if requested by the defendant, be conducted in a bifurcated trial. N.J.S.A. § 2A:15-5.13(a). In the first stage of a bifurcated trial, the trier of fact shall determine liability for compensatory damages and the amount of compensatory damages or nominal damages. N.J.S.A. § 2A:15-5.13(b). In the second stage of a bifurcated trial, the trier of fact shall determine if a defendant is liable for punitive damages. N.J.S.A. § 2A:15.5.13(d). An award of nominal damages cannot support an award of punitive damages. N.J.S.A. § 2A:15-5.13(c).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Yes. Pursuant to the Statute, a defendant shall not be liable for punitive damages in any action in an amount in excess of five (5) times the liability of that defendant for compensatory damages or \$350,000, whichever is greater. N.J.S.A. § 2A:15-5.14(b). However, The Punitive Damages Act’s aforementioned limitations do not apply to civil causes of action for bias crime victims, discrimination cases, AIDS testing disclosure, sexual abuse, whistleblower cases under the Conscientious Employee Protection Act, or in cases in which a defendant has been convicted of murder, manslaughter, driving while intoxicated, or refusal to submit to test for a second offense in connection with operation of a motor vehicle. N.J.S.A. § 2A:15-5.14(c). An award of punitive damages must be specifically requested in the complaint. N.J.S.A. § 2A:15-5.11. The jury is not informed of the cap on punitive damages established by section 6 of the Act. N.J.S.A. § 2A:15-5.16.

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Punitive damages may be awarded to the plaintiff. See N.J.S.A. § 2A:15-5.12.



NEW MEXICO

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. *Romero v. Mervyn's*, 784 P.2d 992 (N.M. 1989); see also *N.M. Banquest Investors Corp. v. Peters Corp.*, 141 N.M. 632 (N.M.Ct. App. 2007).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Punitive damages may be awarded only when the wrongdoer's conduct may be said to be maliciously intentional, fraudulent, oppressive, or committed recklessly or with a wanton disregard of the plaintiff's rights. *Gonzalez v. Surgidev Corp.*, 899 P.2d 594 (N.M. 1995); *Constr. Contracting & Mgmt., Inc. v. McConnell*, 815 P.2d 1161 (N.M. 1991); *Green Tree Acceptance, Inc. v. Layton*, 769 P.2d 84 (N.M. 1989); *Romero*, 784 P.2d 992, *supra*. To be liable for punitive damages, a wrongdoer must have some culpable mental state, and the wrongdoer's conduct must rise to a willful, wanton, malicious reckless oppressive or fraudulent level. *New Mexico UJI 13-1827*; *Clay v. Ferrellgas, Inc.*, 118 N. M. 266, 881 P.2d 11 (N.M. 1994).

Mere negligence is inadequate to establish liability for punitive damages. *Paiz v. State Farm Fire & Cas. Co.*, 880 P.2d 300 (N.M. 1994); *Hood v. Fulkerson*, 699 P.2d 608 (N.M. 1985); *Ramsey v. Culpepper*, 738 F.2d 1092 (Tenth Cir. 1984). Gross negligence may, however, serve as a basis for punitive damages. *Jessen v. Nat'l Excess Ins. Co.*, 776 P.2d 1244 (N.M. 1989); *Sutherlin v. Fenega*, 810 P.2d 353 (N.M. Ct. App 1991); *Valdez v. Warner*, 742 P.2d 517 (N.M. Ct. App. 1987). The imposition of punitive damages rests with the discretion of the trier of fact. *New Mexico Hosp. Assoc. v. A.T. & S.F. Mem'l Hosp., Inc.*, 734 P.2d 748 (N.M. 1987); *Padilla v. Lawrence*, 685 P.2d 964 (N.M. Ct. App. 1984).

Standard of Proof. Preponderance of the evidence. *Gallegos v. Citizens Ins. Agency*, 779 P.2d 99 (N.M. 1989).

Actions Against State. Punitive damages are not recoverable against a governmental entity or public employee for any tort for which immunity has been waived under the Tort Claims Act. N.M. Stat. Ann. § 41-4-19 (2010).

Arbitration. Under the Uniform Arbitration Act, as amended effective July 1, 2001, an arbitrator may award punitive damages to the extent that such an award is permitted by law. *Aguilera v. Palm Harbor Homes, Inc.*, 54 P.3d 993 (N.M. 2002).

Breach of Contract. A plaintiff cannot recover punitive damages for breach of contract unless that breach is maliciously intentional, fraudulent or oppressive, or committed recklessly or with wanton disregard of the plaintiff's rights. *Rhein v. ADT Auto.*, 930 P.2d 783 (N.M. 1996); *Albuquerque Concrete Coring Co. Inc. v. Pan Am World Services, Inc.*, 879 P.2d 772 (N.M. 1994); *Constr. Contracting & Mgmt., Inc.*, 815 P.2d 1161, *supra*; *Kueffer v. Kueffer*, 791 P.2d 461 (N.M. 1990).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under New Mexico law, punitive damages are not awarded to compensate the plaintiff. They are awarded to punish the offender and as a warning to others, and thus can only be awarded against one who has participated in the offense. *Sanchez v. Sec. Acceptance Corp.*, 260 P.2d 703, 706 (N.M. 1953). Accordingly, under New Mexico law, absent participation, authorization or ratification by an employer of the tortious act of an employee, the employer cannot be held liable for punitive damages. *Id.* However, a punitive damages award against a corporation may be based on the actions of the employees viewed in the aggregate in order to determine whether the employer corporation had the requisite culpable mental state because of the cumulative conduct of the employees. *Grassie v. Roswell Hosp. Corp.*, 258 P.3d 1075, 1084 (N.M. 2011)(Known as the "cumulative conduct theory").

Environmental Liability. Punitive damages are permitted only where the defendant acted with a culpable mental state, or evil motive, that rose to a level of conduct that was willful, wanton, malicious, reckless, oppressive or fraudulent. *McNeill v. Rice Eng'g & Operating, Inc.*, 70 P.3d 794, 803879 P.2d 772, *supra*; *Newberry*, 773 P.2d 1231, *supra*.



Insurer's Bad Faith. A punitive damages instruction was to be given to the jury in every common law insurance bad faith case where the evidence supported a finding either that the insurer failed or refused to pay a claim for frivolous or unfounded reasons or that the insurer's failure or refusal to settle was based on a dishonest or unfair balancing of interests. *Sloan v. State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co. (In re Sloan)*, 85 P.3d 230 (N.M. 2004).

Product Liability. Punitive damages are permitted in an action for product liability where "the manufacturer is shown to have knowledge that its product is inherently dangerous to persons or property and that its continued use is likely to cause injury or death, but nevertheless continues to market the product without making feasible modifications to eliminate the danger or making adequate disclosure and warning of such danger." *Gonzales v. Surgidev Corp.*, 899 P.2d 576 (N.M. 1995) (citing *Baker v. Firestone Tire & Rubber Co.*, 793 F.2d 1196 (Eleventh Cir. 1986)).

Professional Liability. In the context of medical malpractice, gross negligence must rise to the level of "reckless indifference." *Sutherland v. Fenenege*, 810 P.2d 353 (N.M. Ct. App. 1991); *Gonzalez v. Sansoy*, 703 P.2d 904 (N.M. Ct. App. 1984).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes. Insurance policies that covered "all sums" for which the insured became liable included awards of punitive damages unless the contract contained language excluding such coverage. *Rummel v. St. Paul Surplus Lines Ins. Co.*, 945 P.2d 985 (N.M. 1997); *Baker v. Armstrong*, 744 P.2d 170 (N.M. 1987); *Wolff v. Gen. Cas. Co. of Am.*, 361 P.2d 330 (N.M. 1961). See also *Stinbrink v. Farmers Ins. Co.*, 803 P.2d 664 (N.M. 1990) (exclusion for punitive damages in uninsured motorists provision was void because such coverage was mandated by statute); *Stewart v. State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co.*, 726 P.2d 1374 (N.M. 1986) (uninsured motorist provision of automobile policy covered punitive damages; an insured may recover punitive damages from his insurer if he would be legally entitled to recover them from the uninsured tortfeasor). The total amount of punitive and compensatory damages for which the insurer was liable could not exceed the policy limits. *Stewart*, 726 P.2d 1374, *supra*.

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable. See II. A. above.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

The plaintiff must first establish actual damages. See N.M. U.J.I. Civ. 13-1827 (2005); *Allsup's Convenience Stores, Inc. v. N. River Ins. Co.*, 976 P.2d 1 (N.M. 1998); *Gonzales*, 899 P.2d 594, *supra*; *Sanchez v. Clayton*, 877 P.2d 567 (N.M. 1994); *N.M. Banquest Investors Corp. v. Peters*, *supra*. No specific ratio must be shown between the amount of actual damages and the punitive award. *Green Tree Acceptance, Inc.*, 769 P.2d 84, *supra*; *Robinson v. Campbell*, 683 P.2d 510 (N.M. Ct. App. 1984). But see *Littell v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 177 P.3d 1080 (N.M. Ct. App. 2008) (ratio of punitive damages to compensatory damages of 3.6 to 1 was within range deemed by U.S. Supreme Court to be consistent with due process). Punitive damages are excessive when there is no rational relationship between the defendant's alleged acts and the amount sought in punitive damages. *Aken v. Plains Elec. Generation & Transmission Coop., Inc.*, 49 P.3d 662 (N.M. 2002); *Stanton v. Gordon Jewelry Corp.*, 768 P.2d 888 (N.M. 1989).

The amount of punitive damages must be based on reason and justice taking into account all the circumstances, including the nature of the wrong and such aggravating and mitigating circumstances as may be shown. The amount awarded, if any, must be reasonably related to the injury and to any damages given as compensation and not disproportionate to the circumstances. N.M. U.J.I. Civ. 13-1827 (2010). In a suit based on intentional torts, the jury may award nominal damages to punish the wrongdoer for violating rights of the victim. *Sanchez*, 877 P.2d 567, *supra*.



D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

The only statutory caps involve cases against a governmental entity or a public employee while acting within the scope of his employment. Tort Claims Act, NMSA Ch. 41 Torts §41-4-19 (D). The law also appears to be in flux with respect to certain medical malpractice claims. Otherwise there are no caps in New Mexico.

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Punitive damages are generally payable to the plaintiff.



NEW YORK

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. See, e.g., *Mathie v. Fries*, 121 F.3d 808 (2d Cir. 1997) (claim pursuant to 42 U.S.C. §1983); *Zarcone v. Perry*, 572 F.2d 52 (2d Cir. 1978) (claim pursuant to 42 U.S.C. §1983); *Rocanova v. Equitable Life Assurance Soc’y of U.S.*, 83 N.Y.2d 603 (N.Y. 1994) (unfair claim settlement practices); *Loughry v. Lincoln First Bank*, 67 N.Y.2d 369 (N.Y. 1986) (slander); *B.F. v. Reprod. Med. Assocs. of New York*, 22 N.Y.S.3d 190, 197 (1st Dept. 2015) (malpractice); *Ahrens v. Stalzer*, 791 N.Y.S.2d 867 (1st Dept. 2004) (intentional infliction of emotional distress, conversion and trespass); *Merritt v. Ramos*, 639 N.Y.S.2d 643 (Civ. Ct. NY. Cty.1995) (assault and battery).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. In order to recover punitive damages, plaintiffs must demonstrate that the wrong complained of rose to a level of “such wanton dishonesty as to imply a criminal indifference to civil obligations.” *Martin v. Group Health Inc.*, 2 A.D.3d 414 (2nd Dept. 2003); *Rocanova v. Equitable Life Assurance Soc’y of U.S.*, 83 N.Y.2d 603 (N.Y. 1994) (quoting *Walker v. Sheldon*, 10 N.Y.2d 401 (N.Y. 1961)).

Punitive damages are recoverable in all actions based upon tortious acts that involve ingredients of malice, fraud, oppression, insult, wanton or reckless disregard of one’s rights, or other circumstances of aggravation. See *Walker v. Sheldon*, 10 N.Y.2d 401 (N.Y.1961); but see declining). See also *Outside Connection, Inc. v. DiGennaro*, 18 A.D.3d 634 (2nd Dept. 1995) (“[P]laintiffs failed to establish that the defendants’ alleged conduct was so gross, wanton, or willful, or of such high moral culpability, as to warrant an award of punitive damages.”); *Cushing v. Seemann*, 2467 A.D.2d 891 (4th Dept. 1998) (declining punitive damages for ordinary negligence); *Matter of Schoharie Limousine Crash of Oct. 6 2018*, 146 N.Y.S.3d 427, 444 (Albany Sup. Ct. Apr 2021) (“punitive damages deter such grossly negligent or reckless conduct as a matter of public policy”). Furthermore, punitive damages are available “for the purpose of vindicating a public right only where the actions of the alleged tortfeasor constitute gross recklessness or intentional, wanton or malicious conduct aimed at the public generally or are activated by evil or reprehensible motives.” *Nooger v. Jay-Dee Fast Delivery*, 194 A.D.2d 784 (2nd Dept. 1998); Such reprehensible conduct must proximately cause the claimant’s injuries. *Boykin v. Mora*, 274 A.D.2d 441 (2nd Dept. 2000).

Standard of Proof. The federal and state court cases on the question of standard of proof are “mired in a morass of ambiguity.” *Greenbaum v. Svenska Handelsbanken*, 979 F. Supp. 973, 975 (S.D.N.Y. 1997). Compare *In re Seventh Jud. Dist. Asbestos Litig. v. Armstrong World Indus.*, 593 N.Y.S.2d 685 (N.Y. App. Div. 1993) (holding that the evidentiary standard for proving entitlement to punitive damages is preponderance of the evidence), with *Randi A.J. v. Long Island Surgi-Center*, 46 A.D.3d 74, 86 (2nd Dept. 2007); *Munoz v. Puretz*, 754 N.Y.S.2d 463 (N.Y. App. Div. 2003) (holding that an award for punitive damages must be supported by clear, unequivocal and convincing evidence).

Pleading Considerations. Punitive damages do not create a separate right of action, but are inextricably linked to the underlying cause of action which has caused actual and ascertainable damages. *LaTouche v. Terezakis*, 132 A.D.3d 956 (2nd Dept. 2015); *Rocanova v. Equitable Life Assurance Soc’y of U.S.*, *supra*.

Actions Against State. Recovery of punitive damages against the state is prohibited. *Pietras v. Gol Pak Corp.*, 520 N.Y.S.2d 683 (N.Y. App. Div. 1987). Waiver of sovereign immunity does not permit punitive damages to be assessed. *Sharapata v. Islip*, 56 N.Y.2d 332 (N.Y. 1982). Punitive damages are also not permitted against a municipality. *Rekemeyer v. Cerone*, 252 A.D.2d 22 (3rd Dept. 1999).

Breach of Contract. Punitive damages are generally not allowed in contract actions, but are properly allowed in tort actions. *Ft. Howard Paper Co. v. William D. Witter Inc.*, 787 F.2d 784 (Second Cir. 1986); *Bibeau v. Ward*, 645 N.Y.S.2d 107 (N.Y. App. Div.



1996). Ordinary breach of contract will not support a punitive damages award as their purpose is not to remedy private wrongs but to vindicate public rights. *New York Univ. v. Cont'l Ins. Co.*, 87 N.Y.2d 308, 315 (N.Y. 1995); *Garrity v. Lyle Stuart, Inc.*, 40 N.Y.2d 354 (N.Y. 1976). "In order to state a claim for punitive damages, plaintiff must allege: (1) defendant's conduct must be actionable as an independent tort; (2) the tortious conduct must be of an egregious nature; (3) the egregious conduct must be directed to the plaintiff; and (4) it must be part of a pattern directed at the public generally." *Dinstber v Allstate Ins. Co.*, 110 AD3d 1410, 1411 (2013); *Brown v. Gov't Emps. Ins. Co.*, 156 A.D.3d 1087(3rd Dept. 2017).

See also *Schneer v. Bellantoni*, 672 N.Y.S.2d 756 (N.Y. App. Div. 1998). Punitive damages are justified only upon a showing of extraordinarily disingenuous or dishonest failure to carry out a contract, when the breach rests on fraud, or when deterring morally culpable conduct. *Morand v. Farmers New Century Ins. Co.*, 99 N.Y.S.3d 346, 348 (2nd Dept. 2019) (Damages "arising from the breach of a contract will ordinarily be limited to the contract damages necessary to redress the private wrong, but . . . punitive damages may be recoverable if necessary to vindicate a public right"); *JPMorgan Chase Bank, Nat'l Ass'n v. Corrado*, 80 N.Y.S.3d 366, 368-69 (2nd Dept. 2018)-

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. In *Loughry v. Lincoln First Bank*, 494 N.E.2d 70 (N.Y. 1986), New York's Highest court, the Court of Appeals, ruled that punitive damages can only be imposed on an employer where management has authorized, participated in, consented to or ratified the conduct giving rise to such damages, or deliberately retained the unfit employee. The court stated that this "complicity rule" results in employer liability for punitive damages only when a superior officer, in the course of employment orders, participates in or ratifies outrageous conduct. In order to further clarify this position, the court noted that the definition of a "superior officer" connotes more than an agent or ordinary officer or employee vested with some supervisory or decision-making responsibility. The term superior officer "must contemplate a high level of general managerial authority in relation to the nature and operation of the employer's business." *Id. Borst v. Lower Manhattan Dev. Corp.*, 80 N.Y.S.3d 29, 31 (1st Dept.2018); *Orange & Rockland Utils., Inc. v. Muggs Pub., Inc.*, 739 N.Y.S.2d 610 (N.Y. App. Div. 2002); *Father Belle Cmty. Ctr. v. N.Y. State Div. of Human Rights*, 642 N.Y.S.2d 739 (N.Y. App. Div. 1996).

Environmental Liability. A tort claim sounding in nuisance for environmental damage caused by contamination of a waste disposal site was a viable cause of action for punitive damages. *State of N.Y. v. Schenectady Chems., Inc.*, 479 N.Y.S.2d 1010 (3rd Dept. 1984); *State of N.Y. v. Monarch Chems., Inc.*, 443 N.Y.S.2d 967 (Sup. Ct., Broome Cty. 1981), *mod. and aff'd*, 90 A.D.2d 907 (3rd Dept. 1982) (landlord that retains real control of property but fails to take adequate steps to correct improper waste disposal or management practices by tenants has breached duty of reasonable care and is potentially liable for punitive damages; a complaint that pleads such allegations states a viable cause of action). *C.f. Niagara Vest, Inc. v. Alloy Briquetting Corp.*, 244 A.D.2d 892 (1997) (fraudulent conduct of landlord in misrepresenting the condition of environmentally contaminated premises to tenant, who in turn, relied to its detriment on those misrepresentations, was not sufficiently egregious to support a claim for punitive damages.)

Insurer's Bad Faith. There is no separate generalized tort claim for bad faith denial of insurance in New York. *Zawahir v. Berkshire Life Ins. Co.*, 22 A.D.3d 841, 842 (2nd Dept. 2005); *Pattera v. Nationwide Mut. Fire Ins. Co.*, 831 N.Y.S.2d 468, 470 (2nd Dept. 2007); *Kings Infiniti Inc. v. Zurich Am. Ins. Co.*, 990 N.Y.S.2d 437, 437 (NY Sup. Ct. Kings Cty 2014); *Those Certain Underwriters at Lloyd's, London v. DVO, Inc.*, 473 F. Supp. 3d 236, 267 (W.D.N.Y. 2020). See also, *Soto v. State Farm Insurance Company*, 83 N.Y.2d 718, (N.Y. 1994) (even where insurer is found to have acted in bad faith, plaintiff cannot recover excess award of punitive damages against insured from insurer); *Camelot Coach Corp. v. U.S. Fid. & Guar. Co.*, 238 A.D.2d 369 (2nd Dept. 1997) (absent sufficient allegations of fraudulent and deceitful scheme in dealing with the general public or implying criminal indifference to civil obligations, the insured failed to state a claim for punitive damages against the insurer); *Lavanant v. General Accident Ins. Co. of Am.*, 212 A.D.2d 450 (First Dept. 1995) (stating that punitive damages should be awarded only when insurer engaged in a fraudulent scheme against the general public evincing a high degree of moral turpitude, wanton or dishonest conduct as to imply a criminal indifference to civil obligations); *Desai v. Blue Shield, Inc.*, 178 A.D.2d 894 (3rd Dept. 1991); *Soto*, 83 N.Y.2d 718 (1994) (the insured was not entitled to punitive damages because the insured did not establish malice or intent to harm on the part of the insurer); *Supreme Automotive Mfg. Corp. v. Continental Casualty Co.*, 126 A.D.2d 153 (1st Dept. 1987); *Porter v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 184 A.D.2d 685 (2nd Dept. 1992); *Samovar of Russia Jewelry Antique Corp. v. Generali General Ins. Co.*, 102 A.D.2d 279,



476 N.Y.S.2d 869 (1st Dept. 1984). *But see Bi-Economy Mkt., Inc. v. Harleysville Ins. Co. of N.Y.*, 886 N.E.2d 127 (N.Y. 2008); *Panasia Estates Inc. v. Hudson Ins. Co.*, 886 N.E.2d 135 (N.Y. 2008) (affirming the right of insureds to seek consequential damages in excess of the policy limits when there is a breach of the covenant of good faith and fair dealing).

Product Liability. Punitive damages are recoverable. *See Home Ins. Co. v. Am. Home Prod. Corp.*, 75 N.Y.2d 196 (N.Y. 1990) (nothing in New York Law or public policy would preclude an award of punitive damages in a strict product liability case, where the theory of liability is failure to warn and where there is evidence that the failure was wanton or in conscious disregard of the rights of others); *Dumesnil v. Proctor & Schwartz, Inc.*, 199 A.D.2d 869 (3rd Dept. 1993) (punitive damages may be recovered in a strict product liability action, at least insofar as founded on a failure to warn); *Bikowicz v. Nedco Pharmacy*, 130 A.D.2d 89 (3rd Dept. 1987); *Baleno v. Jacuzzi Research, Inc.*, 93 A.D.2d 982 (4th Dept. 1983).

Professional Liability. In order to recover punitive damages in a medical malpractice action, a defendant's conduct must be so intentional, malicious, outrageous, or otherwise aggravated beyond mere negligence to warrant such an award. *McDougald v. Garber*, 73 N.Y.2d 246 (N.Y. 1989); *Graham v. Columbia- Presbyterian Med. Ctr.*, 185 A.D.2d 753 (1st Dept. 1992); *Sultan v. Kings Highway Hosp. Ctr.*, 167 A.D.2d 534 (2nd Dept. 1990). Punitive damages in a legal malpractice action are recoverable when an act that is aimed at the public generally is gross and involves high moral culpability. *See Mosseri v. Zimmerman*, 114 A.D.2d 338 (1st Dept. 1985); *Lavanant v. Gen. Accident Ins. Co. of Am.*, 212 A.D.2d 450 (1st Dept. 1995). *Cf. Garber v. Lynn*, 79 A.D.3d 401 (1st Dept. 2010) (punitive damages available in dental malpractice action against technician unlicensed to practice dentistry); *B.F. v. Reproductive Medicine Associates of N.Y.*, 22 N.Y.S.3d 190 (2015) (parents of child born with mental retardation allowed punitive damages against a doctor who failed to screen for Fragile X syndrome); *Gomez v. Cabatic*, 70 N.Y.S.3d 19, 28 (2nd Dept. 2018) (punitive damages award for a medical professional's act of altering or destroying medical records in an effort to evade potential medical malpractice liability).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

No. In *Soto v. State Farm Ins. Co.*, 83 N.Y.2d 718 (N.Y. 1994), the New York Court of Appeals held that while an insurer who acts in bad faith is usually required to pay any judgment in excess of the policy limits, state policy precludes indemnification for punitive damages. *See also Home Ins. Co. v. Am. Home Prod., Corp.*, 75 N.Y.2d 196 (N.Y. 1990) (requiring an insurer to reimburse the insured for punitive damages awarded in an out-of-state action would violate New York public policy). *See also Biondi v. Beekman Hill House Apt. Corp.*, 94 N.Y.2d 659 (N.Y. 2000) (holding that indemnification defeats the purpose of punitive damages, which is to punish and deter others from acting similarly); *J.P.Morgan Sec.Inc. v. Vigilant Ins. Co.*, 21 N.Y.3d 324 (N.Y. 2013) (a policy provision purporting to cover an insured for a punitive damages award is unenforceable).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Yes. Insurance coverage of vicariously assessed punitive damages is not permitted as a matter of New York public policy. *Zurich Ins. Co. v. Shearson Lehman Hutton, Inc.*, 84 N.Y.2d 309 (N.Y. 1994) (imposition of vicarious punitive damages can significantly advance the deterrence goal and thus vicariously assessed punitive damages are not excepted from the public policy prohibition against providing coverage for punitive damages).

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

There is no separate cause of action for punitive damages. *N.Y. Univ. v. Cont'l Ins. Co.*, 87 N.Y.2d 308 (N.Y. 1995); *Fishgold v. C.O.F., Inc.*, 288 A.D.2d 827 (4th Dept. 2001); *Mulder v. Donaldson, Lufkin & Jenrette*, 208 A.D.2d 301 (1st Dept. 1995); *Goldstein v. Winard*, 173 A.D.2d 201 (1st Dept. 1991); *Bader's Residence for Adults v. Telecom Equip. Corp.*, 455 N.Y.S.2d 303 (2nd Dept. 1982). "Not only do [punitive damages] differ in purpose and nature from compensatory damages, but they may only



be awarded for exceptional misconduct which transgresses mere negligence.” *Chauca v. Abraham*, 67 N.Y.S.3d 85, 89 (2017). Punitive damages do not create a separate right of action, but are inextricably linked to the underlying cause of action which has caused actual and ascertainable damages. See, *LaTouche v. Terezakis*, 132 A.D.3d 956 (2nd Dept. 2015); *Rocanova v. Equitable Life Assurance Soc’y of U.S.*, *supra*. Absent a valid claim for compensatory damages, there can be no claim for punitive damages. *Prote Contr. Co. v. Bd. of Educ.*, 276 A.D.2d 309 (N.Y. App. Div. 2000). However, in the context of a Title VII employment discrimination case, at least one court has held that punitive damages may be recovered even though the court finds that the plaintiff is not entitled to compensatory damages. *Cush-Crawford v. Adchem Corp.*, 94 F. Supp. 2d 294 (E.D.N.Y. 2000).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

The award of punitive damages by a jury should not be disturbed unless it is so grossly excessive as to warrant the conclusion that it was “actuated by passion.” *Nardelli v. Stamberg*, 377 N.E.2d 975, 977 (N.Y. 1978) (citations omitted). See also *Minichiello v. Supper Club*, 745 N.Y.S.2d 24 (N.Y. App. Div. 2002); *Buggie v. Cutler*, 636 N.Y.S.2d 357 (N.Y. App. Div. 1995); *Manolas v. 303 W. 2nd St. Enters., Inc.*, 569 N.Y.S.2d 701 (N.Y. App. Div. 1991) (finding the amount of the punitive damages award to be grossly excessive where the award was 80 times that of the compensatory award).

Punitive damages need not bear a certain ratio to actual damages. *Home Ins. Co. v. Am. Home Prods. Corp.*, 550 N.E.2d 930 (N.Y. 1990); *Merritt v. Ramos*, 639 N.Y.S.2d 643 (N.Y. Civ. Ct. 1995); *Ahrens v. Stalzer*, 2004 Slip Op. 50864U (N.Y. Misc. 2004). When reviewing a punitive damage award for excessiveness, courts must examine whether it deviated materially from what is considered reasonable compensation. The award must be reasonably related to the harm done and the flagrancy of the conduct, and consistent with the purpose of punishing a defendant for wanton and reckless acts, thereby discouraging similar conduct in the future. CPLR 5501[c]; *Ferguson v. City of New York*, 73 A.D.3d 649, 651 (2000). In the context of a Title VII employment discrimination claim, the measure of punitive damages must be reasonable and proportionate to the harm to a plaintiff and to the general damages recovered. *Equal Employment Opportunity Comm’r v. Mavis Discount Tire, Inc.*, 2015 WL 5311211 (S.D.N.Y. Sept. 11, 2015).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

A plaintiff may recover punitive damages if he can show that the defendant’s conduct rose to a level of “such wanton dishonesty as to imply a criminal indifference to civil obligations.” *164 Mulberry St. Corp. v. Columbia Univ.*, 771 N.Y.S.2d 16 (N.Y. App. Div. 2004); *Jeffrey BB v. Cardinal McCloskey Sch. and Home for Children*, 689 N.Y.S. 2d 721 (N.Y. App. Div. 1999).

In order for a plaintiff’s spouse or parent to receive punitive damages, there must be a direct interference/injury to the spousal/parental right. *Pickle v. Page*, 169 N.E. 650 (N.Y. 1929); *Young v. Robertshaw Controls Co.*, 104 A.D.2d 84, 481 N.Y.S.2d 891 (N.Y. App. Div. 1984). Indirect injury, such as loss of services, does not constitute a basis for an award of punitive damages. *Tidd v. Skinner*, 122 N.E. 247 (N.Y. 1919). Punitive damages may be awarded in an action to recover damages for personal injury where the death occurs after August 31, 1982. N.Y. ESTATE, POWERS & TRUSTS LAW, § 11-3.2 (Consol. 2010).



NORTH CAROLINA

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. N.C. GEN. STAT. Chapter 1D (2010); see *Rhyne v. K-Mart Corp.*, 594 S.E.2d 1 (N.C. 2004); *Stanback v. Stanback*, 254 S.E.2d 611 (N.C. 1979).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Under N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1D-15:

Standards for recovery of punitive damages:

1. Punitive damages may be awarded only if the claimant proves that the defendant is liable for compensatory damages and that one of the following aggravating factors was present and was related to the injury for which compensatory damages were awarded: fraud, malice, or willful or wanton conduct.
2. The claimant must prove the existence of an aggravating factor by clear and convincing evidence.
3. Punitive damages shall not be awarded against a person solely on the basis of vicarious liability for the acts or omissions of another. Punitive damages may be awarded against a person only if that person participated in the conduct constituting the aggravating factor giving rise to the punitive damages, or if, in the case of a corporation, the officers, directors, or managers of the corporation participated in or condoned the conduct constituting the aggravating factor giving rise to punitive damages.
4. Punitive damages shall not be awarded against a person solely for breach of contract.

When a jury is determining the amount to award in punitive damages, it may consider the following evidence:

1. The reprehensibility of the defendant's motives and conduct
2. The likelihood, at the relevant time, of serious harm
3. The degree of the defendant's awareness of the probable consequences of its conduct
4. The duration of the defendant's conduct
5. The actual damages suffered by the claimant
6. Any concealment by the defendant of the facts or consequences of its conduct
7. The existence and frequency of any similar past conduct by the defendant
8. Whether the defendant profited from the conduct
9. The defendant's ability to pay punitive damages, as evidenced by its revenues or net worth.

N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1D-35 (2010).



Standard of Proof. Clear and convincing evidence. N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1D-15(b) (2010). The party seeking damages “must show that the amount of damages is based upon a standard that will allow the finder of fact to calculate the amount of damages with reasonable certainty.” *Olivetti Corp. v. Ames Bus. Sys., Inc.*, 356 S.E.2d 578, 586 (N.C. 1987); *Case McCulloch, Inc. v. Freedman*, 610 S.E.2d 416 (N.C. Ct. App. 2005). This formulation is similar to the “preponderance of the evidence” standard. However, separate proof standards may be set forth in statutes authorizing punitive damages in specific contexts. See, e.g., N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1D-15(A)(1-3) (2010).

Pleading Requirements. *Holloway v. Wachovia Bank & Trust Co., N.A.*, 339 N.C. 338, 452 S.E.2d 233 (1994) (plaintiff need not plead punitive damages specifically if the facts of the case would support a finding of such damages); but see N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1D-20 (2004) (“claimant must elect, prior to judgment, between punitive damages and any other remedy pursuant to another statute that provides for multiple damages”); N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1A-1, Rule 9(K) (amended 1995) (“a demand for punitive damages shall be specifically stated, except for the amount, and the aggravating factor that supports the award of punitive damages shall be averred with particularity”).

Actions Against State. Punitive damages may not be awarded against a municipality in actions arising under common law. *Long v. Charlotte*, 293 S.E.2d 101 (N.C. 1982). Punitive damages, however, can be awarded against municipalities and their corporations if such a cause of action is created by statute. See, e.g., *Jackson v. Hous. Auth. of High Point*, 341 S.E.2d 523 (N.C. 1986) (permitting recovery of punitive damages against municipality under statute for wrongful death action). See also N.C. Gen. Stat. § 12-3 (6) (“The word ‘person’ shall extend and be applied to bodies politic and corporate...”).

Breach of Contract. Generally, except for breach of contract to marry, punitive damages will not lie for breach of contract. N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1D-15 (d) (2010). Punitive damages are available where the breach of contract rises to the level of independent tort. *Shore v. Farmer*, 351 N.C. 166 (1999).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Pursuant to N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1D-15(c), punitive damages are not available against a person solely on the basis of vicarious liability for the acts or omissions of another. Punitive damages may be awarded against a person only if that person participated in the conduct constituting the aggravating factor giving rise to the punitive damages or if, in the case of a corporation, the officers, directors, or managers of the corporation participated in or condoned the conduct constituting the aggravating factor giving rise to punitive damages.

Environmental Liability. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit affirmed a punitive damages award by the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina arising out of a defendant’s violation of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act. *U.S. v. Carolina Transformer Co.*, 978 F.2d 832 (Fourth Cir. 1992). Punitive damages award of \$5,000 was affirmed for a property damage claim; however, the Sedimentation Pollution Control Act does not allow punitive damages. See *Huberth v. Holly*, 462 S.E. 2d 239 (N.C. Ct. App. 1995).

Insurer’s Bad Faith. An insurer’s violation of a good faith duty with aggravating factors (i.e., intentional, willful, oppressive, unscrupulous and reckless disregard for rights) is sufficient to state a claim for a bad faith refusal to settle, and support a claim for punitive damages. See *Miller v. Nationwide Mut. Ins. Co.*, 435 S.E. 2d 537 (N.C. Ct. App. 1993); *Lovell v. Nationwide Mut. Ins. Co.*, 424 S.E. 2d 181 (N.C. Ct. App. 1993).

Product Liability. Punitive damages may be available for a product liability claim where the plaintiff makes an adequate claim. See *Holmes v. Colombo*, 377 S.E.2d 261 (N.C. Ct. App. 1989).

Professional Liability. Punitive damages are allowed for a professional negligence claim where the plaintiff has proven at least nominal damages, and there is an element of aggravation. See *Estate of Smith v. Underwood*, 487 S.E.2d 807 (N.C. Ct. App. 1997). See also *Muse v. Charter Hosp. of Winston-Salam, Inc.*, 452 S.E.2d 589 (N.C. Ct. App. 1995) (discharge of a patient from a hospital when insurance ran out is a willful or wanton activity that supports a \$2 million punitive damages award against a hospital).



II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes. *Collins & Aikman Corp. v. Hartford Accident & Indem. Co.*, 436 S.E.2d 243 (N.C. 1993). *Mazza v. Med. Mut. Ins. Co.*, 319 S.E.2d 217 (N.C. 1984) (public policy does not preclude coverage for punitive damages); see *Lavender v. State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co.*, 450 S.E.2d 34 (N.C. Ct. App. 1994) (automobile policy covered punitive damages award absent express exclusion); *New S. Ins. Co. v. Kidd*, 443 S.E.2d 85 (N.C. Ct. App. 1994) (automobile policy covered punitive damages even though it contained exclusion for intentional conduct; policy must explicitly state that punitive damages are excluded); *Boyd v. Nationwide Mut. Ins. Co.*, 424 S.E.2d 168 (N.C. Ct. App. 1993) (business automobile and commercial umbrella policy covered punitive damages).

Under N.C. GEN. STAT. § 58-41-50(a) (2004), with respect to liability insurance policy forms, an insurer may exclude or limit coverage for punitive damages awarded against its insured.

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable. See II. A. above.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Punitive damages may not be awarded unless compensatory damages are recoverable. N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1D-15 (a) (2004); *Shugar v. Guill*, 304 N.C. 332, 283 S.E.2d 507 (N.C. 1981); see *Mehovic v. Mehovic*, 514 S.E.2d 730 (N.C. Ct. App. 1999). Punitive damages, however, will be allowed where the plaintiff has proved at least nominal damages and where the element of aggravation accompanying the tortious conduct causes the injury. *Ingle v. Allen*, 317 S.E.2d 1 (N.C. Ct. App. 1984); *Jones v. Gwynne*, 323 S.E.2d 9 (N.C. 1984) (lack of showing of malice precluded the recovery of punitive damages); see also *Hawkins v. Hawkins*, 417 S.E.2d 447 (N.C. 1992) (permitting recovery of punitive damages without award of compensatory damages because plaintiff was entitled to recover nominal damages and, therefore, also punitive damages); *Jennings v. Jessen*, 407 S.E.2d 264 (N.C. Ct. App. 1991).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

There is a limit on recovery of punitive damages of either three times the amount of compensatory damages or \$250,000, whichever is greater. This limit, however, shall not be made known to the trier of fact, who shall determine the award of punitive damages separately from all other damages. N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1D-25 (a-c) (2010); *Rhyne v. K-Mart Corp.*, 594 S.E.2d 1 (N.C. 2004), *aff'g* 149 N.C. App. 672 (N.C. App. 2002). The cap for punitive damages awards does not apply to actions under the "Driving While Impaired" statutes. N.C. GEN. STAT. §§ 20-138.1, 20-138.2., 20-138.5 (2010). N.C. GEN. STAT. § 1D-26 (2010).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Punitive damages are generally payable to the plaintiff under North Carolina law. See, e.g., N.C. GEN. STAT. § 15B-18 (2004) (punitive damages as crime victims' compensation), N.C. GEN. STAT. § 28A-18-2 (2004) (punitive damages under wrongful death statute), N.C. GEN. STAT. § 99D-1 (2004) (punitive damages for interference with civil rights).



NORTH DAKOTA

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. N.D. CENT. CODE § 32-03.2-11 (2010); *Corwin Chrysler-Plymouth, Inc. v. Westchester Fire Ins. Co.*, 279 N.W.2d 638 (N.D. 1979). See also *Pioneer Fuels Inc. v. Mont.-Dakota Utils. Co.*, 474 N.W.2d 706 (N.D. 1991). Punitive damages need not be provided expressly by a statute in order to be awarded. N.D. CENT. CODE § 32-03-35.

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Oppression, fraud or actual malice. N.D. CENT. CODE § 32-03.2-11 (1). See *Slaubaugh v. Slaubaugh*, 466 N.W.2d 573 (N.D. 1991); *Ingalls v. Paul Revere Life Ins. Group*, 561 N.W.2d 273 (N.D. 1997). Oppression, fraud, or malice can be understood as an “intent to vex, injure or annoy, or a conscious disregard of the plaintiff’s rights.” *Id.* The absence of a specific finding of oppression, fraud or malice, actual or presumed, is fatal to the award of exemplary damages. See *Ehrman v. Feist*, 568 N.W.2d 747 (N.D. 1997).

Standard of Proof. Punitive damages are only awardable when the defendant is liable by clear and convincing evidence. N.D. CENT. CODE § 32-03.2-11 (1).

Actions Against State. Punitive or exemplary damages are not permitted. N.D. CENT. CODE § 32 03.2-12 (2005).

Breach of Contract. North Dakota only allows the award of punitive damages for a breach of contract action, when an insurer has accompanied such a breach with an “independent willful tort.” N.D. Cent. Code § 32-03-09. See also *Pioneer Fuels v. Mont.-Dakota Utils. Co.*, 474 N.W.2d 706, 709 (N.D. 1991).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under North Dakota law, punitive damages are not recoverable against the employer for the wrongful act of an employee, unless the employer: (1) participated in the wrongful act, (2) approved of the wrongful act, or (3) ratified the wrongful act. N.D. Cent. Code §§ 32-03.2-11(1), 32-12.2-02(2). See also *John Deere Co. v. Nygard Equip.*, 225 N.W.2d 80, 95 (N.D. 1974).

Environmental Liability. There is no North Dakota case law or statute expressly authorizing punitive damages in the area of environmental liability. However, punitive damages need not be provided expressly by a statute in order to be awarded. N.D. Cent. Code § 32-03-35. Instead, the standard of conduct required for an award of punitive damages is oppression, fraud or malice, actual or presumed. N.D. Cent. Code § 32-03.2-11 (1).

Insurer’s Bad Faith. North Dakota case law has held that an “insurer holds an implied duty to deal fairly and act in good faith with its insured and that the violation of this duty gives rise to an action in tort for which, in proper cases, punitive damages may be sought.” *Smith v. American Family Mut. Ins. Co.*, 294 N.W. 2d 751,759 (N.D. 1980). A “proper case” can be defined as when an insurer acted with the “intent to vex, injure or annoy, or a conscious disregard of the insured rights.” *Ingalls*, 561 N.W. 2d at 284. See also *Maristuen v. Nat’l States Ins. Co.*, 57 F.3d 673, 679 (8th Cir. 1995) (allowing punitive damages for insurance bad faith).

Other Circumstances. By statute, punitive damages may be allowed against (1) a public utility that willfully violates the law; (2) for injuries to domestic animals resulting from gross negligence or willful acts, N.D. CENT. CODE § 36-21-13 (1995); (3) for injury resulting from illegal sales of liquor; (4) for malicious mischief; and (5) for conversion of personality, *Lamoreaux v. Randall*, 53 N.D. 697, 208 N.W. 104 (N.D. 1926); N.D. CENT. CODE § 32- 03-23 (2005).

Product Liability. Punitive damages may be awarded in a products liability suit, so long as the plaintiff can provide evidence that the defendant acted with malice. *Hebron Pub. Sch. Dist. No. 13 v. U.S. Gypsum*, 953 F.2d 398, 403 (Eighth Cir. 1992) (citing *Dahlen v. Landis*, 314 N.W.2d 63, 69 (N.D. 1981)). Mere negligence on behalf of the defendant, will not rise to the level of conduct required for punitive damages to be assessed. *McLean v. Kirby Co.*, 490 N.W. 2d 229, 246 (N.D. 1992).



Professional Liability. In an action for legal malpractice, an attorney who is guilty of deceit or collusion or consents to deceit or collusion, with intent to deceive the court or any party, forfeits to the party injured treble damages. N.D. Cent. Code § 27-13-08. The treble damages award may be characterized as punitive. *Id.*

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Generally, North Dakota does not allow defendants to insure against punitive damages as this goes against public policy. Under North Dakota Administrative Code, “[a]ll contracts which have for their object, directly or indirectly, the exempting of anyone from responsibility for that person’s own fraud or willful injury to the person or property of another, or violation of law, whether willful or negligent, are against the policy of the law.” N.D. Cent. Code, § 9-08-02.

However, there are some instances where punitive damages are insurable. In a case involving the interpretation of an ambiguous insurance policy, the North Dakota Supreme Court interpreted the contract to provide coverage for punitive damages. *Cont’l Cas. Co. v. Kinsey*, 499 N.W. 2d 574, 580 (N.D. 1993). Here, insurability was allowed under the doctrine of contract adhesion, as this was the interpretation that was most favorable to the insured. *Id.* (insurer did not breach duty to settle case where it had duty to pay only compensatory damages and it also had a right to seek reimbursement from the insured for punitive damages).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Undetermined, but probably not.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

No award of exemplary damages may be made if the claimant is not entitled to compensatory damages. N.D. CENT. CODE § 32-03.2-11 (2005).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

North Dakota law caps the award of punitive damages to the greater of: (1) two times the amount of compensatory damages, or (2) \$250,000. N.D. Cent. Code § 32-03.2-11(4).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Generally, an award of punitive damages is payable to the plaintiff.



OHIO

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. O.R.C. Ann. §2315.21; *Cabe v. Lunich*, 640 N.E.2d 159, 162 (Oh. 1994).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Punitive damages may be awarded in cases in which the acts or omissions of the defendant demonstrate actual malice, or aggravated or egregious fraud. O.R.C. Ann. §2315.21(c)(1). Malice sufficient for an award of punitive damages is present where a defendant “possessed either (1) that state of mind under which a person’s conduct is characterized by hatred, ill will or a spirit of revenge, or (2) a conscious disregard for the rights and safety of other persons that has a great probability of causing substantial harm.” *Cabe v. Lunich*, 640 N.E.2d 159, 162 (Oh. 1994). The second category includes reckless behavior that demonstrates a conscious disregard for a great, obvious harm. *Preston v. Murty*, 512 N.E.2d 1174, 1175 (Oh. 1987).

Standard of Proof. An award of punitive damages requires clear and convincing evidence. O.R.C. Ann. 2315.21(c)(3). They may not be awarded in Ohio absent actual proof of damages. *Shimola v. Nationwide Ins. Co.*, 496 N.E.2d 391 (Oh. 1986).

Actions Against State. Punitive damages may not be awarded for acts or omissions in connection with a government or proprietary function. O.R.C. Ann. §2744.05; *Schaad v. Buckeye Valley Local Sch. Dist. Bd. of Educ.*, 2016-Ohio-569 (6th Dist. 2016) (explaining punitive damages cannot be awarded against a defendant in his official capacity as a government employee).

Breach of Contract. Punitive damages may not be awarded in a breach of contract action. *Hofner v. Davis*, 675 N.E.2d 1339, 1341 (Oh. Ct. App. 2016). However, punitive damages may be awarded in a breach of contract action which involves a separate malicious or oppressive tort. *R&H Trucking, Inc. v. Occidental Fire & Cas. Co.*, 441 N.E.2d 816 (Oh. Ct. App. 1981) citing *Ketcham v. Miller*, 136 N.E. 145 (Oh. 1922); *Sweet v. Grange Mut. Cas. Co.*, 364 N.E.2d 38, 39 (holding a claim for punitive damages should have been considered in an action for breach of contract arising with a tort claim).

Employer Liability. Punitive damages may be awarded against an employer for the acts or omissions of an employee when the employer “knowingly authorized, participated in, or ratified” the employee’s conduct. O.R.C. §2315.21(C)(1); *Stephens v. A-Able Rents Co.*, 654 N.E.2d 1315 (Oh. Ct. App. 1995)(finding punitive damages appropriate for negligent hiring).

Insurer’s Bad Faith. Punitive damages may be awarded in claims of bad faith against insurers where the insurer refuses to pay a claim and engages in actual malice, fraud, or insult. *Staff Builders, Inc. v. Armstrong*, 525 N.E.2d 783 (Oh. 1988); *Hoskins v. Aetna Life Ins. Co.*, 452 N.E.2d 1315 (Oh. 1983)(explaining punitive damages may be awarded for bad faith claims against insurer who failed to settle, if the plaintiff sufficiently pleads).

Tortious Interference and Misappropriation of Trade Secrets. Punitive damages may be awarded for tortious interference and misappropriation of trade secrets. O.R.C. Ann. §1333.63; *Mid-Michigan Computer Sys. v. Marc Glassman, Inc.*, 416 F.3d 505 (6th Cir. 2005) (finding punitive damages appropriate in action for misappropriation of trade secrets as they did not exceed three times the compensatory damages); *McLaurin v. Fischer*, 768 F.2d 98 (6th Cir. 1985)(holding punitive damages recoverable in action for tortious interference with business relations when interference was due to ill will, spite, or hatred).

Products Liability. Punitive damages may be awarded in products liability actions where there was a “great probability of causing substantial harm.” *Calmes v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.*, 575 N.E.2d 416 (Oh. 1991)(explaining that a “great probability” of substantial harm requires more than mere foreseeability, it requires high foreseeability for punitive damages in products liability).



Professional Liability. Punitive damages may be recovered in an action for professional liability. *Doe v. White*, 647 N.E.2d 198 (Oh. Ct. App. 1994)(finding punitive damages appropriate where the findings of malice are based on a great probability of harm).

Wrongful Death and Survivorship. Generally, punitive damages are not recoverable for wrongful death claims in Ohio. *Rubeck v. Huffman*, 374 N.E.2d 411 (Oh. 1978). However, punitive damages may be awarded in a survivorship action. *Estate of Robert L. Beavers v. Knapp*, 889 N.E.2d 181 (Oh. Ct. App. 2008)(explaining punitive damages may be awarded if decedent suffered personal injury or property loss before death).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable?

No, punitive damages are not insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer in Ohio. O.R.C. Ann. §3937.182; *Casey v. Calhoun*, 531 N.E.2d 1348 (Oh. Ct. App. 1987) (finding insurance for punitive damages against public policy because it would shift the intended punishment from the wrongdoer to the insurance company); *Lumbermens Mut. Cas. C. v. S-W Indus.*, 39 F.3d 1324 (6th Cir. 1994) (stating “Ohio law prohibits the indemnification of monies paid pursuant to an award of punitive damages arising out of the insured’s own conduct”).

B. What is the relationship of punitive damages to compensatory damages?

Punitive damage cannot be awarded without first an award of compensatory damages. *Weaver v. Colwell Financial Corp.*, 596 N.E.2d 617 (Oh. Ct. App. 1992); *Shimola v. Nationwide Ins. Co.*, 496 N.E.2d 391 (Oh. 1986) (explaining punitive damages cannot be awarded absent actual proof). Additionally, low compensatory damages with high punitive damages imposed by the jury are not necessarily cause to reverse judgment or grant remittitur. *Uebelacker v. Cincom Sys., Inc.*, 608 N.E.2d 858 (Oh. Ct. App. 1992).

C. Are there any statutory caps or state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Yes. Ohio law limits the amount of punitive damages to two times the amount of compensatory damages awarded. If the defendant is a small employer or individual, punitive damages are limited to the lesser of two times the compensatory damages or ten percent of their net worth up to a maximum of \$350,000. O.R.C. Ann. §2315.21 (D). Additionally, the defendant’s wealth is relevant when determining punitive damages. *Spadafore v. Blue Shield, Oh. Medical Indem. Corp.*, 486 N.E.2d 1201, 2015 (Oh. Ct. App. 1985). Attorney’s fees awarded as result of claim for punitive damages are not to be considered for purposes of determining the cap. O.R.C. Ann. §2315.21 (D)(2)(c).

Ohio imposes punitive damages to punish and deter. *Dardinger v. Anthem Blue Cross & Blue Shield*, 781 N.E.2d 121, 144 (Oh. 2002). (explaining these “twin aims” should be considered in light of the defendant involved, but the law does not require financial ruin of the defendant). The primary consideration is the defendant’s behavior, rather than the injury or damage to the plaintiff. *Wightman v. Conrail*, 715 N.E.2d 546 (Oh. 1999).

D. To whom and from whom are punitive damages payable?

Punitive damages are payable to plaintiffs. Additionally, the estate of the decedent may be awarded punitive damages. *Rubeck v. Hoffman*, 374 N.E.2d 411 (Oh. 1978). Punitive damages may also be imposed against a deceased tortfeasor. *Whetstone v. Binner*, 15 N.E.3d 905 (Oh. Ct. App. 2014) (holding punitive damages may be imposed on a defendant’s estate).



OKLAHOMA

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes, for the breach of non-contractual obligations. 23 OKL. STAT. Ann.§ 9.1(A); *Capstick v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 998 F.2d 810, 821 (Tenth Cir. 1993); *Smith v. Johnson*, 591 P.2d 1260, 1264 (Okla. 1978). Punitive damages serve a broader function to aimed at deterrence and retribution. *State Farm Mut. Auto. Insr. Co. v Campbell*, 538 U.S. 408 (2003).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Conduct that would cause punitive damages awards includes a wanton or reckless disregard for the rights of others, reckless disregard of a duty to deal fairly and act in good faith with the insured (for an insurer), or acting with actual malice, fraud or oppression. Reckless disregard and gross negligence may be used to infer malice. *Stroud v. Arthur Anderson & Co.*, 37 P.3d 783, 793 (Okla. 2001); **23 OKL. STAT. Ann.§ 9.1**; *Silkwood v. Kerr-McGee Corp.*, 769 F.2d 1451 (Tenth Cir. 1985), cert. denied, 476 U.S. 1104 (1986); *Mitchell v. Ford Motor Credit Co.*, 688 P.2d 42 (Okla. 1984); *Oden v. Russell*, 251 P.2d 184 (Okla. 1952); *Graham v. Keuchel*, 847 P.2d 342 (Okla. 1993).

A request for punitive damages is considered an element of recovery of the underlying cause of action and is not a separate cause of action. *Rodebush ex. rel. Rodebush v Okla. Nursing Homes, Ltd.*, 867 P.2d 1241 (Okla. 1993).

Standard of Proof. Punitive damages require a plaintiff to prove by “clear and convincing evidence” that the defendant is “guilty of reckless disregard for the rights of others” or “acted intentionally and with malice towards others.” *McKinley v. Am. Dump Trucks, Inc.*, 2021 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 188186 (W.D. Okla. Sep. 30, 2021)(quoting Okla. Stat. tit. 23, §9.1). A “competent evidence standard” is used to award damages that are capped. In order to lift the cap and award punitive damages, a clear and convincing evidence standard must be met. *Badillo v. Mid Century Ins. Co.*, 121 P.3d 1080 (Okla. 2005); *Barnes v. Okla. Farm Bureau Mut. Ins. Co.*, 11 P.3d 162 (Okla. 2000).

Actions Against State. Punitive damages are not recoverable. Okla. Stat. tit. 51, § 154(C) (2010); *Estate of Weatherford v. Bd. of County Comm’rs*, 2009 U.S. Dist. (LexisNexis 9886) (E.D. Okla. Feb. 10, 2009).

Breach of Contract. Punitive damages are not awarded for breach of contract. However, punitive damages may be awarded where the breach amounts to an independent willful tort. *Woods Petroleum Corp. v. Delhi Gas Pipeline Corp.*, 700 P.2d 1023 (Okla. Ct. App. 1983); *Jackson v. Glasgow*, 622 P.2d 1088 (Okla. Ct. App. 1980); *Norman’s Heritage Real Estate Co. v. Aetna Cas. & Sur. Co.*, 727 F.2d 911 (Tenth Cir. 1984); *Zenith Drilling Corp. v. Internorth Inc.*, 869 F.2d 560 (Tenth Cir. 1989); *Okland Oil Co. v. Conoco Inc.*, 144 F.3d 1308 (Tenth Cir. 1998). *But see, Embry v. Innovative Aftermarket Systems L.P.*, 2010 OK 82, 247 P. 3d 1158 (2010), in which the Oklahoma Supreme Court allowed bad faith tort liability for breaching a contract in which the parties had a “special relationship” due to the disparity of bargaining power and the elimination of risk. In addition, 12 O.S. § 1-304 which eliminated tort liability for the breach of good faith in UCC contracts was declared unconstitutional and void, thus, providing a potential argument for tort liability. *Douglas v. Cox Retirement Properties, Inc.*, 2013 OK 37.

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under Oklahoma law, exemplary damages may be awarded against an employer for the wrongful act of an employee even though the employer did not personally participate in, authorize, or ratify the act complained of. *Kurn v. Radencic*, 141 P.2d 580, 581 (Okla. 1943).

Environmental Liability. Punitive damages may be awarded. *Cities Serv. Oil Co. v. Merritt*, 332 P.2d 677 (Okla. 1958). In *Merritt*, the landowner sought damages from oil companies that polluted her water wells with saltwater. *Id.* The defendants, for more than 20 years, “had permitted immense quantities of salt water to escape into the creeks in the watershed in reckless and wanton disregard of the consequences.” *Id.* at 687. Lack of personal malice was no defense. *Id.*



Insurer's Bad Faith. Punitive damages may be awarded where a jury finds by clear and convincing evidence that an "insurer has recklessly disregarded its duty to deal fairly and act in good faith with its insured..." or that an "insurer has intentionally and with malice breached its duty to deal fairly and act in good faith with its insured." Okla. Stat. tit. 23, § 9.1 (2010).

Product Liability. Punitive damages may be awarded "under those circumstances where it is demonstrated that the defendant manufacturer acted 'with reckless disregard for public safety' in designing, advertising, manufacturing and/or distributing the product at issue." *Johnson v. Gen. Motors Corp.*, 889 F. Supp. 451, 454 (W.D. Okla. 1995) (citing *Thiry v. Armstrong World Ind.*, 661 P.2d 515, 518 (Okla. 1983)). Reckless disregard is shown when (1) the defendant was aware of a defect and that user injury would likely result from the defect; (2) the defendant was capable of preventing user injury; and (3) the defendant "deliberately failed to take any action to remedy the product's defect or to prevent the possibility of user injury." *Id.* (citing *Thiry*, 661 P.2d at 517).

Professional Liability. In medical malpractice actions, a breach of fiduciary duty between patient and physician can be the basis for an award of punitive damages. *Silman v. Whistler*, 790 P.2d 1125, 1126 (Okla. Ct. App. 1989) (citing *McCarroll v. Reed*, 679 P.2d 851, 854 (Okla. Ct. App. (1983)).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

No. It is against public policy to allow a wrongdoer to escape punishment by insuring himself against a punitive damages award. *Magnum Foods Inc. v. Cont'l Cas. Co.*, 36 F.3d 1491 (Tenth Cir. 1994); *Oliver v. Producers Gas Co.*, 798 P.2d 1090 (Okla. Ct. App. 1990) (insurance proceeds must be allocated to compensatory damages and not to punitive damages); *Aetna Cas. & Sur. Co. v. Craig*, 771 P.2d 212 (Okla. 1989) (payment of punitive damages under uninsured motorist provision would violate public policy). But there is a narrow exception, allowing insurability solely in the vicarious liability context. *Aetna Cas. & Sur. Co. v. Craig*, 771 P.2d 212, 215-16 (Okla. 1989).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

No. It does not violate public policy to allow one who is vicariously liable to insure against punitive damages, so long as his negligence is no more than ordinary and the employee commits an intentional tort or willful act. *Jordan*, 935 P.2d at 292; *Sides v. John Cordes, Inc.*, 981 P.2d 301, 306 n.16 (Okla. 1999).

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Oklahoma requires recovery of actual damages in order to recover punitive damages. 23 OKL. STAT. Ann. § 9.1; *Mitchell v. Griffin Television, L.L.C.*, 60 P.3d 1058, 1067 (Okla. Ct. App. 2002) (instructing trial court to vacate punitive damages where no compensatory damages were affirmed); *Smith v. Johnson*, 591 P.2d 1260 (Okla. 1978). Punitive damages cannot stand without at least a nominal compensatory award under a tort cause of action. *Norman's Heritage Real Estate Co. v. Aetna Cas. and Sur. Co.*, (Tenth Cir. 1984). Punitive damages must bear some reasonable relation to the cause and extent of the injuries inflicted. *Timmons v. Royal Globe Ins. Co.*, 653 P.2d 907 (Okla. 1982); *Silkwood v. Kerr-McGee Corp.*, 769 F.2d 1451 (Tenth Cir. 1985).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

23 OKL. STAT. Ann. § 9.1(B), (C), (D) set certain limits on punitive damages recoveries, depending on the magnitude of the culpable behavior. Particularly, these sections categorize the available recoveries. Category I and Category II cap punitive damages; Category III does not.



The difference in standards of proof among the categories is relevant only to the question of whether to lift the punitive damages cap. See *Am. Nat'l Bank & Trust Co. v. Bic Corp.*, 880 P.2d 420 (Okla. Ct. App. 1994) (facts created a situation where the punitive damages cap could be lifted).

For Category I, the award may not exceed \$100,000 or the actual damages awarded (whichever is greater). See *Majors v. Good*, 832 P.2d 420 (Okla. 1992) (statute limiting punitive damages to the amount not exceeding the amount of actual damages awarded applies prospectively only, to awards made after 1986); *Nalley v. Kellwood Co.*, 867 P.2d 1336 (Okla. Ct. App. 1993) (facts outlined situation where punitive damages were reduced to accord to the actual damages); *Mitchell v. Ford Motor Co.*, 688 P.2d 42 (Okla. 1984) (verdict not necessarily subject to reversal because actual damages allowed were less than the amount of punitive damages).

For Category II, the award may not exceed \$500,000, twice the amount of actual damages, or the increased financial benefit derived by the defendant or insurer as a direct result of the conduct causing the injury to the plaintiff. See Okla. Stat. tit. 23, § 9.1(B), (C), (D); *Gilbert v. Security Finance Corp. of Oklahoma, Inc.*, 152 P.3d 165, 181 (Okla. 2006) (explaining Category II calculation).

For Category III, punitive damages may be awarded in any amount. If the jury finds by clear and convincing evidence that the defendant committed the act intentionally and with malice towards others, 23 OKL. STAT. Ann.§ 9.1(D)(1); or an insurer has intentionally and with malice breached its duty to deal fairly and in good faith with its insurer and there is evidence beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant or insurer acted intentionally and with malice and engaged in conduct life-threatening to humans, then punitive damages can be awarded in any amount. 23 OKL. STAT. Ann.§ 9.1(D)(2); *Badillo v. Mid Century Ins. Co.*, 2005 Ok. 48 (Okla. 2005); *Bowen v. Amoco Pipeline Co.*, 254 F.3d 925, 940-41 (Tenth Cir. 2001) (applying Oklahoma law). To fall within Category III, there must be a preliminary finding by the court that the defendant acted with actual or presumed malice, wanton or reckless disregard of rights of another, fraud, or oppression, and finding must be supported by clear and convincing evidence. *Rodebush v. Okla. Nursing Homes, Ltd.*, 867 P.2d 1241, 1247 (Okla. 1993). The requisite malice may be inferred from gross negligence that indicates conscious indifference to consequences of one's acts or reckless disregard for safety of others. *Silkwood v. Kerr-McGee Corp.*, 769 F.2d 1451, 1455 (Tenth Cir. 1985).

Factors. The jury shall consider the following factors when determining whether to assess punitive damages: (1) the seriousness of the hazard to the public arising from the defendant's misconduct; (2) the profitability of defendant's misconduct; (3) the duration of the misconduct and any concealment of it; (4) the degree of the defendant's awareness of the hazard and of its excessiveness; (5) the attitude and conduct of the defendant upon discovery of the misconduct or hazard; (6) in the case of corporate defendant, the number and level of employees involved in causing or concealing the misconduct; and (7) the financial condition of the defendant. 23 OKL. STAT. Ann.§ 9.1(A); *Silkwood*, 769 F.2d at 1460. 12 O.S. § 990.4 which eliminated a bond for the appeal of punitive damages was declared unconstitutional and void. *Douglas v. Cox Retirement Properties, Inc.*, 2013 OK 37.

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Punitive damages may be awarded to the plaintiff. **23 OKL. STAT. Ann.§ 9.1.**

F. Other Statutory Schemes

47 Okl. St. §§10-103 prohibits the driver or any vehicle who is involved in an accident from leaving the scene of the accident until they have fulfilled other statutory requirements of exchange of information including name, address, registration and drivers license. Failure to provide this information will be "subject to liability for damages in an amount equal to three times the value of the damage caused by the accident." The treble damages in this statute are considered to be punitive damages as a matter of law. *Progressive Direct Ins. Co. v. Pope*, 2022 Okla. 4*, 507 P.3d 688 (2022)(Treble damages award precluded by policy language that did not cover punitive or exemplary damages).



OREGON

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. See OR. REV. STAT. § 31.730. Pursuant to the Oregon Tort Claims Act, no award for damages on any tort action against a public body may include punitive damages. OR. REV. STAT. § 30.269.

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. A plaintiff seeking punitive damages must prove “by clear and convincing evidence that the party against whom punitive damages are sought has acted with malice or has shown a reckless and outrageous indifference to a highly unreasonable risk of harm and has acted with a conscious indifference to the health, safety and welfare of others.” OR. REV. STAT. § 31.730(1). The Supreme Court of Oregon has stated punitive damages are “a penalty for conduct that is culpable by reason of motive, intent, or extraordinary disregard of or indifference to known or highly probable risks to others.” *Andor v. United Air Lines, Inc.*, 739 P.2d 18, 25 (1987). Punitive damages, “by definition are not part of a plaintiff’s compensation for what he or she has lost; they are a penalty for conduct that is culpable by reason of motive, intent, or extraordinary disregard of or indifference to known or highly probable risks to others.” *Id.*

Standard of Proof. The standard of proof required in Oregon for the recovery of punitive damages is clear and convincing evidence. OR. REV. STAT. § 31.730.

Actions against State. Punitive damages are not recoverable. OR. REV. STAT. § 30.269.

Breach of Contract. “The general rule is that there is no recovery of punitive damages for breach of contract.” *Farris v. U.S. Fidelity and Guaranty Co.*, 587 P.2d 1015, 1022 (Or. 1978). Where the activity complained of is essentially tortious conduct, punitive damages may be warranted despite a contractual agreement between the parties. *Adams v. Crater Well Drilling, Inc.*, 556 P.2d 679 (Or. 1976). See also *Georgetown Realty, Inc. v. The Home Ins. Co.*, 831 P.2d 7 (Or. 1992) (if relationship carries a standard of care that exists independent of the terms of the contract, the injured party may bring a claim for negligence independent of the terms of the contract).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under Oregon law, an employer may be held vicariously liable for punitive damages related to the wrongful conduct of an employee. *Stroud v. Denny’s Restaurant, Inc.*, 532 P.2d 790 (Or. 1975). “[W]hen an employee commits a wrongful act which would subject him personally to punitive damages, the essential inquiry must be whether the act was committed while the employee was acting within the scope of his employment, that is: ‘whether the servant at the time of the commission of the injury was performing a service for the master in furtherance of the master’s business, not whether it was done in exact observance of detail prescribed by his employer.’” *Id.* at 793 (quoting *Tyler v. Moore et al.*, 111 Or. 499, 509, 226 P.433, 446 (1924)). If the employee was acting within the scope of his employment, the employer will be liable for punitive damages regardless of whether that employee may be classified as “menial” or “managerial.” *Id.* See also *Badger v. Paulson Inv. Co.*, 803 P.2d 1178 (Or. 1991).

Environmental Liability. Punitive damages may be imposed on any person liable under OR. REV. STAT. § 465.260 who fails without sufficient cause to conduct a removal or remedial action as required by an order of the director of the Department of Environmental Quality, not to exceed three times the amount of the state’s remedial action costs. OR. REV. STAT. § 465.260(8).

Insurer’s Bad Faith. Where an insurer made a bad faith denial of liability coverage, insureds were not entitled to punitive damages because a failure to undertake representation of an insured is strictly breach of contract where punitive damages are not recoverable, and the legislature imposed civil penalties for such wrongful acts by insurers, but did not authorize punitive damages as a civil penalty. *Farris v. U.S. Fld. & Guar. Co.*, 587 P.2d 1015 (Or. 1978); OR. REV. STAT. § 731.988 (listing civil penalties



but not punitive damages). *But see Green v. State Farm Fire and Cas. Co.*, 667 F.2d 22 (9th Cir. 1982) (where action was brought in tort for outrageous conduct by an insurer, statute did not prohibit award of punitive damages). If an insurer fails to settle a claim within policy limits without justification, the insurer may be liable in tort to the insured for breach of fiduciary duty, where punitive damages may be recoverable. *Georgetown Realty, Inc. v. The Home Ins. Co.*, 831 P.2d 7 (Or. 1992); OR. REV. STAT. § 746.230 (fair claims settlement practices).

Product Liability. In a product liability civil action, punitive damages shall be determined and awarded based on the following criteria: (a) the likelihood at the time that serious harm would arise from the defendant's misconduct; (b) the degree of the defendant's awareness of that likelihood; (c) the profitability of the defendant's misconduct; (d) the duration of the misconduct and any concealment of it; (e) the attitude and conduct of the defendant upon discovery of the misconduct; (f) the financial condition of the defendant; and (g) the total deterrent effect of other punishment imposed upon the defendant as a result of the misconduct, including, but not limited to, punitive damages awards to persons in situations similar to the claimant's and the severity of criminal penalties to which the defendant has been or may be subjected. See OR. REV. STAT. § 30.925; See also OR. REV. STAT. § 30.927 (criteria for award of punitive damages against drug manufacturer).

Professional Liability. Punitive damages may be justified by failure to perform a special duty of attention and care arising out of a professional or fiduciary relationship that would not apply between strangers. *Noe v. Kaiser Found. Hosps.*, 435 P.2d 306 (Or. 1967); See OR. REV. STAT. § 31.740 (punitive damages shall not be awarded against a health care practitioner if the health care practitioner was engaged in conduct regulated by the license, registration or certificate issued by the appropriate governing body and was acting within the scope of practice for which the license, registration or certificate was issued and without malice).

Wrongful Death. Punitive damages may be awarded in an amount that the decedent would have been entitled to recover from the wrongdoer if the decedent had lived. OR. REV. STAT. § 30.020(2)(e).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes. See *Harrell v. Travelers Indem. Co.*, 567 P.2d 1013 (Or. 1977) (insurance contracts providing protection against liability for punitive damages do not violate public policy of Oregon).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

See II. A. above.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

An award of punitive damages is not proper in the absence of proof that the plaintiff is entitled to an award of actual damages. *Belleville v. Davis*, 498 P.2d 744 (Or. 1972); *Lewis v. Devils Lake Rock Crushing Co.*, 545 P.2d 1374 (Or. 1976). See also *Klinicki v. Lundgren*, 695 P.2d 906 (Or. 1985) (except in cases involving a breach of public trust, or presumed damages, a plaintiff may recover punitive damages only if the plaintiff "was somehow actually hurt and damaged by the Defendant's conduct").

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Yes. The court shall review an award of punitive damages made by a jury to determine whether the award is within the range of damages that a rational juror would be entitled to award based on the record as a whole. OR. REV. STAT. § 31.730. Where the harm is purely economic and not physical, a four-to-one ratio (punitive damages to compensatory damages) is the relevant constitutional



limit on punitive damages awards. *Goddard v. Farmers Ins. Co. of Or.*, 179 P.3d 645, 662 (Or. 2008) (citing extensively to *BMW of N. Am., Inc. v. Gore*, 517 U.S. 559 (1996)). Factors pertinent to determining the range a rational juror would be entitled to award include (1) the statutory and common-law factors that allow an award of punitive damages for the specific kind of claim at issue; (2) the state interests that a punitive damages award is designed to serve; (3) the degree of reprehensibility of the defendant's conduct; (4) the disparity between the punitive damages award and the actual or potential harm inflicted; and (5) the civil and criminal sanctions provided for comparable misconduct. *Parrott v. Carr Chevrolet, Inc.*, 17 P.3d 473 (Or. 2001).

Various limitations on the award of punitive damages also arise pursuant to statute. See e.g. OR. REV. STAT. § 646.465 (2015) (punitive damages for a willful or malicious misappropriation of a trade secret may be awarded in an amount not to exceed twice any award for compensation for misappropriation, the actual loss caused by the misappropriation and the unjust enrichment caused by the misappropriation). Although OR. REV. STAT. § 31.710 creates a \$500,000 cap on non-economic, but not punitive, damages in civil cases involving statutorily created claims for relief, that portion of the statute was deemed unconstitutional. *Busch v. McInnis Waste Sys.*, 468 P.3d 419, 433 (2020).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Upon entry of a judgment for punitive damages, 30 percent shall be paid to the prevailing party; 60 percent shall be paid to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Account of the Oregon Department of Justice Crime Victim's Assistance Section; and 10 percent shall be paid to the Attorney General for deposit in the State Court Facilities and Security Account and may be used only for the purposes specified in by statute; in no event may more than 20 percent of the amount awarded as punitive damages be paid to the attorney for the prevailing party. OR. REV. STAT. § 31.735.



PENNSYLVANIA

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. See *Hutchison ex rel. Hutchison v. Luddy*, 870 A.2d 766 (Pa. 2005); *Sears, Roebuck & Co. v. 69th Street Retail Mall, L.P.*, 126 A.3d 959, (Pa. 2015); *Sokolsky v. Eidelman*, 93 A.3d 858 (Pa. 2014); *SHV Coal, Inc. v. Cont'l Grain Co.*, 587 A.2d 702 (Pa. 1991); *Bannar v. Miller*, 701 A.2d 232 (Pa. 1997). See also, *Came v. Micou*, 2005 WL 1500978 (M.D. Pa. June 23, 2005); *Riba v. Staar Surgical*, 2003 WL 21961395 (E.D. Pa. June 25, 2003). Pennsylvania does not allow punitive damages in wrongful death actions (see 42 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 8301 (2010)) but does allow for them in survival actions (see 42 Pa. CONS. STAT. § 8302 (2010)) brought by the estate. Damages are recoverable in a survivorship suit in which the estate's representative is asserting the rights the decedent would have had if he were still alive. *Townes v. Cove Haven, Inc.*, 2004 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 21593. Punitive damages are not available under Pennsylvania's wrongful death statute. *Walsh v. Strenz*, 63 F. Supp. 2d 548 (M.D. Pa. 1999)

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Punitive damages may be awarded for "conduct that is outrageous, because of the defendant's evil motive or his reckless indifference to the rights of others." See *Feld v. Merriam*, 485 A.2d 742 (Pa. 1984) (adopting Restatement of Torts (Second) §908(2)); see also *Hutchison supra*. Punitive damages are an extreme remedy, available only in the "most exceptional matters." *Phillips v. Cricket Lighters*, 883 A.2d 439, 445 (Pa. 2005). "Outrageous conduct" has been defined as an act done with a bad motive or with a reckless indifference to the interests of others." *Id.* at 445. Reckless indifference means that "the actor has intentionally done an act of an unreasonable character, and disregard to a risk known to him or so obvious that he must be taken to have been aware of it and so great as to make it highly probably that harm will follow." *McClellan v. Health Maintenance Organization of Pennsylvania*, 604 A.2d 1053, 1061 (Pa. 1992) See also *Doe v. Wyo Valley Health Care Sys.*, 987 A.2d. 759 (Pa. Super. Ct. 2009). They are only proper in cases where the conduct of the defendant is so outrageous so as to demonstrate malicious, wanton, reckless, willful or oppressive conduct. *Feld, supra; Hutchison, supra*. The nature of the tortfeasor's act itself, together with his motive, the relationship between the parties, and all other attendant circumstances are taken into account. *Chambers v. Montgomery*, 192 A.2d 355 (Pa. 1963). Allegations that a defendant "acted willfully, wantonly, and with reckless disregard for the consequences of his conduct, acts and omissions" have been held to be sufficient to state a claim for punitive damages. See, e.g. *Fields v. Graff*, 784 F.Supp. 224, 226 (E.D.Pa.1992); See also *Corrigan v. Methodist Hospital*, 869 F.Supp. 1208 (E.D. Pa. 1994) and *McDaniel v. Merck, Sharp & Dohme*, 367 Pa.Super. 600, 622-23, 533 A.2d 436, 447 (1987), *app. denied*, 520 Pa. 589, 551 A.2d 215 (1988). Punitive damages will not be awarded where the defendant's mental state arises to no more than negligence, or even gross negligence. *SHV Coal, Inc. v. Cont'l Grain Co.*, 587 A.2d 702 (Pa. 1991); *Weston v. Northampton Personal Care Inc.*, 62 A.3d 947 (Pa. Super Ct. 2013).

Standard of Proof. The applicable standard jury instruction imposes a clear and convincing burden of proof in determining whether punitive damages will be assessed. Pennsylvania Selected Standard Jury Instruction (Civil) § 14.00 – Punitive Damages (1984). However, punitive damages awarded under "preponderance of the evidence" have been upheld. *Martin v. Johns-Manville Corp.*, 494 A.2d 1088 (Pa. 1985), abrogated on other grounds, *Kirkbride v. Lisbon Contractors, Inc.*, 555 A.2d 800 (Pa.1989); *Empire Trucking Co. v. Reading Anthracite Coal Co.*, 71 A.3d 923 (Pa. 2013); *Sprague v. Walter*, 656 A.2d 890 (Pa. Super. 1995); *McDermott v. Party City Corp.*, 11 F. Supp. 2d 612 (E.D. Pa. 1998). Other cases upheld on appeal have correctly applied the "clear and convincing evidence" burden of proof. See, e.g., *Hepps v. Phila. Newspapers, Inc.*, 485 A.2d 374 (Pa. 1984) (clear and convincing standard for defamation actions), reversed on other grounds, 475 U.S. 767 (1986); *Brogan v. Rosenn*, 35 Pa. D&C 5th 500 (Pa. 2014); *Rutkowski v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 69 Pa. D. & C.4th 10 (2004) (under insurer bad faith statute, plaintiff must prove bad faith on part of insurer by clear and convincing evidence).

Actions Against State. The commonwealth and its agents are generally immune from punitive damages. See *Feingold v. Se. Pa. Transp. Auth.*, 488 A.2d 284 (Pa. Super. Ct. 1985); *Bonenberger v. Plymouth Twp.*, 1998 U.S. Dist. (LexisNexis 8632) (E.D. Pa. 1998). Cf. 42 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 8528 (2010) (statute providing for damages against municipality does not mention punitive damages).



Breach of Contract. Generally, punitive damages are not recoverable in an action for breach of contract. See *Hess v. Hess*, 397 Pa. Super. 395 (1990); *Thorsen v. Iron & Glass Bank*, 476 A.2d 928 (Pa. Super. Ct. 1984); *DiGregorio v. Keystone Health Plan E*, 840 A.2d 361 (Pa. 2003); *Factory Mkt. v. Schuller Int'l*, 987 F. Supp. 387 (E.D. Pa. 1997). Note, however, that a party can in some instances maintain an action for fraud or negligence, which would allow for punitive damages, in conjunction with a breach of contract claim. See *Hess, supra* (allowing fraud and breach of contract claims); *MacGregor v. Mediq, Inc.*, 576 A.2d 1123 (Pa. Super. Ct. 1990) (allowing negligence and breach of contract claims). Punitive damages may be awarded in a breach of contract action based upon the tort of intentional interference with business. This tort requires a third party's interference which forces the breaking of the contract between two parties. The standard is "malice, vindictiveness, and wanton disregard of another's rights and "it encompasses that kind of conduct which is so wholly reckless of another's rights as to call for monetary relief." *Richette v. Penn. R.R.*, 187 A.2d 910 (1963); see also *Patterson v. Marine Bank*, 18 A. 632 (1889)(jury was instructed on punitive damages in a breach of contract case because public policy would not permit a bank to refuse to honor a check of one of its depositors; but no punitive damages were awarded.)

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. In actions against employers for injuries received through the negligence of their servants, exemplary damages may be recovered under Pennsylvania law when the injuries are wanton and malicious, or are inflicted in a gross or outrageous manner, whether the act was previously authorized or subsequently ratified by the employer or not. *Philad. Traction Co. v. Orbann*, 12 A. 816, 818 (Pa. 1888); *Shiner v. Moriarty*, 706 A.2d 1228 (1998).

Environmental Liability. A person who willfully fails to comply with an order of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection requiring a response action is liable for punitive damages in an amount up to three times the state's actual damages. 35 P.S. § 6020.507.

General Liability. Yes. See, e.g., *SHV Coal, Inc. v. Continental Grain Co.*, 587 A.2d 702 (Pa. 1991); *Focht v. Rabada*, 268 A.2d 157 (Pa. Super. Ct. 1970) (injury caused by intoxicated driver); *McClellan v. Health Maint. Org. of Pa.*, 604 A.2d 1053 (Pa. Super. Ct. 1992) (intentional fraud); *Trotman v. Mecchella*, 618 A.2d 982 (Pa. Super. Ct. 1992) (personal injury action); *Weston v. Northampton Personal Care, Inc.*, 62 A.3d 947 (Pa. 2013) (a cause of action for misrepresentation can support a claim for punitive damages).

Insurer's Bad Faith. 42 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 8371 (2010) provides that punitive damages can be awarded against an insurer if, in an action arising under an insurance policy, the court finds that the insurer acted in bad faith toward the insured. See, e.g., *Hollock v. Erie Ins. Exch.*, 842 A.2d 409 (Pa. Super. Ct. 2004). Bad faith must be established by "clear and convincing evidence." *Id.* at 23. But see *Barber v. Unum Life Ins. Co. of America*, 383 F.3d 134 (Third Cir. 2004) (42 Pa. CONS. STAT. § 8371 preempted by ERISA).

Product Liability. Yes. See, e.g., *Glodzik v. Whink Prods. Co.*, 61 Pa. D.&C.4th 241 (2003) (summary judgment on punitive damages claim denied based in part on defendant's use of dangerous chemical in product); *Ogozaly v. Am. Honda Motor Co. Inc.*, 67 Pa. D.&C.4th 314 (2004) (plaintiff made a prima facie case for recovery of punitive damages on allegations of defective product and deficiencies in warnings); *Riba v. Staar Surgical*, Civ. No. 03-2404, 2003 U.S. Dist. (LexisNexis 12199) (E.D. Pa. June 25, 2003) (motion to dismiss claim of punitive damages denied where allegations claimed manufacturer was aware of defective product and failed to warn and inform regulatory agencies).

Furthermore, though the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania has not expressly so held, it appears that a plaintiff may seek punitive damages even in suits based solely on a theory of strict liability. See *Hutchinson v. Penske Truck Leasing Co.*, 876 A.2d 978 (Pa. Super. Ct. 2005).

Professional Liability. Yes. See, e.g., *Corrigan v. Methodist Hosp.*, 869 F. Supp. 1202 (E.D. Pa. 1994) (medical malpractice punitive damage plaintiff held to have stated a claim for punitive damages based on allegation that defendant "acted willfully, wantonly, and with reckless disregard for the consequences of his conduct, acts and omissions as described more fully at length herein.") Punitive damages for legal malpractice may be recoverable if there are claims that sound in tort, see *Rizzo v. Haines*, 555 A.2d 58 (Pa. 1989), but will not be recoverable for those sounding in contract, *Bangert v. Harris*, 553 F. Supp. 235 (M.D. Pa. 1982).



II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

No. *Aetna Cas. & Sur. Co. v. Roe*, 650 A.2d 94 (Pa. Super. Ct. 1994) (insurers have no duty to defend against punitive damages allegations); *Esmond v. Liscio*, 224 A.2d 793 (Pa. Super. Ct. 1966) (public policy barred coverage of punitive damages under automobile policy); *Aetna Life & Cas. Co. v. McCabe*, 556 F. Supp. 1342 (E.D. Pa. 1983) (insurance for punitive damages against public policy).

Exception: Pursuant to statute, an insurance company may insure the operator of a downhill skiing area against punitive damages other than those arising from an intentional tort of the operator. 40 P.S. § 2051 (2010).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Pennsylvania does not preclude recovery of punitive damages from an insurer where the insured is only vicariously liable for such damages. *Butterfield v. Giuntoli*, 670 A.2d 646 (Pa. Super. Ct. 1995); *Pennbank v. St. Paul Fire & Marine Ins. Co.*, 669 F. Supp. 122 (W.D. Pa. 1987).

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

While a claim for punitive damages is not an independent cause of action and must be dismissed if the claim for compensatory damages is dismissed, it is not necessary that compensatory damages actually be awarded. *Kirkbride v. Lisbon Contractors, Inc.*, 555 A.2d 800 (Pa. 1989); *Rhoads v. Heberling*, 451 A.2d 1378 (Pa. Super. Ct. 1982).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Generally, no. “[P]unitive damages need bear no proportional relationship to the compensatory damages awarded in a particular case. Rather, a reasonable relationship must exist between the amount of the punitive damages award and the twin goals of punishment and deterrence, the character of the tortious act, the nature and extent of the harm suffered by the plaintiff, and the wealth of the defendant.” *Sprague*, 656 A.2d at 925. However, the court has the discretion to reduce an award if it is plainly excessive and exorbitant in a particular case. It is well settled that the large size of a verdict is in itself no evidence of excessiveness. The correct question on review is whether the award of damages falls within the uncertain limits of fair and reasonable compensation or whether the verdict so shocks the sense of justice as to suggest that the jury was influenced by partiality, prejudice, mistake or corruption. See *Id.*; *Zauflik v. Pennsbury Sch. Dist.* 104 A.3d 1096 (Pa. 2014); *Haines v. Raven Arms*, 640 A.2d 367, 369 (Pa. 1994).

In July of 2023, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court declined to create a rule limiting punitive damages. In *Bert Co. v. Turk*, Nos. 13 WAP 2022, 14 WAP 2022, 2023 Pa. LEXIS 950 (July 19, 2023) the Court held that punitive damage ratios should be calculated on a per defendant basis and that ratios above 9:1 are not necessarily presumptively unconstitutional.

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Generally, an award of punitive damages is payable to the plaintiff. In medical malpractice cases, 25% of punitive damages awarded must be paid into the MCARE Fund rather than to the prevailing party. Pa. Stat. Ann. tit. 40, §1303.505(e).



RHODE ISLAND

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. Under Rhode Island General Law § 28-5-29.1, a court may award punitive damages when the defendant's conduct: is motivated by malice; is motivated by ill will; or involves reckless indifference to the protected rights of the victim.

If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. One seeking punitive damages must produce evidence of such willfulness, recklessness or wickedness on the part of the party at fault as amounts to criminality by the defendant. *Johnson v. Johnson*, 654 A.2d 1212 (R.I. 1995); *Palmisano v. Toth*, 624 A.2d 314 (R.I. 1993); *Sherman v. McDermott*, 329 A.2d 195 (R.I. 1974); *Morin v. Aetna Cas. & Sur. Co.*, 478 A.2d 964 (R.I., 1984); see also *Greater Providence Deposit Corp. v. Jenison*, 485 A.2d 1242 (R.I. 1984). Punitive damages are allowed only when the defendant has acted maliciously or in bad faith, or when the defendant acted with the intent to cause harm. See *Peckham v. Hirschfeld*, 570 A.2d 663 (R.I. 1990). Conduct that is merely reckless does not justify punitive damages. *Wilson Auto Enter., Inc. v. Mobil Oil Corp.*, 778 F. Supp. 101, 107 (D.R.I. 1991). Punitive damages are appropriate only when a defendant's conduct requires deterrence and punishment over and above that provided in an award of compensatory damages. *Pier House Inn, Inc. v. 421 Corp.*, 812 A.2d 799, 803 (R.I. 2002).

Standard of Proof. Preponderance of the evidence is the standard for determining punitive damages. *Dodson v. Ford Motor Co.*, CCH Prod. Liab. Rep. P17,580 (R.I. 2006); citing, *Parker v. Parker*, 103 R.I. 435, 442, 238 A.2d 57, 60 (1968) ("satisfaction by a 'preponderance of the evidence' [is] the recognized burden [of proof] in civil actions"). In Rhode Island, the issue of whether the facts are sufficient to support an award for punitive damages is a question of law for the trial court to decide. Once the trial court has determined that the facts are sufficient to support a punitive damages award, the award of punitive damages is left to the discretion of the trier of fact. *Palmisano v. Toth*, 624 A.2d 314, 320 (R.I. 1993); *Morin v. Aetna Cas. & Sur. Co.*, 478 A.2d 964 (R.I., 1984). A plaintiff must make a prima facie showing that a viable claim for punitive damages can be submitted to a jury before the court will allow discovery of a defendant's financial condition. *Mark v. Congregation Mishkon Tefiloh*, 745 A.2d 777 (R.I. 2000); *Sherman v. Ejnes*, 111 A.3d 371 (R.I. 2015).

Actions Against State. A municipality is immune from punitive damages under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. *City of Newport v. Fact Concerts, Inc.*, 453 U.S. 247 (1981). A punitive damages award against a municipality is contrary to public policy. *Graff v. Motta*, 695 A.2d 486 (R.I. 1997); *Estate of Sherman v. Almeida*, 747 A.2d 470, 473 (R.I. 2000).

Breach of Contract. Generally, one cannot recover punitive damages for a breach of contract. *Dias v. Vieira*, 572 A.2d 877 (R.I. 1990) (upholding trial justice's decision not to award punitive damages where defendant had fraudulently created real estate agreements); *Pier House Inn, Inc. v. 421 Corp.*, 812 A.2d 799, 805 (R.I. 2002). However, punitive damages have been awarded in Rhode Island where the breach of contract also constituted the independent torts of fraud, conversion, intentional interference with business relationships, and breach of fiduciary duty. *Ross-Simmons of Warwick, Inc., v. Baccarat, Inc.*, 182 F.R.D. 386 (D.R.I. 1998).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under Rhode Island law, punitive or exemplary damages will not be allowed in situations in which an employer is prosecuted for the tortious act of his employee, unless there is proof implicating the employer that makes him a participant in his employee's act. *AAA Pool Serv. & Supply v. Aetna Casualty & Sur. Co.*, 479 A.2d 112, 116 (R.I. 1984). Furthermore, when the proof does not implicate the principal and when the employer neither expressly nor impliedly authorized or ratified the act, only compensatory damages will be available. *Id.* Punitive damages are not available against an employer for the acts of an employee acting only with apparent authority and without any intention of benefitting the principal. *Id.*; see also *Recco v. Criss Cadillac Co.*, 610 A.2d 542, 545 (R.I. 1992).



Environmental Liability. R.I. GEN. LAWS § 23-19.1-22 (2015) provides for treble the amount of costs, damages, losses, or injuries whenever it finds that a person has willfully and knowingly stored, disposed of, or transported hazardous wastes in violation of this chapter or the rules and regulations promulgated thereunder. In *Gail v. New Eng. Gas Co.* the court denied a private right of action for the violation of R.I. GEN. LAWS § 23-19.1-22 of the Rhode Island Hazardous Waste Management Act (HWMA) stating, “nothing authorized a private individual to sue for a violation of the HWMA and it seemed clear that the General Assembly contemplated that violations would be prosecuted by the State and not by private parties.” *Gail v. New Eng. Gas Co.*, 460 F. Supp. 2d 314 (D.R.I. 2006). R.I. GEN. LAWS § 23-19.14-16 (2015) allows the state to commence a civil action to recover punitive damages against any responsible party who fails, without sufficient cause, to properly provide for removal or remedial action pursuant to a final order of the director of the department of environmental management. But, where the plaintiff alleged that the defendants knew or should have known that there was a high degree of risk associated with the handling, disposal and/or release of the [coal gasification waste material that contains lead, arsenic, cyanide and other hazardous substances], it is possible that the plaintiffs might be able to prove the high degree of culpability necessary to support an award of punitive damages. *Corvello v. New England Gas Co.*, 460 F.Supp.2d 314, 329 (D.R.I. 2006).

General Liability. Under R.I. GEN. LAWS § 3-14-8 (2016). Punitive damages may be awarded in all actions based on reckless conduct that violates the Rhode Island Liquor Liability Act, as set forth in § 3-14-7 (c), but punitive damages may not be awarded for [Liquor Liability] actions based on negligent conduct, as set forth in § 3-14-6(c). Assault, battery and false imprisonment are torts that will sustain a punitive damages award. *Sherman v. McDermott*, 329 A.2d 195 (R.I. 1974). A plaintiff cannot recover punitive damages in a wrongful death action. *Simeone v. Charron*, 762 A.2d 442, 445 (R.I. 2000). However, punitive damages are recoverable in a wrongful death action to receive a distribution of assets under a decedent’s will under the Slayer’s Act § 33-1.1-1.3. *Swain v. Estate of Tyre*, 57 A.3d 283, 286 (R.I. 2012).

Since damages recoverable under the Rhode Island wrongful death statute are restricted to those involving pecuniary loss, Rhode Island courts may prohibit punitive damages in wrongful death cases. See R.I. GEN. LAWS § 10-7-1.1 (2010); *Simeone v. Charron*, 762 A.2d 442 (R.I. 2000). Additionally, Rhode Island statutes expressly prohibit recovery of exemplary damages in survival actions. See R.I. GEN. LAWS § 9-1-8 (2010) (actual damages only to be granted after death of party).

Insurer’s Bad Faith. Under R.I. GEN. LAWS § 9-1-33 (2016), an insured may bring an action seeking compensatory and punitive damages and reasonable attorney fees against the insurer issuing the policy when it is alleged the insurer wrongfully and in bad faith refused to pay or settle a claim made pursuant to the provisions of the policy, or otherwise wrongfully and in bad faith refused to timely perform its obligations under the contract of insurance. Bad faith is established when the proof demonstrates that the insurer acted with out a reasonable basis in fact or law. Since punitive damages are recoverable in bad faith cases as a matter of right, it is unnecessary to plead and prove willful or wanton conduct by the insurer. *Skaling v. Aetna Ins. Co.*, 799 A.2d 997 (R.I. 2002). A claim may be “fairly debatable”; a difference in opinion as to policy language interpretation is not proof of bad faith. *Pace v. Ins. Co. of N. Am.*, 838 F.2d 572 (1st Cir. 1988).

In accordance with R.I. GEN. LAWS § 9-1-50 (2016), the failure by an insurance company, or its adjusting company or other entity responsible for payment, to tender settlement payment, within 30 days from the date the claimant or his attorney sends the release, raises the presumption of willful and wanton disregard for the rights of the claimant that is subject to a separate cause of action for punitive damages. Additionally, interest shall be computed at the rate of 12 percent per annum from the date the cause of action giving rise to the settlement occurred until the judgment on the claim brought pursuant to this section is entered. The Supreme Court of Rhode Island held that R.I. GEN. LAWS § 9-1-50 should be construed to create a single cause of action for punitive damages with interest to be computed thereon from the date of the underlying cause of action; it does not entitle the plaintiff to interest on the settlement amount. *LaPlante v. Honda N. Am., Inc.*, 697 A.2d 625 (R.I. 1997).

Product Liability. A court may award punitive damages in a product liability case, but courts must remain sensitive to the state’s interest in maintaining the financial stability of businesses. *Dodson. V. Ford Motor Co.*, CCH Prod. Liab. Rep. P17,580 (R.I. 2006); but see, *LaPlante v. Honda N. Am., Inc.*, 697 A.2d 625 (R.I. 1997) (It remains unclear whether punitive damages are recoverable in Rhode Island for claims involving product liability).**Professional Liability.** Where the underlying facts are particularly egregious, punitive damages may be awarded in a legal malpractice claim. *Clauson v. Kirshenbaum*, 1996 R.I. Super. LEXIS 23 (1996).



II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

No. Punitive damages assessed against the wrongdoer are not insurable in Rhode Island. In *Allen v. Simmons*, 533 A.2d 541 (R.I. 1987), the Supreme Court of Rhode Island held that an insurer was not required to indemnify injured parties for punitive damages assessed against its insured under an automobile insurance policy. The Allen court's holding that punitive damages are not insurable was based upon the view that insurance coverage would defeat the punishment and effect of the punitive damages award. The court added that "common sense demands that the burden of satisfying a punitive damages award should remain with the wrongdoer and should not be cast upon the blameless shoulders of the other insureds." *Id.* at 544; *Town of Cumberland v. R.I. Interlocal Risk Mgmt. Trust, Inc.*, 860 A.2d 1210 (R.I. 2004).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Rhode Island law does not countenance vicarious liability for punitive damages on a respondeat superior theory. *AAA Pool Service & Supply, Inc. v. Aetna Cas. & Sur. Co.*, 479 A.2d 112, 116 (R.I. 1984).

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Rhode Island law does not require that punitive damages be directly proportional to compensatory damages. Because Rhode Island does not follow the "ratio rule," Rhode Island does not require compensatory damages as a prerequisite to punitive damages. Rather, all a plaintiff must show to obtain an award of punitive damages is a "valid legal injury"; "what matters most is whether the defendant's actions merit punishment, not whether the plaintiff is able to calculate large material damages." *Ross-Simons of Warwick, Inc. v. Baccarat*, 182 F.R.D. 386 (D. R.I. 1998).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Although punitive damages are "imprecise and elusive of review", nevertheless a jury award of punitive damages (or an award by a trial justice) may be set aside if the amount clearly appears to be excessive, shocks the conscience or appears to represent passion and prejudice rather than unbiased judgment. *Carozza v. Voccola*, 90 A.3d 142 (R.I. 2014). "[T]he financial ability of a defendant is always a matter of vital consideration in estimating the amount of punitive damages that should be awarded." *Hanks v. Titsworth*, 2013 R.I. Super. Lexis 191 (R.I. Super. Ct. 2013).

Pursuant to the Uniform Trade Secrets Act, punitive damages for willful and malicious misappropriation are not permitted to exceed twice the actual loss and the unjust enrichment. R.I. GEN. LAWS § 6-41-3 (2008).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Under R.I. GEN. LAWS § 23-19.14-17 (2016), the state can subrogate its authority to pursue cost recovery or assess punitive damages as part of a settlement action. A plaintiff may recover punitive damages, and a plaintiff's spouse may also recover punitive damages in the discretion of the jury. *Allen v. Simmons*, 533 A.2d 541 (R.I. 1987).



SOUTH CAROLINA

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes, subject to statutory limits and comprehensive judicial review. S.C. CODE ANN. § 15-32-530 (2022). While the most important indicium of the propriety of a punitive damages award is the degree of reprehensibility of the defendant's conduct, *State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co. v. Campbell*, 538 U.S. 408, 419 (2003) (quoting *BMW of N. Am. v. Gore*, 517 U.S. 559 (1996)), all awards of punitive damages are subject to a mandatory eight factor review to determine if a jury's award of punitive damages is reasonable. *Gamble v. Stevenson*, 406 S.E.2d 350 (S.C. 1991). Trial courts must then also navigate the three *Gore* guideposts when reviewing an award of punitive damages to ensure constitutional compliance before final judgment is entered. See, e.g., *James v. Horace Mann Ins. Co.*, 371 S.C. 187 (2006) (Applying the eight factor *Gamble* test and conducting a *Campbell* analysis using the three *Gore* guideposts.).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Punitive damages are available only when the defendant's tortious conduct is shown to be willful, wanton, or in reckless disregard of the rights of others. See *S.C. Farm Bur. Mut. Ins. Co. v. Love Chevrolet, Inc.*, 324 S.C. 149 (1996). A tort is characterized as reckless, willful or wanton if it was committed in such a manner or under such circumstances that a person of ordinary reason and prudence would have been conscious of it as an invasion of another's rights. *Nesbitt v. Lewis*, 335 S.C. 441 (Ct. App. 1999). Punitive damages serve not only as a punishment for wrongful acts, but also as a vindication of private rights when it is proved one's rights have been wantonly, willfully or maliciously violated. *Harris v. Burnside*, 261 S.C. 190 (1973). Some scenarios that have been found to amount to willful, wanton or reckless conduct include: A conscious failure to exercise due care amounting to willfulness, *McCourt v. Abernathy*, 457 S.E.2d 603 (S.C. 1995); Disregard for the property rights of others constitutes recklessness, *Hollis v. Stonington Dev., LLC*, 394 S.C. 383 (2011); even the intentional violation of a traffic statute can form sufficient basis to require submission of the issue of punitive damages to the jury, *Wise v. Broadway*, 433 S.E.2d 857 (S.C. 1993).

Standard of Proof. S.C. CODE ANN. § 15-33-135 provides that where punitive damages are claimed in any civil action, the plaintiff has the burden of proving such damages by clear and convincing evidence.

Actions Against State. Punitive damages are not recoverable against the state or any of its constituent agencies and subdivisions, nor is there any available coverage afforded under the Tort Claims Act for any award of punitive damages. S.C. CODE ANN. § 15-78-20 *et seq.* ("Tort Claims Act") (2022). Where claims are made against a government official, the official has limited liability under the Tort Claims Act. *Id.* However, employees whose conduct was not within the scope of their official duties, or whose actions constitute actual fraud, actual malice, intent to harm, or a crime involving moral turpitude are not privy to insulation from liability. *Frazier v. Badger*, 361 S.C. 94 (2004) (Because 'Scope of Employment' is broader than 'Scope of Official Duties; and the Tort Claims Act limits coverage to acts within the 'Scope of Official Duties', then acts outside the 'Scope of Employment' are necessarily outside the 'Scope of Official Duties'—thereby foreclose coverage for any damages rendered against the employee-agent); see also *Proctor v. Dep't of Health & Envtl. Control*, 368 S.C. 279 (Ct. App. 2006) ("The Tort Claims Act 'must be liberally construed in favor of limiting the liability of the State.'" (quoting § 15-78-20(f))).

Breach of Contract. Proof that a breach of contract was accompanied by a fraudulent act is a predicate for recovery of punitive damages. *Edens v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.*, 858 F.2d 198 (4th Cir. 1998) (citing *Smith v. Canal Ins. Co.*, 275 S.C. at 260 (1980), followed by *Parker v. Nat'l Honorary Beta Club*, 423 S.C. 590 (Ct. App. 2018). Punitive damages for tortious interference with contractual relations may be properly awarded under S.C. CODE ANN. § 15-33-135 where a plaintiff can show that interference with the contract was unjustified. *Broach v. Carter*, 399 S.C. 434, (Ct. App. 2012) citing *Eldeco, Inc. v. Charleston County Sch. Dist.*, 372 S.C. 470 (2007) (holding a plaintiff must show absence of justification to establish a cause of action for tortious interference with a contract); see also *Sea Island Food Grp., LLC v. Yaschik Dev. Co.*, 433 S.C. 278 (Ct. App. 2021) citing *Collins Entm't Corp. v. Coats & Coats Rental Amusement*, 355 S.C. 125, (Ct. App. 2003), *Collins Music Co. v. Terry*, 303 S.C. 358 (Ct. App. 1991), and *Todd v. S.C. Farm Bureau Mut. Ins. Co.*, 287 S.C. 190, (1985) in holding punitive damages are available on claims of tortious interference.



Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. A master cannot be held solely responsible for damages where its liability is based on conduct of its servant alone. See, e.g., *Collins v. Johnson*, 245 S.C. 215 (1965); but, see, c.f. *Hundley v. Rite Aid of South Carolina, Inc.*, 339 S.C. 285 (Ct. App. 2000) (citing *Kirby v. Gulf Refining Co.*, 173 S.C. 224 (1934) in affirming punitive damages against an employer for injuries caused by disbursing the wrong prescription medication to a child.). In *Hundley*, a jury found the pharmacy contemporaneously liable along with the pharmacist it employed when the employer failed to take reasonable steps to supervise and retrain the licensed pharmacist it knew had a documented ongoing history of mis-filling prescriptions). Punitive damages may be awarded against an employer for an employee's act even if the employer did not authorize or ratify the acts of the employee, so long as the wrongful acts were undertaken in furtherance of the employer's business. *Hooper v. Hutto*, 160 S.C. 404, 407 (1931) (citing *Reeves v. Southern Ry.*, 68 S.C. 89, 94 (1904)).

Environmental Liability. The Department of Health and Environmental Control is authorized to recover on behalf of the state punitive damages of up to three times the state's costs incurred in responding to hazardous substance releases. S.C. Code Ann. § 44-56-200 (2010).

Insurer's Bad Faith. The Supreme Court of South Carolina has long recognized that the insurance is a business affected with public interest and in furtherance of the public good, the Court has held that in addition to a breach of contract action, a separate tort action for an insurer's bad-faith refusal to pay benefits under an insurance policy, whether for a first-party claim or a third-party claim. *In re Mt. Hawley Ins. Co.*, 427 S.C. 159, 169 (2019); see also *Tadlock Painting Co. v. Md. Cas. Co.*, 322 S.C. 498 (1996) and *Nichols v. State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co.*, 279 S.C. 336 (1983) ("If an insured can demonstrate the insurer's actions were willful or in reckless disregard of the insured's rights, he can recover punitive damages.").

Product Liability. Punitive damages are recoverable in a negligence cause of action when the defendant's conduct rises to the level of a willful, wanton or malicious violation of the plaintiff's rights. For example, in *Scott v. Fruehauf*, the South Carolina Supreme Court awarded \$1,125,000 where a seller of used trailers was negligent in failing to inspect a wheel assembly when it was aware of the danger of mismatched parts. *Scott v. Fruehauf Corp.*, 396 S.E.2d 354 (S.C. 1990). Punitive damages are not recoverable in a statutorily-created cause of action unless the statute expressly specifies their availability. *Barnwell v. Barber-Colman Co.*, 393 S.E.2d 162 (S.C. 1989); see also *Mosser v. Fruehauf Corp.*, 940 F.2d 77 (4th Cir. 1991) (Applying *West Virginia* law holding there is a difference between a negligent failure to test and wanton disregard of danger to others such that, on its own, a manufacturer's failure to test its negligently manufactured product was not sufficient to allow a plaintiff to recover punitive damages under a negligence cause of action).

Professional Liability. In order to recover punitive damages in a medical malpractice action, there must be evidence the physician's conduct was willful, wanton, or in reckless disregard of the plaintiffs' rights. *McGee v. Bruce Hosp. Sys.*, 321 S.C. 340, A conscious failure to exercise due care constitutes wilfulness. *Id.*, citing *McCourt v. Abernathy*, 318 S.C. 301 (1995); *Scott v. Fruehauf Corp.*, 302 S.C. 364 (1990). In *Taylor v. Medenica, M.D.*, 324 S.C. 200 (1996), the court affirmed a punitive damages award of \$10 million on top of \$3 million in actual damages against an oncologist for medical malpractice in his administering of chemotherapy to the plaintiff. The court's ruling was based on clear and convincing evidence that the defendant should not have used a particular drug in the patient's chemotherapy, failed to obtain the patient's informed consent, and ordered and billed for unnecessary and/or excessive tests through his medical laboratory.

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer?)

Yes, South Carolina not only permits insurance coverage of punitive damages, through statutory schemes, the legislature expressly regulates the automobile industry in ensuring South Carolina policies allow for recovery of punitive damages. *USAA Cas. Ins. Co. v. Rafferty*, 439 S.C. 130 (2023) (holding the term "damages" as defined in 38-77-160(4) clearly includes both actual and punitive damages.); see also, *Gov't Emples. Ins. Co. v. Poole*, 424 S.C. 1 (2018) (holding that punitive damages were not required to be apportioned between split limit policies of bodily injury and property damage allowing an injured person to recover up to the



aggregate maximum per person limits available under the liability policy automobile insurance; see also, *S.C. Budget & Control Bd. v. Prince*, 403 S.E.2d 643 (S.C. 1991) (allowing punitive damages coverage for a liability policy); *Carroway v. Johnson*, 245 S.C. 200 (1965) (automobile liability policy covered punitive damages award), followed by *Mattison v. Dallas Carrier Corp.*, 947 F.2d 95 (4th Cir. 1991).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable. See II. A. above.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Under *McGee v. Bruce Hosp. Sys.*, 545 S.E.2d 286 (S.C. 2001), there must be an award of actual or nominal damages for a verdict of punitive damages to be supported. This rule is premised on the fact that liability must be established before a plaintiff can seek punitive damages. *McGee v. Bruce Hosp. Sys.*, 344 S.C.466, 545 S.E.2d 286 (S.C. 2001) (reversed on other grounds by *McGee v. Bruce Hospital Sys.*, 545 S.E.2d 286 (S.C. 2001)). Where the jury awards only punitive damages for a willful invasion of a legal right, at least nominal damages may be assumed. See *Pilkington v. McBain*, 262 S.E.2d 916 (S.C. 1980); see also *Liberty Mut. Fire Ins. Co. v. JT Walker Indus.*, 554 Fed. Appx. 176 (4th Cir. 2014) (“where pleadings allege and evidence proves a willful invasion or infringement of a right, courts presume nominal damages, even if exact measurement of actual damages is not possible.”). There is no requirement of a mathematical proportion between actual and punitive damages. See *Eddy v. Greensboro- Fayetteville Bus Lines*, 5 S.E.2d 281 (S.C. 1939); *Mylin v. Allen- White Pontiac, Inc.*, 314 S.E.2d 354 (S.C. Ct. App. 1984).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

An award of punitive damages is left almost entirely to the discretion of the jury and the trial judge. *Jordan v. Hold*, 608 S.E.2d 129 (S.C. 2005). In South Carolina, a defendant still has an opportunity to challenge the propriety of any resulting punitive damages award before a judgment is entered. The trial court has the obligation to review the punitive damages award and if the court finds the award is inappropriate or excessive, it has the discretion to order a new trial or remittitur. See *Fairchild v. S.C. DOT*, 398 S.C. 90 (2012), following *Mitchell v. Fortis Ins. Co.*, 385 S.C. 570 (2009). First, punitive or exemplary damage awards are subject to a mandatory eight factor review to determine if a jury’s award of punitive damages is reasonable. *Gamble v. Stevenson*, 406 S.E.2d 350 (S.C. 1991). Trial courts must then conduct a *Campbell* analysis to determine if the awards safely navigate the three *Gore* guideposts before final judgment can be entered. *State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co. v. Campbell*, 538 U.S. 408; see, e.g., *James v. Horace Mann Ins. Co.*, 371 S.C. 187 (2006) (Applying the eight factor *Gamble* test and conducting a *Campbell* analysis using the three *Gore* guideposts.). Finally, an appellate review the amount of punitive damages is limited to correction of errors of law, *Austin v. Specialty Transp. Servs.*, 594 S.E.2d 867 (S.C. Ct. App. 2004), and merely serves to confirm there is some evidence to support the jury’s verdict. *Hutson v. Cummins Carolinas, Inc.*, 280 S.C. 552, (Ct. App. 1984), followed by *Chakrabarti v. City of Orangeburg*, 403 S.C. 308 (Ct. App. 2013).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Generally, punitive damages are only payable to the plaintiff directly injured as a result of the misconduct giving rise to the entitlement to the award. Neither a spouse nor parent of the injured plaintiff is entitled to punitive damages under a derivative loss of consortium claim against the tortfeasor(s). *Hughey v. Ausborn*, 154 S.E.2d 839 (S.C. 1967) (husband and father had no cause of action to recover punitive damages for personal injuries to wife and minor child proximately caused by willful or intentional negligence of another); but, see c.f. *Patton v. Miller*, 420 S.C. 471 (2017) (noting that *Hughey* was decided prior to the Rules of Civil Procedure taking effect which expressly permit a minor’s personal representative to recover all damages on behalf of the minor child.).



SOUTH DAKOTA

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes, South Dakota law does allow the award of punitive damages, but only when expressly authorized by a state statute. *McKie v. Huntley*, 620 N.W. 2d 599, 602 (S.D. 2000).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. To obtain punitive damages, the plaintiff must show the defendant acted with/in one of four factors: (1) oppression, (2) fraud, (3) malice (actual or presumed), or (4) the wrongful injury to animals that was committed intentionally or by willful and wanton misconduct, in disregard of humanity." S.D. Codified Laws § 21-3-2.

When considering malice, it can be established via actual or presumed action. *Id.* Yet, it is not presumed simply from doing the unlawful or injurious act. *Kjerstad v. Ravellette Publ'ns, Inc.*, 517 N.W.2d 419, 425 (S.D. 1994). Presumed malice is inferred from certain acts. *Isaac v. State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co.*, 522 N.W.2d 752, 761 (S.D. 1994). The implication is "that the act complained of was conceived in the spirit of mischief or of criminal indifference to civil obligations." *Id.* (quoting *Dahl v. Sittner*, 474 N.W.2d 897, 900 (S.D. 1991)).

Standard of Proof. Clear and convincing evidence is required to obtain punitive damages. S.D. CODIFIED LAWS § 21-1-4.1 (2004); *Diamond Surface, Inc. v. State Cement Plant Comm'n*, 583 N.W.2d 155, 159 (S.D. 1998).

Actions Against State. South Dakota adheres to the system of sovereign immunity, and only in specific circumstances where the state legislature allows for a waiver of such an immunity can a plaintiff receive punitive damages in an action against the state. *Hallberg v. S.D. Bd. of Regents*, 937 N.W. 2d 568, 572 (S.D. 2019). Therefore, "except as provided in § 21-32-16, any employee, officer or agent of the state, while acting within the scope of his employment or agency, whether such acts are ministerial or discretionary, is immune from suit or liability for damages brought against him in either his individual or official capacity." S.D. CODIFIED LAWS § 21-32-17 (2010).

The state has waived sovereign immunity for punitive damages "to the extent such liability insurance is purchased pursuant to § 21-32-15 and to the extent coverage is afforded thereunder..." S.D. CODIFIED LAWS § 21-32-16 (2010).

Breach of Contract. Punitive damages are not ordinarily recoverable for breach of contract because, as a general rule, damages for breach of contract are limited to pecuniary loss sustained. *Grynberg v. Citation Oil & Gas Corp.*, 573 N.W.2d 493, 494 (S.D. 1997), (quoting *Hoffman v. Louis Dreyfus Corp.*, 435 N.W.2d 211, 214 (S.D. 1989)).

Only in the specific instance where a plaintiff can prove that the breach of contract was accompanied by an independent tort, can punitive damages be awarded in such an action. *Id.* The Court noted that, "while the independent tort may occur at the time of and in connection with the breach, or may arise out of the same transaction, it is not committed merely by breaching the contract, even if such act is intentional." *Id.* (Citing 22 AnJur Damages § 752 (1988)).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. South Dakota courts applying South Dakota law follow the complicity rule, as defined in the Restatement (Second) of Torts § 909 (1977), which states that:

Punitive damages can properly be awarded against a master or other principal because of an act by an agent if, but only if,

1. the principal or a managerial agent authorized the doing and the manner of the act, or
2. the agent was unfit and the principal or a managerial agent was reckless in employing or retaining him, or



3. the agent was employed in a managerial capacity and was acting in the scope of employment, or
4. the principal or a managerial agent of the principal ratified or approved the act.

See *Olson v. Tri-County State Bank*, 456 N.W.2d 132, 134 n.3 (S.D. 1990).

Environmental Liability. Punitive damages may be awarded “in any action for the breach of an obligation not arising from contract, where the defendant has been guilty of oppression, fraud, or malice, actual or presumed ... for sake of example, and by way of punishing the defendant.” S.D. CODIFIED LAWS § 21-3-2.

Equity. Punitive damages are allowable in equitable actions. *Black v. Gardner*, 320 N.W.2d 153 (S.D. 1982).

Insurer’s Bad Faith. South Dakota law does allow punitive damages to be awarded against an insurer for “tortious bad faith in an action for breach of insurance contract.” S.D. Codified Laws § 21-3-2; see *Trouten v. Heritage Mut. Ins. Co.*, 632 N.W.2d 856, 863 (S.D. 2001). For the insured to successfully recover punitive damages, they must prove, via clear and convincing evidence, that a “reasonable basis exists to believe the insurer engaged in willful, wanton, or malicious conduct.” *Sawyer v. Farm Bureau Mut. Ins. Co.*, 619 N.W.2d 644, 647 (D.D. 2000). The insured must also establish the insurer had malice (actual or presumed) for the court to consider a punitive damage award. *Isaac v. State Farm Mut. Auto Ins. Co.*, 522 N.W. 2d 752, 761 (S.D. 1994).

Product Liability. South Dakota does allow the recovery of punitive damages as a result of product liability lawsuits. S.D. Codified Laws § 21-3-2. Nevertheless, the law still requires the plaintiff to prove malice existed on behalf of the defendant, in order to punitive damages to be assessed. *Holmes v. Wegman Oil Co.*, 492 N.W.2d 107, 111 (S.D. 1992).

Professional Liability. Punitive damages may be awarded “in any action for the breach of an obligation not arising from contract, where the defendant has been guilty of oppression, fraud, or malice, actual or presumed ... for sake of example, and by way of punishing the defendant.” S.D. CODIFIED LAWS § 21-3-2.

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer?)

It seems unlikely that South Dakota law would allow punitive damages to be insured against to the benefit of the defendant. See *Dairyland Ins. Co. v. Wyant*, 474 N.W.2d 514, 516-16 (S.D. 1991). This is mainly due to the fact that S.D. Codified Laws § 53-9-3, explains that, “all contracts which have for their object, directly or indirectly, to exempt anyone from responsibility for his own fraud or willful injury to the person or property of another or from violation of law whether willful or negligent, are against the policy of the law.”

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

No statute or decision addressed the insurability of vicariously assessed punitive damages under South Dakota law. However, it is highly likely that an individual who is vicariously liable to pay an award of punitive damages would be also be barred from insuring against such damages.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

There must be a recovery of compensatory damages before punitive damages are allowed. *Speck v. Anderson*, 349 N.W.2d 49, 50 (S.D. 1984); *Johnson v. Kirkwood, Inc.*, 306 N.W.2d 640, 643 (S.D. 1981); see *Roberts v. Shaffer*, 156 N.W. 67, 68 (S.D. 1916). The amount of compensatory damages is among the factors to be considered in a punitive damages award, but there need be no precise ratio between them. *Hulstein v. Meilman Food Indus.*, 293 N.W.2d 889, 891 (S.D. 1980). The award may be reduced for excessiveness. *Stene v. Hillgren*, 98 N.W.2d 156, 158 (S.D. 1959).



D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

No, South Dakota does not place a specific statutory cap on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded to a plaintiff. The only statute setting a cap on damages, is S.D. Codified Laws § 21-3-11, which limits medical malpractice damages to \$500,000.

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Generally, an award of punitive damages is payable to the plaintiff. The estate of a decedent may pursue a claim for punitive damages against a wrongdoer. *In re Estate of O'Keefe*, 583 N.W.2d 138, 141 (S.D. 1998).



TENNESSEE

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. The Supreme Court of Tennessee has indicated that punitive damages should only be awarded in those cases involving “the most egregious of wrongs.” *Hodges v. S.C. Toof & Co.*, 833 S.W.2d 896 (Tenn. 1992).

Tennessee Code Annotated Section 29-39-104 (a)(1) states that in a civil action in which punitive damages are sought, punitive damages may only be awarded if the claimant proves by clear and convincing evidence that the defendant against whom punitive damages are sought acted maliciously, intentionally, fraudulently or recklessly. In an action in which the claimant seeks an award of punitive damages, the trier of fact in a bifurcated proceeding shall first determine whether compensatory damages are to be awarded and in what amount and by special verdict whether each defendant’s conduct was malicious, intentional, fraudulent or reckless and whether the limitations on punitive damages shall not apply. Tenn. Code Ann. § 29-39-104(a)(2). If a jury finds that the defendant engaged in malicious, intentional, fraudulent, or reckless conduct, then the court shall promptly commence an evidentiary hearing in which the jury shall determine the amount of punitive damages, if any. Tenn. Code Ann. § 29-39-104(a)(3).

In all cases involving an award of punitive damages, the trier of fact, in determining the amount of punitive damages, shall consider, to the extent relevant, the following: the defendant’s financial condition and net worth; the nature and reprehensibility of the defendant’s wrongdoing; the impact of the defendant’s conduct on the plaintiff; the relationship of the defendant to the plaintiff; the defendant’s awareness of the amount of harm being caused and the defendant’s motivation in causing such harm; the duration of the defendant’s misconduct and whether the defendant attempted to conceal such misconduct; the expense plaintiff has borne in attempts to recover the losses; whether the defendant profited from the activity, and if defendant did profit, whether the punitive award should be in excess of the profit in order to deter similar future behavior; whether, and the extent to which, defendant has been subjected to previous punitive damage awards based upon the same wrongful act; whether, once the misconduct became known to defendant, defendant took remedial action or attempted to make amends by offering a prompt and fair settlement for actual harm caused; and any other circumstances shown by the evidence that bear on determining a proper amount of punitive damages. The trier of fact shall be instructed that the primary purpose of punitive damages is to punish the wrongdoer and deter similar misconduct in the future by the defendant and others while the purpose of compensatory damages is to make the plaintiff whole. Tenn. Code Ann. § 29-39-104(a)(4).

Punitive damages cannot be awarded against the estate of a deceased tortfeasor. See *Chapman v. Jones*, 2000 Tenn. App. (LexisNexis 3), at 1 (Tenn. Ct. App. Jan. 10, 2000); see also *Hayes v. Gill*, 390 S.W.2d 213 (Tenn. 1965).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. A court may award punitive damages in cases involving the most egregious of harms. The court must find that a defendant has acted either intentionally, fraudulently, maliciously or recklessly. Tenn. Code Ann. § 29-39-104(a)(1); *Hodges*, 833 S.W.2d at 901; see also *Vaughn v. Park Healthcare Co.*, 1994 WL 684485, 1 (Tenn. App. 1994); *Curtis v. Universal Match Corp.*, 778 F. Supp. 1421 (E.D. Tenn. 1991), *aff’d*, 966 F.2d 1451 (Sixth Cir. 1992).

Standard of Proof. Clear and convincing evidence is required to obtain punitive damages. Tenn. Code Ann. § 29-39-104(a)(1); *Hodges*, 833 S.W.2d at 901.

Actions Against State. Punitive damages are not permitted against the state. Tenn. Code Ann. § 9-8-307(d).

Breach of Contract. Although as a general matter, punitive damages are not available in a breach of contract case, *B.F. Myers & Son of Goodlettsville, Inc. v. Evans*, 612 S.W.2d 912, 916 (Tenn. Ct. App. 1980), punitive damages may be awarded in such a case



under certain circumstances. See *Greyhound Lines, Inc. v. Freels*, 176 Tenn. 502, 144 S.W.2d 743, 746 (Tenn. 1940); *Louisville, Nashville & Great S.R.R. v. Guinan*, 79 Tenn. 98, 1883 WL 3669, at *2 (1883). However, an award of punitive damages is limited to “the most egregious cases” and is proper only where there is clear and convincing proof that the defendant has acted either “intentionally, fraudulently, maliciously, or recklessly.” *Goff v. Elmo Greer & Sons Constr. Co.*, 297 S.W.3d 175, 187 (Tenn. 2009) (citing *Hodges v. S.C. Toof & Co.*, 833 S.W.2d 896, 901 (Tenn. 1992)). See also, *Rogers v. Louisville Land Co.*, 367 S.W.3d 196, 211 (Tenn. 2012).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. The culpability of a defendant for punitive damages whose liability is alleged to be vicarious shall be determined separately from that of any alleged agent, employee or representative. Tenn. Code Ann. § 29-39-104(a)(9).

Punitive damages may be awarded against a defendant based on vicarious liability for the acts or omissions of an agent or employee only if the finder of fact determines by special verdict based on clear and convincing evidence that one or more of the following has occurred: (A) the act or omission was committed by a person employed in a management capacity while that person was acting within the scope of employment; (B) the defendant was reckless in hiring, retaining, supervising or training the agent or employee and that recklessness was the proximate cause of the act or omission that caused the loss or injury; or (C) the defendant authorized, ratified or approved the act or omission with knowledge or conscious or reckless disregard that the act or omission may result in the loss or injury. Tenn. Code Ann. § 29-39-104(g)(1)(A-C).

Environmental Liability. Punitive damages may be awarded in connection with environmental liability claims. *Sterling v Velsicol Chem. Corp.*, 855 F.2d 1188, 1216-17 (Sixth Cir. 1988) (applying Tennessee law) (In a class action by persons who either lived on or owned property near a landfill where a company disposed of hazardous chemical by-products, the court held that an award for punitive damages was appropriate where the company “violated state law in establishing, utilizing, and refusing to cease disposal operations at the landfill disposal site.”).

In addition, pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 68-212-207(c), any liable party who fails without sufficient cause to properly provide for removal of hazardous substances or remedial action upon order of the commissioner pursuant to this part may be liable to the state for punitive damages in an amount equal to one hundred fifty percent (150%) of the amount of any costs incurred by the fund as a result of such failure to take proper action. The commissioner shall recover the punitive damages in an action commenced under subsection (b) or in a separate civil action, and such punitive damages shall be in addition to any costs recovered from such liable party pursuant to this part. Any punitive damages awarded pursuant to this subsection (c) shall be deposited in the fund.

Insurer’s Bad Faith. Tennessee law provides for a statutory “bad faith penalty” that allows up to an additional 25 percent damage award. Tenn. Code Ann. § 56-7-105 (2010). However, this provision establishes authority for recovery of additional damages caused by a breach of insurance contract above and beyond the obvious recovery of the loss directly insured against. *Rice v. Van Wagoner Cos.*, 738 F. Supp. 252 (M.D. Tenn. 1990).

Product Liability. Tenn. Code Ann. § 29-39-104 governs punitive damages for a product liability action. The seller of a product other than the manufacturer shall not be liable for punitive damages, unless the seller exercised substantial control over that aspect of the design, testing, manufacture, packaging or labeling of the product that caused the harm for which recovery of damages is sought; the seller altered or modified the product and the alteration or modification was a substantial factor in causing the harm for which recovery of damages is sought; or the seller had actual knowledge of the defective condition of the product at the time the seller supplied the same. Tenn. Code Ann. § 29-39-104 (c).

Under Tenn. Code Ann. § 29-39-104(d)(1), except as provided in subdivision (d)(2), punitive damages shall not be awarded in a civil action involving a drug or device if the drug or device which allegedly caused the claimant’s harm:(A) was manufactured and labeled in relevant and material respects in accordance with the terms of an approval or license issued by the federal food and drug administration under the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, 52 Stat. 1040, compiled in 21 U.S.C. §§ 301-392, as amended, or the Public Health Service Act, 53 Stat. 682, compiled in 42 U.S.C. §§ 201-300cc-15; or (B) was an over-the-counter drug or device marketed pursuant to federal regulations, was generally recognized as safe and effective and as not being misbranded pursuant to the applicable federal regulations, and satisfied in relevant and material respects each of the conditions



contained in the applicable regulations and each of the conditions contained in an applicable monograph. Under Tenn. Code Ann. § 29-39-104(d)(2), subdivision (d)(1) shall not apply in an action against a manufacturer of a drug or device, if, at any time before the event alleged to have caused the harm, the manufacturer, in violation of applicable regulations of the food and drug administration: (A) withheld from the food and drug administration information known to be material and relevant to the harm that the claimant allegedly suffered; or (B) misrepresented to the food and drug administration information of that type. For purposes this subsection (d): (A) "Device" has the same meaning as in the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, 52 Stat. 1040, 1041, codified in 21 U.S.C. § 321(h); (B) "Drug" has the same meaning as in the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, 52 Stat. 1040, 1041, codified in 21 U.S.C. § 321(g)(1).

Pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 29-39-104 (e), punitive damages shall not be awarded in any civil action when a defendant demonstrates by a preponderance of the evidence that it was in substantial compliance with applicable federal and state regulations setting forth specific standards applicable to the activity in question and intended to protect a class of persons or entities that includes the plaintiff, if those regulations were in effect at the time the activity occurred.

Professional Liability. A claim for punitive damages will stand where there was clear and convincing evidence of intentional, fraudulent, malicious and/or reckless conduct on the part of an attorney, including his attempts to conceal the misconduct from his client. *Metcalfe v. Waters*, 970 S.W.2d 448 (Tenn. 1998).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes. An insurer may indemnify its insured for punitive damages so long as the underlying injury was not intentionally inflicted. *Lazenby v. Universal Underwriters Ins. Co.*, 383 S.W.2d 1 (Tenn. 1964); see also *Gen. Cas. Co. v. Woodby*, 238 F.2d 452 (Sixth Cir. 1956) (insurer liable for punitive damages assessed as consequence of driver's gross negligence). There is no legal requirement that the liability carrier must satisfy the punitive damages before satisfying compensatory damages. Once the liability carrier has paid damages to its limits, its legal obligations are fulfilled. *West v. Pratt*, 871 S.W.2d 477 (Tenn. 1994).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable. See II. A. above.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

A low award of compensatory damages may support a high award of punitive damages, depending on whether the action was particularly egregious. Alternatively, a high award of compensatory damages may warrant a low amount of punitive damages, depending on the seriousness of the defendant's actions. A compensatory award is never tested by its relationship to the punitive award. *Coffey v. Fayette Tubular Prods.*, 929 S.W.2d 326 (Tenn. 1996).

Actual damages must be sustained or suffered to have punitive damages awarded, although no actual monetary award is necessary and mere proof of actual loss is sufficient to support a punitive damages award. *Oakley v. Simmons*, 799 S.W.2d 669 (Tenn. Ct. App. 1990) (punitive damages awarded in an action for injunctive relief). See also *Emerson v. Garner*, 732 S.W.2d 613 (Tenn. Ct. App. 1987); *Whittington v. Grand Valley Lakes, Inc.*, 547 S.W.2d 241 (Tenn. 1977); *Hutchison v. Pyburn*, 567 S.W.2d 762 (Tenn. Ct. App. 1977) (punitive damages awarded in action to rescind contract).



D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Generally, punitive damages are capped at the greater of (i) two times the total amount of compensatory damages awarded; or (ii) five hundred thousand dollars. Tenn. Code Ann. § 56-7-105(a)(5).

However, this cap does not apply to actions for damages or an injury (i) if the defendant had a specific intent to inflict serious physical injury, and the defendant's intentional conduct injured the plaintiff; (ii) if the defendant intentionally falsified, destroyed, or concealed records containing material evidence with the purpose of wrongfully evading liability in the case at issue; (iii) if the defendant was under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or any other intoxicant or stimulant that resulted in the defendant's substantially impaired judgment, which caused the injuries or death; or (iv) if the defendant's act or omission results in the defendant being convicted of a felony in any US jurisdiction, and that act or omission caused the damages or injuries. Tenn. Code Ann. § 56-7-105(a)(7).

In *Lindenberg v. Jackson Nat'l Life Ins. Co.*, 912 F.3d 348 (6th Cir. 2018), the Sixth Circuit has held that the punitive damages bar set forth in T.C.A. § 29-39-104 violates the individual right to a trial by jury set forth in the Tennessee Constitution. However, there is no similar state law decision at this time. *McClay v. Airport Mgmt. Servs., LLC*, 596 S.W.3d 686 (Tenn. 2020) noted in a footnote that it acknowledged the *Lindenberg* Court held that the cap on punitive damages unconstitutional, but decisions by federal circuit court of appeals on not binding on the Tennessee Supreme Court. The Court further noted that the statutory cap on punitive damages in Tennessee Code Annotated section 29-39-104 was not at issue in the instant case, and expressed no opinion on this issue. *McClay v. Airport Mgmt. Servs., LLC*, 596 S.W.3d 686, 693. As such, the punitive damages cap is still applicable in Tennessee state courts at this time.

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Generally, an award of punitive damages is payable to the plaintiffs.



TEXAS

The information contained herein is based on the 1995 version of the Texas Civil Practice and Remedies Code **and its subsequent amendments**. Any cause that accrued before September 1, 1995, would be governed by the pre-1995 code. The prior code sections are still available within the Texas Civil Practice and Remedies Code, but will not be discussed in this publication.

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes, punitive damages are available under Texas law. See Tex. Civ. Prac. & Rem. Code § 41.001 et. seq.

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Punitive damages may be awarded in Texas only if the claimant proves by clear and convincing evidence that the wrong **results from fraud, malice, or gross negligence**. Tex. Civ. Prac. & Rem. Code § 41.003(a). See *Bennett v. Howard*, 170 S.W.2d 709, 712-13 (Tex. 1943) (discussing availability of exemplary damages prior to enactment of modern version of § 41.003). Proof of ordinary negligence, bad faith or deceptive trade practices will not suffice to support an award of exemplary damages or to shift the burden of proof to the defendant. See Tex. Civ. Prac. & Rem. Code § 41.003(b); *U-Haul Intern., Inc. v. Waldrip*, 380 S.W.3d 118, 140 (Tex. 2012).

“Fraud” is defined by statute to exclude constructive fraud. Tex. Civ. Prac. & Rem. Code § 41.001(6).

“Malice” is defined by statute as “specific intent by the defendant to cause substantial injury or harm to the claimant.” *Id.* at § 41.001(7).

“Gross negligence” is defined by statute as an act or omission which, when viewed objectively from the standpoint of the actor at the time of its occurrence, involves an extreme degree of risk, considering the probability and magnitude of the potential harm to others and of which the actor proceeds with conscious indifference to the rights, safety or welfare of others. *Id.* at § 41.001(11).

Standard of Proof. Clear and convincing evidence is required to obtain punitive damages. *Id.* at § 41.003(a). Clear and convincing evidence is that “measure or degree of proof that will produce in the mind of the trier of fact a firm belief or conviction as to the truth of the allegations sought to be established.” *Id.* at § 41.001(2). “This intermediate standard falls between the preponderance standard of civil proceedings and the reasonable doubt standard of criminal proceedings.” *W.L. Lindemann Operating Co., Inc. v. Strange*, 256 S.W.3d 766, 755 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2008, pet. denied).

Unanimous. Punitive damages may be awarded only if the jury is unanimous in regards to finding liability for and the amount of exemplary damages. Tex. Civ. Prac. & Rem. Code § 41.003(d).

Bifurcated Trial. A defendant has the right to a bifurcated trial if requested. During the first phase of the bifurcated trial, the jury shall determine liability for compensatory and punitive damages; and the amount of compensatory damages. If liability for punitive damages is established during the first phase, the jury shall, in the second phase, determine the amount, if any, of punitive damages to assess. *Id.* at § 41.009.

Evidence Relating to Amount of Punitive Damages. When determining the amount, if any, of punitive damages, the jury shall consider the nature of the wrong, the character of the conduct involved, the degree of culpability of the wrongdoer, the situation and sensibilities of the parties concerned, the extent to which such conduct offends a public sense of justice and propriety, and the net worth of the defendant. *Id.* at § 41.011.



Discovery of Net Worth. The Texas Civil Practice and Remedies Code was amended, effective September 1, 2015, to modify the protocol and standards for discovering net worth in a lawsuit seeking punitive damages. *Id.* at § 41.0115. Now, to discover net worth from a defendant, a plaintiff must file a motion and have a hearing. *Id.* at § 41.0115(a); *In re Juniper Ventures of Tex.*, No. 04-22-00753-CV, 2023 Tex. App. LEXIS 1469, at *5 (Tex. App.—San Antonio Mar. 8, 2023, no pet. h.). The court “may” authorize the discovery if the court finds in a written order that the plaintiff has demonstrated a “substantial likelihood of success on the merits” on the claim for exemplary damages and, even then, the court may only authorize use of the “least burdensome method available” to obtain net worth information. Tex. Civ. Prac. & Rem. Code § 41.0115(a), (b). Finally, if a plaintiff requests net worth discovery under this section, the court shall presume plaintiff has had adequate time for discovery of the facts relating to the discovery of exemplary damages such that a defendant may file a no evidence motion for summary judgment on plaintiff’s claim for exemplary damages. *Id.* at § 41.0115(a). The statute applies only to lawsuits filed on or after September 1, 2015.

No Pre-judgment Interest Recoverable. Pre-judgment interest may not be assessed or recovered on an award of punitive damages. *Id.* at § 41.007.

Nominal Damages Insufficient. Punitive damages may be awarded only if damages other than nominal damages are awarded. *Id.* at § 41.004.

Actions Against State. Punitive damages are not permitted against the State. *E.g.*, *Duhart v. State*, 610 S.W.2d 740 (Tex. 1980) (holding that the Texas Tort Claims Act did not waive governmental immunity for a suit for exemplary damages).

Breach of Contract. Neither punitive nor exemplary damages are not recoverable in a breach of contract action. *Jim Walter Homes, Inc. v. Reed*, 711 S.W.2d 617, 618 (Tex. 1986); *Lisanti v. Dixon*, 147 S.W.3d 638, 645 (Tex. App.—Dallas 2004, pet. denied). Even an intentional, malicious and oppressive breach of contract is not punishable by punitive damages. *Jim Walter Homes, Inc.*, 711 S.W.2d at 618; *Chachere v. Drake*, 941 S.W.2d 193, 197 (Tex. App.—Corpus Christi 1996, writ denied). Punitive damages, however, may be allowed if the breach of contract is shown to have been accompanied by an underlying independent tort that is malicious, oppressive or fraudulent in nature. *See Sheffield v. Gibson*, 2008 WL 190049, at 5-6 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] Jan. 22, 2008, no pet.) (explaining that breach of contract cannot be pleaded as tort for more favorable damages, but fraudulent inducement may be separate tort for tort damages purposes); *Amoco*, 622 S.W.2d at 571; *Sharpe*, 962 S.W.2d at 703; *Shelton Ins. Agency v. St. Paul Mercury Ins. Co.*, 848 S.W.2d 739, 747 (Tex. App.—Corpus Christi 1993, writ denied).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Texas courts applying Texas law follow the Restatement (Second) of Torts in cases where punitive damages are sought from an employer for acts of employees. Section 909 of the Restatement states that:

Punitive damages can properly be awarded against a master or other principal because of an act by an agent if, but only if:

1. the principal or a managerial agent authorized the doing and the manner of the act, or
2. the agent was unfit and the principal or a managerial agent was reckless in employing or retaining him, or
3. the agent was employed in a managerial capacity and was acting in the scope of employment, or
4. the principal or a managerial agent of the principal ratified or approved the act.

Restatement (Second) of Torts § 909 (1977); *Purvis v. Prattco, Inc.*, 595 S.W.2d 103 (Tex. 1980).

Under Texas law, a corporation may be liable for punitive damages if the corporation itself – through its corporate agents – acts with gross negligence. *Hammerly Oaks, Inc. v. Edward*, 958 S.W.2d 387, 391 (Tex. 1997).

Environmental Liability. There is no law in Texas expressly addressing the issue of punitive damages and environmental liability. However, in Texas, punitive damages may be awarded only if the claimant proves by clear and convincing evidence that the wrong is accompanied by fraud, malice, or gross negligence. *See* Tex. Civ. Prac. & Rem. Code § 41.003(a).



Insurer's Bad Faith. A bad faith insurance claim may result in punitive damages only where the insurer's bad faith is accompanied by intentional, malicious, fraudulent or grossly negligent conduct. *Universe Life Ins. Co. v. Giles*, 950 S.W.2d 48, 54 (Tex. 1997) (citing *Transp. Ins. Co. v. Moriel*, 879 S.W.2d 10, 18 (Tex. 1994)). "The plaintiff in a bad faith case must therefore prove that "the insurer was actually aware that its action would probably result in extraordinary harm not ordinarily associated with breach of contract or bad faith denial of a claim—such as death, grievous physical injury, or financial ruin." " *Id.* (citing *Moriel*, 879 S.W.2d at 18). "Even if the insurer has 'no reasonable basis' to deny or delay payment of the claim, the plaintiff may not recover punitive damages on that basis alone." *Moriel*, 879 S.W.2d at 18 (citing *Arnold v. Nat'l County Mut. Fire Ins. Co.*, 725 S.W.2d 165, 168 (Tex. 1987)). See also *Munoz v. State Farm Lloyds*, 522 F.3d 568, 574 (5th Cir. 2008) (applying Texas law).

Product Liability. Texas law allows recovery of punitive damages in favor of a product liability plaintiff. *Owens-Corning Fiberglas Corp. v. Malone*, 972 S.W.2d 35, 54 (Tex. 1998); *North American Refractory Co. v. Easter*, 988 S.W.2d 904, 919-20 (Tex. App.—Corpus Christi 1999, pet. denied); *Sears, Roebuck & Co. v. Kunze*, 996 S.W.2d 416, 429-30 (Tex. App.—Beaumont 1999, pet. denied); accord *Cimino v. Raymark Indus., Inc.*, 739 F. Supp. 328, 332 (E.D. Tex. 1990) (affirmed in part, vacated in part on other grounds by *Cimino v. Raymark Industries, Inc.*, 151 F.3d 297 (5th Cir. 1998)).

Professional Liability. Punitive damages are generally available in professional negligence cases, if the plaintiff is able to show gross negligence. *Nowzaradan v. Ryans*, 347 S.W.3d 734, 740 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 2011, no pet.) (medical malpractice or "health care liability" claim); *Henry S. Miller Commer. Co. v. Newsom, Terry & Newsom, L.L.P.*, No. 05-14-01188-CV, 2016 Tex. App. LEXIS 10136, at *9 (Tex. App.—Dallas Sep. 14, 2016, pet. denied) (legal malpractice claim).

Tortious Interference with Contract. A plaintiff can recover exemplary damages in a claim for tortious interference with a contract if the plaintiff establishes that the interference was malicious. *Buzbee v. Terry & Thweatt, P.C.*, No. 01-20-00659-CV, 2022 Tex. App. LEXIS 69, at *26-27 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] Jan. 6, 2022, pet. denied); *Texas Beef Cattle Co. v. Green*, 921 S.W.2d 203, 210 (Tex. 1996).

Wrongful Death. In an action for wrongful death, "[w]hen the death is caused by the willful act or omission or gross negligence of the defendant, exemplary as well as actual damages may be recovered." Tex. Civ. Prac. & Rem. Code § 71.009.

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Possibly. The Texas Supreme Court decided a question certified from the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, holding that Texas public policy does not prohibit insurance coverage of punitive damages in the context of a workers' compensation claim, under an employer's liability policy for punitive damages awarded for an employer's gross negligence causing an employee's death. *Fairfield Ins. Co. v. Stephens Martin Paving, L.P.*, 246 S.W.3d 653 (Tex. 2008). The Court based its holding on Texas's strong policy favoring preservation of freedom of contract. The Court expressly declined to decide the extent to which punitive damages may or may not be insurable in other contexts. Thus, the question remains undecided.

In this context, it is important to note that two Texas courts of appeals previously found that coverage for punitive damages awarded for gross negligence under liability policies did not exclude coverage for punitive damages. *Am. Home Assurance v. Safway Steel Prod. Co.*, 743 S.W.2d 693, 701-02 (Tex. App.—Austin 1987, writ denied); *Dairyland County Mut. Ins. Co. v. Wallgren*, 477 S.W.2d 341, 343 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 1972, writ ref'd n.r.e.). These courts held that it is not against public policy for an insurer to contract to pay punitive damages on behalf of the insured. *Id.*

The U.S. District Court for the Western District of Texas applied the *Fairfield* framework relatively recently in *Frederking v. Cincinnati Insurance Co.*, holding that Texas public policy barred an insurer from having an obligation to indemnify an employee of its insured for punitive damages awarded because of the employee's gross negligence in causing an automobile accident while intoxicated. 447 F. Supp. 3d 577, 582 (W.D. Tex. 2020).



B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable. See II. A. above.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

An award of punitive damages must bear a “reasonable relationship” to the award of compensatory damages. *Alamo Nat’l Bank v. Kraus*, 616 S.W.2d 908, 910 (Tex. 1981); *Gen. Mills Rests., Inc. v. Clemons*, 865 S.W.2d 48 (Tex. App.—Corpus Christi 1993, no writ); *Riedell v. Hoffman Controls Corp.*, 2001 WL 832342, at 4 (Tex. App.—Dallas July 25, 2001, no pet.). However, there is no “mathematical bright line” between the constitutionally acceptable and unacceptable. *BMW of N. Am., Inc. v. Gore*, 517 U.S. 559, 580 (1996). Rather, the reasonableness of the ratio should be judged on the facts of each case. *Id.* This rule is a tool to aid the courts in determining whether a punitive damages award is excessive because it is the product of passion rather than reason. *Wright v. Gifford-Hill & Co., Inc.*, 725 S.W.2d 712, 714 (Tex. 1987).

Punitive damages may not be recovered unless the plaintiff is shown to have sustained actual loss or injury as the result of an underlying tort. *Bellefonte Underwriters Ins. Co. v. Brown*, 704 S.W.2d 742, 745 (Tex. 1986); *Fed. Express Corp. v. Dutschmann*, 846 S.W.2d 282 (Tex. 1993); *City Prods. Corp. v. Berman*, 610 S.W.2d 446, 450 (Tex. 1980). A plaintiff cannot recover punitive damages if its compensatory damages claim is precluded as a matter of law. *Entergy Gulf States, Inc. v. Isom*, 143 S.W.3d 486, 494 (Tex. App.—Beaumont 2004, pet. denied). In determining the amount of punitive damages to award, the trier of fact is to consider evidence relating to the following six factors: (1) the nature of the wrong, (2) the character of the conduct involved, (3) the degree of culpability of the wrongdoer, (4) the situation and sensibilities of the parties concerned, (5) the extent to which such conduct offends a public sense of justice and propriety, and (6) the net worth of the defendant. Tex. Civ. Prac. & Rem. Code § 41.011(a).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Yes, for suits filed on or after September 1, 1995, punitive damages are capped by statute at the greater of either (1) two times the amount of economic damages, plus any non-economic damages found by the jury, not to exceed \$750,000 or (2) \$200,000. Tex. Civ. Prac. & Rem. Code § 41.008.

However, these limitations do not apply to actions resulting from an intentional tort or malice. *Id.* Nor do they apply when certain criminal conduct is proven. *Id.* at § 41.008(c).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Generally, punitive damages are payable to the plaintiff. Punitive damages have also been held payable to an estate’s representative. Because the basis of the damages is to deter wrongdoing, the deterrent survives the death of the injured party in areas where the Texas Constitution and statutes have not provided to the contrary. *Hofer v. Lavender*, 679 S.W.2d 470, 472 (Tex. 1984); *Pace v. McEwen*, 574 S.W.2d 792, 801 (Tex. App.—El Paso 1978, writ ref’d n.r.e.).



UTAH

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes, punitive damages are available under Utah law. UTAH CODE ANN. §78B-8-201 (2011). Punitive damages may be awarded only if compensatory or general damages are awarded and it is established by clear and convincing evidence that the acts or omissions of the tortfeasor are the result of willful and malicious or intentionally fraudulent conduct, or conduct that manifests a knowing and reckless indifference toward, and a disregard of, the rights of others. UTAH CODE ANN § 78B-8-201(1)(a). These standards do not apply to a claim arising out of the operation of motor vehicle while voluntarily intoxicated or under the influence of any drug, for causing the death of another by providing or administering an illegal controlled substance or by providing an illegal controlled substance to any person in the chain of transfer that connects directly to a person who caused the death of another through the administration of a controlled substance. UTAH CODE ANN § 78B-8-201(1)(b).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. In order to justify an award of punitive damages, a defendant's acts must be the result of willful and malicious or intentionally fraudulent conduct, or conduct that manifests a knowing and reckless indifference toward, and a disregard of, the rights of others. UTAH CODE ANN § 78B-8-201(1)(a). *Orr v. Brigham Young Univ.*, 960 F. Supp. 1522 (D. Utah 1994) (notice or knowledge of a dangerous condition and failure to act, absent more, does not support a claim for punitive damages).

Standard of Proof. Proof by "clear and convincing" evidence is required to sustain a punitive damages award. UTAH CODE ANN § 78B-8-201(1)(a).

Actions Against State. Punitive damages against the state are not permitted. UTAH CODE ANN § 63g-7-603. *See also Youren v. Tintic Sch. Dist.*, 343 F.3d 1296, 1307 (10th Cir. 2003).

Breach of Contract. Breach of contract, standing alone, does not give rise to a claim for punitive damages even if the breach was intentional and unjustifiable, but such damages are allowable if there is some independent tort. *See Campbell v. State Farm*, 65 P.3d 1134 (Utah 2001, writ granted); but see *State Farm Mut. Auto Ins. v. Campbell*, 123 S. Ct. 1513 (U.S. 2003) ("To the extent an award of punitive damages is grossly excessive, it furthers no legitimate purpose and constitutes an arbitrary deprivation of property."); and *Norman v. Arnold*, 2002 UT 81; 453 Utah Adv. Rep. 27 (Utah 2002). *See, e.g., Schurtz v. BMW*, 814 P.2d 1108 (Utah 1991); *Highland Constr. Co. v. Union Pac. R.R.*, 683 P.2d 1042 (Utah 1984); *Hal Taylor Assocs. v. Unionamerica, Inc.*, 657 P.2d 743 (Utah 1982).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. After extensively discussing the role of employer liability for punitive damages applying Utah law in *Johnson v. Rogers*, the Supreme Court of Utah adopted the complicity rule articulated in the Restatement of Torts as follows:

Punitive damages can properly be awarded against a master or other principal because of an act by an agent if, but only if:

1. the principal or a managerial agent authorized the doing and the manner of the act, or
2. the agent was unfit and the principal or a managerial agent was reckless in employing or retaining him, or
3. the agent was employed in a managerial capacity and was acting in the scope of employment, or
4. the principal or a managerial agent of the principal ratified or approved the act.

Restatement (Second) of Torts § 909 (1977).



The Court noted that the complicity rule “limits vicarious punitive damages to those situations where wrongful acts were committed or specifically authorized by a managerial agent or were committed by an unfit employee who was recklessly employed or retained.” *Johnson v. Rogers*, 763 P.2d 771, 778 (Utah 1988).

Decision clarifying that wrongful termination claims sound in tort (and include the possibility of punitive damages). See *Peterson v. [644] Browning*, 832 P.2d 1280, 1284 (Utah 1992). The potential for such exposure highlights the need for careful, predictable exceptions to the at-will presumption.

Ray v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., 359 P.3d 614, 643-44 (Utah 2015)

Environmental Liability. Punitive damages may be assessed with respect to environmental torts. See, e.g., *Boyette v. L.W. Looney & Son*, supra, 932 F. Supp. 1344 (D. Utah 1995, writ granted); *Branch v. W. Petroleum, Inc.*, 657 P.2d 267, 278 (Utah 1982) (pre- statute case).

General Liability. Punitive damages are recoverable in general negligence actions. See, e.g., *Hall v. Wal-Mart, Inc.*, 959 P.2d 109, 110 (Utah 1998) (premises liability lawsuit).

Insurer’s Bad Faith. Punitive damages are recoverable by an insured against an insurer in an insurance “bad faith” action. See *Campbell v. State Farm*, 65 P.3d 1134 (Utah 2001). But see *State Farm Mut. Auto Ins. v. Campbell*, 538 U.S. 408 (2003) (“To the extent an award of punitive damages is grossly excessive, it furthers no legitimate purpose and constitutes an arbitrary deprivation of property.”).

Product Liability. Punitive damages are recoverable in actions over allegedly defective products. See, e.g., *Slisze v. Stanley Bostitch Corp.*, 979 P.2d 317, 321 (Utah 1999).

Professional Liability. Punitive damages are recoverable in professional negligence actions. See, e.g., *C.S. v. Nielson*, 767 P.2d 504, 510 (Utah 1988) (pre-statute action for medical malpractice).

Arbitration. If a plaintiff submits their claims for arbitration under Utah Code section 31A-22-321 they accept certain statutory limits on their damages. See UTAH CODE § 31A-22-321(3) (barring punitive damages for a claim submitted to arbitration under this provision); *id.* § 31A-22-321(2)(a) (providing that the plaintiff “is limited to an arbitration award that does not exceed \$50,000 in addition to any available personal injury protection benefits and any claim for property damage”).

Zeller v. Nixon, 355 P.3d 991, 991-92 (Utah 2015)

II IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

No. Utah law states that no insurer may insure or attempt to insure against punitive damages. UTAH CODE ANN. § 31A-20-101(4).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Yes. See II. A. above.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Punitive damages may be awarded only if compensatory or general damages are awarded. 78B-8-201 (2011).



D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Yes. Punitive damages should be assessed in light of the ratio between punitive and actual damages. Where a punitive damages award exceeds a 3-to-1 ratio of punitive to actual damages, the award is presumptively excessive. See *Hall v. Wal-Mart, Inc.*, 959 P.2d 109, 112 (Utah 1998).

In assessing punitive damages, the trier of fact must consider seven factors: (1) the relative wealth of the defendant; (2) the nature of the alleged conduct; (3) the facts and circumstances surrounding such conduct; (4) the effect thereof on the lives of the plaintiff and others; (5) the probability of future recurrences of the misconduct; (6) the relationship of the parties; and (7) the amount of the actual damages awarded. *Hall v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.*, *supra*, 959 P.2d at 111; *Campbell v. State Farm*, 65 P.3d 1134 (Utah 2001). But see *State Farm Mut. Auto Ins. v. Campbell*, 123 S. Ct. 1513 (2003).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

In any judgment where punitive damages have been paid, 50 percent of any amount of the punitive damages in excess of \$50,000 shall, after payment of attorneys' fees and costs, be remitted to the state treasurer for deposit into the General Fund. UTAH CODE ANN. 78B-8-201(3)(a).



VERMONT

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes, punitive damages are available under Vermont law. *Brueckner v. Norwich Univ.*, 730 A.2d 1086 (Vt. 1999); *State Agency of Natural Res. v. Riendeau*, 603 A.2d 360 (Vt. 1991).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Punitive damages may be awarded when a defendant is shown to have acted with malice, or with conduct marked by ill will, insult or oppression, or by a reckless or wanton disregard of one's rights. See *Schnabel v. Nordic Toyota, Inc.*, 721 A.2d 114 (Vt. 1998); *Ainsworth v. Franklin County Cheese Corp.*, 592 A.2d 871 (Vt. 1991); *Shortle v. Cent. Vt. Pub. Serv. Corp.*, 399 A.2d 517 (Vt. 1979). The defendant's act(s) must not only have been wrongful or unlawful, but bad spirited and with wrongful intent. The purpose of punitive damages is to punish conduct that is "morally culpable" and to deter the wrongdoer from repeating the same or similar acts. See *Brueckner v. Norwich Univ.*, 730 A.2d 1086, 169 Vt. 118 (Vt. 1999) (citing *Coty v. Ramsey Assocs.*, 546 A.2d 196 (Vt. 1988); *State Agency of Natural Res. v. Riendeau*, 603 A.2d 360 (Vt. 1991)). To be entitled to punitive damages, plaintiff needed to prove two essential elements: (1) wrongful conduct that is outrageously reprehensible; and (2) malice . . . In assessing the reprehensibility of a defendant's actions, a jury may consider whether the conduct involved repeated actions or was an isolated incident. *Carpentier v. Tuthill*, 86 A.3d 1006, 1011 (2013). The requisite degree of actual malice "may be shown by conduct manifesting personal ill will or carried out under circumstances evidencing insult or oppression, or even by conduct showing a reckless or wanton disregard of one's rights.... Conduct that is not based upon personal hatred or dislike may nevertheless be malicious—it may be insulting or oppressive, or carried out with reckless or wanton disregard of another's rights." *Post & Beam Equities Grp., LLC v. Sunne Vill. Dev. Prop. Owners Ass'n*, 124 A.3d 454, 469 (Vt. 2015) (internal quotation marks omitted).

Standard of Proof. Punitive damages may be obtained based on a preponderance of evidence. *Rubin v. Sterling Enters.*, 674 A.2d 782 (Vt. 1996). "We will not overturn a punitive damages award unless the award is manifestly and grossly excessive or the evidence of defendants' wrongful actions is insufficient to support an award of punitive damages." *Post & Beam Equities Grp., LLC v. Sunne Vill. Dev. Prop. Owners Ass'n*, 124 A.3d 454, 469 (Vt. 2015). A trial court's findings on punitive damages will not be overturned unless the court abused its discretion. *Birchwood Land Co. v. Ormond Bushey & Sons, Inc.*, 82 A.3d 539, 547 (Vt. 2013).

Actions Against State. Punitive damages against the state are not expressly permitted. Absent a clear legislative directive to the contrary, municipalities are immune from punitive damage awards. The twin aims behind punitive damages—punishment and deterrence—would not be met if they were levied against a municipal corporation for the malicious and wrongful acts of its officers. Rather than exclusively targeting the wrongdoers, such an award would punish all of the town's taxpayers. *In re Town Highway No. 20*, 45 A.3d 54, 79 (Vt. 2012). Moreover, damages against the state for "injury to persons or property or loss of life caused by the negligent or wrongful act or omission of an employee of the state while acting within the scope of employment..." are capped. VT. STAT. ANN. § tit. 12 § 5601(a) and VT. STAT. ANN. § tit. 10 § 5601(b) (2015) (the maximum liability of the state "shall be \$500,000 to any one person and the maximum aggregate liability shall be \$2,000,000 to all persons arising out of each occurrence").

Breach of Contract. Generally, punitive damages may not be recovered in actions for breach of contract. However, punitive damages are available in contract actions, in certain "extraordinary cases," in which the breach has the character of a willful and wanton or fraudulent tort. *Villeneuve v. Beane*, 933 A.2d 1139 (Vt. 2007); *Birchwood Land Co. v. Ormond Bushey & Sons, Inc.*, 82 A.3d 539 (Vt. 2013).



Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under Vermont law, a claimant may recover punitive damages against an employer if the employer or governing officer of a corporation directed the act, participated in it, or subsequently ratified it. *Staruski v. Continental Tel. Co.*, 154 Vt. 568, 579-580 (1990). It is appropriate to hold defendant liable for the punitive damages attributable to her late husband and business partner. *Ring v. Carriage House Condo. Owner's Assn.*, 112 A.3d 754, 769 (Vt. 2014). Vermont follows the rule of 714 Restatement (Second) of Torts §909 (1979) which sets forth four alternative elements to impose vicarious liability for punitive damages. *Sweet v. Roy*, 801 A.2d 694 (Vt. 2002). Liability may arise where the agent was employed in a managerial capacity and was acting in the scope of employment; liability may arise even in the absence of fault on the part of the employer, which serves as a deterrent to the employment of unfit persons for important positions. *Id.*

Environmental Liability. Punitive damages are recoverable under Vermont's water pollution control statute, where malice, ill will or wanton conduct is shown. See *State Agency of Natural Res. v. Riendeau*, 603 A.2d 360 (Vt. 1991) interpreting 10 VT. STAT. ANN. § 1274(a)(5)(2015). Additionally, punitive damages can be awarded for failure to comply with the conditions set forth in 10 VT. STAT. ANN. § 1934, resulting in the failure of aboveground storage tanks and underground facilities for the storage and handling of petroleum liquids, related sludge and other chemicals. 10 VT. STAT. ANN. § 1934 (2015).

Insurer's Bad Faith. It remains unclear as to whether punitive damages are specifically recoverable in actions of an insurer's bad faith.

Invasion of Privacy. Wrongful invasion of privacy has also been held to warrant an award of punitive damages. *Fletcher v. Ferry*, 917 A.2d 937, 181 Vt. 294 (Vt. 2007). *Staruski v. Continental Tel. of Vermont*, 581 A.2d 266, 154 Vt. 568 (Vt. 1990); *Shahi v. Madden*, 949 A.2d 1022 (Vt. 1990).

Libel/Defamation. Punitive damages are available in libel actions if common law malice is proven in addition to constitutional malice. *Ryan v. Herald Assoc., Inc.*, 566 A.2d 1316, 152 Vt. 275 (Vt. 1989). See also *Rubin v. Sterling Enter., Inc.*, 674 A.2d 782, 164 Vt. 582 (Vt. 1996) (holding that punitive damages may be awarded, "in the jury's discretion," upon a finding of "actual malice" in an action for defamation).

Product Liability. Punitive damages are recoverable in actions over allegedly defective products. See, e.g. *Slayton v. Ford Motor Co.*, 435 A.2d 946, 140 Vt. 27 (Vt. 1981)(jury instructed on punitive damages in product liability case).

Professional Liability. It remains unclear whether punitive damages are specifically recoverable in professional liability actions; however, it appears as though punitive damages would be available in the professional liability context, See *Bloomer v. Gibson*, 912 A.2d 424 (Vt. 2006) (denying punitive damages judgment to plaintiff in malpractice case against attorney, but not indicating that punitive damages are unavailable in the professional liability context).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes. Punitive damages are insurable, and there is no public policy against insurance coverage of punitive damages. See *Am. Prot. Ins. Co. v. McMahan*, 562 A.2d 462 (Vt. 1989) (citing *State v. Glens Fall Ins. Co.*, 404 A.2d 101 (Vt. 1979)). But coverage imposed under the uninsured motorist statute does not include punitive damages that would have been imposed against a third-party tortfeasor. See, *Pecor v. Elrac, Inc.*, unreported, 2003 WL 25681238 (D.Vt. 2003).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable. See II. A. above.



C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Punitive damages “serve a different function than compensatory damages.” *D’Arc Turcotte v. Estate of LaRose*, 569 A.2d 1086 (Vt. 1989). Their purpose is to punish the tortfeasor, not to compensate the victim for losses. *Id.* Further, the amount of the punitive damages need not bear a particular relationship to the amount of compensatory damages. *Crump v. P & C Food Mkts.*, 576 A.2d 441 (Vt. 1990). Rather, an award of punitive damages may stand as long as the evidence supports the showing of malice. *Id.* An entitlement to punitive damages requires an award of compensatory damages. *Baptie v. Bruno*, 88 A.3d 1212, 1220 (Vt. 2013). Single-digit ratios are presumptively within the bounds of due process as recognized by the U.S. Supreme Court, but Vermont courts have upheld ratios of 10:1 and greater. *Carpentier v. Tuthill*, 86 A.3d 1006, 1014 (Vt. 2013) (\$30,000 in compensatory damages and \$150,000 in punitive damages was not excessive).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

Some Vermont statutes specifically place caps on punitive damages. See 9 VT. STAT. ANN. § 2461 (2015) (which limits recovery of punitive damages for fraudulent representations in contracts for goods or services to three times the value of the consideration given by the consumer). Other statutes specifically provide for treble damages. 12 VT. STAT. ANN. § 4920 (2015) (suits for forcible entry and detainer) and 10 VT. STAT. ANN § 4709 (2015) (suits by the State for unlawful importation of wildlife).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Punitive damages are payable to the plaintiff, or Vermont state agencies where the agency prevails on its punitive damages claim. See *State Agency of Natural Res. v. Riendeau*, 603 A.2d 360 (Vt. 1991).



VIRGINIA

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. Punitive damages may be awarded, but actual malice or malice in fact must be established; simple legal malice is insufficient. *Hamilton Dev. Co. v. Broad Rock Club*, 445 S.E.2d 140 (Va. 1994); *Peacock Buick Inc. v. Durkin*, 277 S.E.2d 225 (Va. 1981); *Xspedius Mgmt. Co. of Va., L.L.C. v. Stephen*, 611 S.E.2d 385 (Va. 2005) (punitive damages may be awarded when there is misconduct or actual malice “or such recklessness or negligence as to evince a conscious disregard of the rights of others”). See also *Banks v. Mario Indus.* 650 S.E.2d 687 (Va. 2007).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Actual malice must be proven to obtain a punitive damages award. Actual malice may be shown where the defendant’s actions exhibit “ill will, violence, grudge, spite, wicked intention or a conscious disregard of the rights of another.” *Lee v. Southland Corp.*, 244 S.E.2d 756 (Va. 1978); *Wright v. Castles*, 349 S.E.2d 125 (Va. 1986). See also *Wallen v. Allen*, 343 S.E.2d 73 (Va. 1986).

Standard of Proof. A preponderance of evidence, either direct or circumstantial, showing actual malice will support punitive damages. *Gov’t Micro Res., Inc. v. Jackson*, 624 S.E.2d 63 (Va. 2006); *Jordan v. Sauve*, 247 S.E.2d 739 (Va. 1978); *Smith v. Litten*, 507 S.E.2d 77 (Va. 1998). Under Virginia law, submission of a cause of action for punitive damages to the jury is not required in all cases involving torts having malice or fraud as an essential element. *Sit-Set, A.G. v. Universal Jet Exch., Inc.*, 747 F.2d 921 (Fourth Cir. 1984).

Trial Procedure. Under Virginia law, submission of a cause of action for punitive damages to the jury is not required in all cases involving torts having malice or fraud as an essential element. *Sit-Set, A.G. v. Universal Jet Exchange, Inc.*, 747 F.2d 921 (Fourth Cir. 1984).

Actions Against State. Punitive damages are not permitted against the Commonwealth of Virginia. Va. Code Ann. § 8.01- 195.3 (2010).

Breach of Contract. A breach of contract does not authorize a claim for punitive damages in the absence of an independent willful tort. *Gasque v. Mooers Motor Car Co., Inc.*, 313 S.E.2d 384 (Va. 1984); *Kamlar Corp. v. Haley*, 299 S.E.2d 514 (Va. 1983); see also *Payne v. Consolidation Coal Co.*, 607 F. Supp. 378 (E.D. Va. 1985); *Wallace v. Hartford Ins. Co.*, 583 F. Supp. 1108 (W.D. Va. 1984).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under Virginia law, a plaintiff may not recover punitive damages from an employer for the act of an employee unless the employer participated in, authorized or ratified the wrongful act. *Egan v. Butler*, 772 S.E.2d 765 (Va. 2015); *Freeman v. Sproles*, 204 Va. 353, 358 (1963).

Environmental Liability. There is no law in Virginia expressly addressing the issue of punitive damages and environmental liability. However, in any civil action, punitive damages may be awarded when there is misconduct or actual malice “or such recklessness or negligence as to evince a conscious disregard of the rights of others.” *Xspedius Mgmt. Co. of Va., L.L.C. v. Stephen*, 611 S.E.2d 385 (Va. 2005).

Insurer’s Bad Faith. Virginia law does not permit recovery of punitive damages by a first-party insured as a result of the insurer’s bad faith refusal to settle the plaintiff’s claim. *Berryman v. Globe Life Ins. Co.*, 22 Va. Cir. 211, 213 (Va. Cir. Ct. 1990). “In a first-party Virginia insurance relationship, liability for bad faith conduct is a matter of contract rather than tort law. The obligation arises from the agreement and extends only to situations connected with the agreement.” *Id.* (citing *A & E Supply Co. v. Nationwide Mut. Fire Ins. Co.*, 798 F.2d 669 (Fourth Cir. 1986)). Therefore, Virginia law will permit the recovery of foreseeable consequential damages in excess of policy limits in the event of a bad faith breach by the insurer. *Id.* However, punitive damages are not permitted.

Product Liability. Punitive damages are available in the product liability context and may be awarded only where the defendant “made a decision that [was] wanton, willful, malicious or in conscious disregard of the rights of others.” *Ford Motor Co. v. Bartholomew*, 297 S.E.2d 675, 683 (Va. 1982).



Professional Liability. Punitive damages are not recoverable for legal malpractice. *Smith v. McLaughlin*, 769 S.E. 2d 7 (Va. 2015); *O’Connell v. Bean*, 556 S.E. 2d 741, 743 (2002). In medical malpractice suits, punitive damages are permitted so long as they do not exceed the statutory cap. *Bulala v. Boyd*, 389 S.E.2d 670 (Va. 1990). The total amount of recoverable medical malpractice damages, including punitive damages, for any injury to a single patient is capped at \$2.6 million through June 30, 2024. VA. CODE ANN. § 8.01-581.15. (2011). Pursuant to statute, the medical malpractice cap increases by \$50,000 every year on July 1, until July 1, 2031, when it will be capped at \$3 million. *Id.* In medical malpractice actions, suits for negligence are governed by the same principles as apply in other negligence actions. *Anand v. Allison*, 55 Va. Cir. 261, 268 (2001) (citing *Allied Prods. v. Duesterdick*, 232 S.E.2d 774 (Va. 1977)), overruled on other grounds by *Shipman v. Kruck*, 593 S.E.2d 319 (Va. 2004).

Wrongful Death. In an action for wrongful death, “punitive damages may be recovered for willful or wanton conduct, or such recklessness as evinces a conscious disregard for the safety of others.” VA. Code Ann. § 8.01-52 (5).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes. It is not against the public policy of Virginia to purchase insurance providing coverage for punitive damages arising out of the death or injury of any person as the result of negligence, including willful and wanton negligence, but excluding intentional acts. VA. CODE ANN. § 38.2-227; see *United Servs. Auto. Ass’n v. Webb*, 369 S.E.2d 196 (Va. 1988); *Lerner v. Gen. Ins. Co.*, 245 S.E.2d 249 (Va. 1978); *Allstate Ins. Co. v. Dade*, 579 S.E.2d 180 (Va. 2003); but see *U.S. Fire Ins. Co. v. Aspen Bldg. Corp.*, 367 S.E.2d 478 (Va. 1988) (holding section does not extend to awards of punitive damages in property damage cases).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

See II. A. above.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

A finding of compensatory damages is a necessary prerequisite to an award of punitive damages. See *Murray v. Hadid*, 385 S.E.2d 898 (Va. 1989); *O’Brien v. Snow*, 210 S.E.2d 165 (Va. 1974). The amount of punitive damages awarded should bear some reasonable relationship to actual damages. *Poulston v. Rock*, 467 S.E.2d 479 (Va. 1996); *Gazette, Inc. v. Harris*, 325 S.E.2d 713 (Va. 1985); see also *Johnson v. Hugo’s Skateway*, 974 F.2d 1408 (Fourth Cir. 1992) (punitive damages awards should be proportional to the award of compensatory damages given in a particular case, that do not afford double recovery to the plaintiff, and that are given only after consideration of the effect of the award on the defendant).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

The total amount awarded for punitive damages against all defendants shall not exceed \$350,000. VA. CODE ANN. § 8.01-38.1. (2010). In the medical malpractice context, the total amount of recoverable damages, including punitive damages, for any injury to a single patient is capped at \$2.2 million through July 1, 2017. VA. CODE ANN. § 8.01-581.15. (2011).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Punitive damages are payable to the plaintiff. In wrongful death cases they are payable to the spouse, children, children of deceased children of decedent, or other surviving statutory beneficiaries. See *Carroll v. Sneed*, 179 S.E.2d 620 (Va. 1971), overruled in part on other grounds by *Jones v. Robinson*, 329 S.E.2d 794 (Va. 1985).



WASHINGTON

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Generally, no. An award of punitive damages is not in accord with *Washington law*. *Dailey v. N. Coast Life Ins. Co.*, 919 P.2d 589, 590 (Wash. 1996). Recovery of punitive damages is contrary to public policy and will not be allowed unless expressly authorized by state statute. *Barr v. Interbay Citizens Bank*, 635 P.2d 441, 443 (Wash. 1981); *Dailey, supra*, 919 P.2d at 590–91. However, punitive damages may be awarded under the law of another state. See *Kammerer v. Western Gear Corp.*, 635 P.2d 708, 711–12 (Wash. 1981). When determining whether to apply the law of the other state in connection with punitive damages, a court considers whether the other state has the most significant relationship to the occurrence and the parties. *Id.* (holding that where the most significant contractual relationships were in California and the conduct and acts as to the fraud and misrepresentation were accomplished in California, California had a specific interest to be furthered, and that under those circumstances the Washington court could award punitive damages under the law of California); *Barr*, 635 P.2d 441 at 443 (“Our approach is not merely to count contacts, but rather to consider which contacts are most significant and to determine where these contacts are.”).

Maritime actions brought in state court are governed by federal maritime law. Thus, Washington permits punitive damages under general maritime causes of action brought in state court. See, e.g., *Tabingo v. Am. Triumph LLC*, 188 Wn.2d 41, 43, 391 P.3d 434 (2017) (finding that, “like maintenance and cure, punitive damages are available for a general maritime unseaworthiness claim.”).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

See I.A. above, when expressly authorized by statute. See, e.g., RCW 64.12.030 (Timber Trespass statute permits treble damages). For example, the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington has found that that the Washington Insurance Fair Conduct Act (“IFCA”) RCW 48.30.015(2) is an express authorization of punitive damages. *Nw. Mut. Life Ins. Co. v. Koch*, 771 F. Supp. 2d 1253, 1256 (W.D. Wash. 2009).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Not Applicable. See I.A. above. However, insurance coverage for punitive damages assessed against an insured in the court of another state, under the law of that state, does not violate public policy in Washington. *Fluke Corp. v. Hartford Acc. & Indem. Co.*, 7 P.3d 825, 829, 831 (2000) (“An insured who has paid a premium ordinarily has a legitimate and enforceable expectation of receiving the coverage promised.”). Washington’s disapproval of punitive damages will not result in a finding that coverage for punitive damages contravenes public policy. *Id.* at 831; see also *Virginia Mason Med. Ctr. v. Executive Risk Indem. Inc.*, No. C07-0636MJP, 2007 WL 3473683, at *4 (W.D. Wash. Nov. 14, 2007) (observing that the Washington Supreme Court has distinctly acknowledged an absence of public policy in the construction of insurance contracts, and holding that “vague public policy arguments” should not limit the express language in a policy).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable. See II.A. above.



C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Not applicable. See I.A. above. However, the Washington State Supreme Court has declined to cap punitive damages awarded under federal maritime law on the basis that they vastly exceeded the compensatory damages awarded. See *Clausen v. Icicle Seafoods, Inc.*, 174 Wash. 2d 70, 74 (2012). In *Clausen*, the jury found the defendant: (i) negligent under the Jones Act, awarding plaintiff \$453,100 in damages; and (ii) was callous or willful and wanton for failing to pay plaintiff's maintenance and cure, awarding plaintiff \$37,420 in compensatory damages, plus \$1.3 million in punitive damages for defendant's willful misconduct. The trial judge thereafter awarded plaintiff \$387,558 in attorney fees and \$40,548 in costs. The Court held that it was not required to reduce the award of punitive damages in accordance with *Exxon Shipping Co. v. Baker*, 554 U.S. 471, 128 S.Ct. 2605, 171 L.Ed.2d 570 (2008), where the United States Supreme Court reduced a punitive damages award, applying a 1:1 ratio to compensatory damages. The *Clausen* Court held that, because *Exxon* did not announce a general rule limiting the jury's role in determining appropriate damages, and *Icicle Seafoods'* actions were far from reckless and nearer the "most egregious" end of the culpability scale, that the availability of punitive damages serves a deterring function.



WEST VIRGINIA

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes. Punitive damages are allowed in West Virginia subject to the limitations in W.Va. Code §55-7-29. See *Capper v. Gates*, 454 S.E.2d 54 (W. Va. 1994); *Goodwin v. Thomas*, 403 S.E.2d 13 (W. Va. 1991).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Punitive damages are warranted “if the defendant has acted wantonly or oppressively, or with such malice as implies a spirit of mischief or criminal indifference to civil obligations.” *Mayer v. Frobe*, 22 S.E. 58 (W. Va. 1895); *Stephens v. Rakes*, 235 W.Va. 555 (2015) (“In actions of tort, when gross fraud, malice, oppression or wanton, willful or reckless conduct or criminal indifference to civil obligations affecting the rights of others appear or when legislative enactment authorizes it, the jury may assess exemplary, punitive or vindictive damages, these terms being synonymous”).

Standard of Proof. Punitive damages may be awarded only if a plaintiff establishes by clear and convincing evidence that the damages suffered were the result of conduct carried out by the defendant with actual malice or a conscious, reckless and outrageous indifference to the health, safety and welfare of others. W.Va. Code §55-7-29.

Actions Against State. No governmental agency may be subject to an award of punitive damages in any judicial proceeding. W. Va. Code § 55-17-1 (2010). Punitive damages are not allowed in an action against a political subdivision or its employees. W. Va. Code § 29-12A-7.

Breach of Contract. Punitive damages are not recoverable in an action for breach of contract unless the breach amounts to an independent, intentional tort. *Berry v. Nationwide Mut. Fire Ins. Co.*, 381 S.E.2d 367 (W. Va. 1989); see also *Warden v. Bank of Mingo*, 176 W. Va. 60, 341 S.E.2d 679 (1986); *Hayseeds Inc. v. State Farm Fire & Cas.*, 352 S.E.2d 73 (W. Va. 1986) (actual malice must be proven).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under West Virginia law, punitive damages may be awarded if an employer knowingly hires an incompetent employee who commits wanton and willful or malicious acts in the scope of employment. *Addair v. Hyffman*, 156 W. Va. 592, 601 (1973). A federal trial court determined that, under long-standing West Virginia precedent, punitive damages may not be awarded under West Virginia law against the employer merely because of the existence of an employee- employer relationship. *Baker v. Wheat First Securities*, 643 F. Supp. 1420, 1427 (S.D. W. Va. 1986).

Environmental Liability. Landowners may seek punitive damages, in addition to the treble damage award available by statute, for wrongfully damaged or removed timber, trees, logs, growing plants, or products of growing plants. W. Va. Code § 61-3-48a; *Bullman v. D & R Lumber Co.*, 464 S.E.2d 771 (W. Va. 1995). There must be evidence that the defendant acted maliciously, willfully or wantonly. *Hadley v. Hathaway*, 439 S.E.2d 459 (W.Va. 1993).

General Liability. Punitive damages may be recovered when a person driving while under the influence of alcohol in reckless disregard of the safety of others injures another person. *Wilt v. Buracker*, 443 S.E.2d 196 (W.Va. 1993).

Insurer’s Bad Faith. Punitive damages are recoverable for an insurer’s bad faith. *Dodril v. Nationwide Mut. Ins. Co.*, 201 W.Va. 1 (1996); *Poling v. Motorists Mut. Ins. Co.*, 450 S.E.2d 635 (1994).

Product Liability. Punitive damages may be awarded in an action for product liability. *Davis v. Celotex Corp.*, 420 S.E.2d 557 (W. Va. 1992).



Professional Liability. In medical malpractice cases, punitive damages are not permitted unless the plaintiff shows that the defendant acted in a wanton, willful or reckless manner, or with criminal indifference to civil obligations affecting the rights of others. *Michael v. Sabado*, 453 S.E.2d 419 (W. Va. 1994). Punitive damages are also permitted by statute against any nursing home or assisted living residence that deprives a resident of any right or benefit willfully or in reckless disregard of the lawful rights of the resident. W. Va. Code § 16-5C-15(c), (d) (LexisNexis 2010).

Wrongful Death. Punitive damages may be recovered in an action for wrongful death. *Bond v. City of Huntington*, 276 S.E.2d 539, 545 (W.Va. 1981). See also W.Va. Code §55-7-6(b), (c).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes, insurance coverage for punitive damages is permitted under West Virginia law. See *Cont'l Hensley v. Erie Ins. Co.*, 283 S.E.2d 227 (W. Va. 1981) (insurer was required to pay under policy extending coverage for punitive damages awards against its insured, where the insured's action was the result of gross, reckless or wanton conduct). See also *Perry v. Melton*, 299 S.E.2d 8 (W. Va. 1982) (the fact that punitive damages may be paid by a liability insurer is no reason to deny their recovery).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable. See II. A. above.

C. What is the relationship of punitive damages to compensatory damages?

A finding of compensatory damages is an indispensable predicate to a finding of punitive damages, and punitive damages should bear reasonable proportion to compensatory damages. *Garnes v. Fleming Landfill*, 413 S.E.2d 897 (W. Va. 1991). Punitive damages should be in excess of profits reaped by the defendant's wrongful act to discourage future bad acts. *Capper v. Gates*, 454 S.E.2d 54 (W. Va. 1994).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

The amount of punitive damages that may be awarded may not exceed the greater of four times the amount of compensatory damages or \$500,000, whichever is greater. W. Va. Code § 55-7-29(c). Any defendant can request bifurcation of a jury trial involving punitive damages. *Id.*

West Virginia cases specify guidelines for review of punitive damages awards. In *Garnes v. Fleming Landfill*, *supra*, the court followed *Pacific Mutual Life Insurance Co. v. Haslip*, 499 U.S. 1, 111 S. Ct. 1032 (1991), and set forth an extensive system for reviewing punitive damages awards. The factors to be considered by the jury include the following: (1) punitive damages should bear a reasonable relationship to the harm that is likely to occur from the defendant's conduct as well as to the harm that actually occurred; (2) the reprehensibility of the defendant's conduct; (3) if the defendant profited from the wrongful conduct, the punitive damages should remove, and be in excess of, the profit to discourage future bad acts; (4) as a matter of fundamental fairness, punitive damages should bear a reasonable relationship to compensatory damages; and (5) the financial position of the defendant. See also *Kessel v. Leavitt*, 511 S.E.2d 720 (W. Va. 1998).

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Punitive damages are payable to the plaintiff alone.



WISCONSIN

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes, Wisconsin law allows for punitive damages. *Wis. Stat. Ann. § 895.043*; *Reyes v. Greatway Ins. Co.*, 582 N.W.2d 480 (Wis. 1998); *Mgmt. Computer Servs., Inc. v. Hawkins, Ash, Baptie & Co.*, 557 N.W.2d 67 (Wis. 1996); *McWilliams v. Bragg*, 3 Wis. 424 (1854). See *Markes v. Frey-Rude & Assoc., Inc.*, 481 N.W.2d 707 (Wis. Ct. App. 1992).

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Wisconsin's punitive damages statute requires proof of malice or an intentional disregard of the plaintiff's rights to obtain a punitive damages award. *Wis. Stat. Ann. § 895.043(3)*; see *Ervin v. Kenosha*, 464 N.W.2d 654 (Wis. 1991); *Collins v. Eli Lilly Co.*, 342 N.W.2d 37 (1984), *cert. denied*, 469 U.S. 826 (1984); *Poling v. Wis. Physicians Serv.*, 357 N.W.2d 293 (Wis. 1984). By enacting a statute, Wisconsin has heightened the state of mind required of a defendant from a "wanton, willful and reckless" disregard for rights of another to an "intentional disregard" for rights of another. *Berner Cheese Corp. v. Krug*, 752 N.W. 2d 800, 814 (Wis. 2008). A defendant acts with intentional disregard if he or she: (1) "acts with a purpose to cause the result or consequence," or (2) "is aware that the result or consequence is substantially certain to occur from the person's conduct." *Id.* Accordingly, in order to fall within [Wis. Stat. § 895.043\(3\)](#), a defendant's conduct must be (1) deliberate, (2) in actual disregard of the rights of another, and (3) "sufficiently aggravated to warrant punishment by punitive damages." *Id.* Under this heightened threshold for punitive damages, "we expect circuit courts to serve as gatekeepers before sending a question on punitive damages to the jury." *Groshek*, 325 Wis. 2d at 270 (internal citations omitted); *Roehl Transp. Inc. v. Liberty Mut. Ins. Co.*, 325 Wis.2d 56, 125 (2010).

Standard of Proof. Evidence of intentional disregard must be established by clear and convincing evidence. *Sharp v. Case Corp.*, 595 N.W.2d 380, 390 (Wis. 1999). Before the question of punitive damages can be submitted to a jury, the court must determine as a matter of law that evidence was presented at trial of outrageous conduct that would support an award of punitive damages. *City of W. Allis v. Wisconsin Elec. Power Co.*, 635 N.W.2d 873, 881 (Wis. App. 2001).

Actions Against State. Claims for punitive damages are not allowed against governmental bodies, officers, agents or employees. *Wis. Stat. § 893.80(3)*.

Breach of Contract. Punitive damages are not available in a breach of contract action unless the breach amounts to an independent tort. *Weiss v. United Fire & Cas. Co.*, 541 N.W.2d 753 (Wis. 1995); *Anderson v. Cont'l Ins. Co.*, 271 N.W.2d 368 (Wis. 1978); *White Hen Pantry, Div. Jewel Cos. v. Johnson*, 599 F. Supp. 718 (E.D. Wis. 1984); see also *N. Mech., Inc. v. Labor & Indus. Review Com.*, 460 N.W.2d 835 (Wis. 1990) (abrogated on other grounds by *Brown v. Labor and Industry Review Com'n.*, 671 N.W.2d 279 (Wis. 2003)); *Park Terrace, LLC v. Transp. Ins. Co.*, 808 N.W.2d 741 (Wis. App. 2011). A first-party bad faith claim alleging that the insurer unreasonably withheld payment may be subject to punitive damages. *Dufour v. Progressive Classic Ins. Co.*, 881 N.W.2d 678 (Wis. App. 2015).

Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under Wisconsin law, there is no recovery of punitive damages against a defendant employer for the act of an employee without a showing that the employer authorized or ratified the act. *Garcia v. Samson's Inc.*, 103 N.W.2d 565, 567 (Wisc. 1960). Whether the employer ratified or authorized the acts of an employee is a question for the jury. *Id.*; see also *Bass v. Chicago & N.R. Co.*, 42 Wis. 654, 666 (1877) ("[An employer] is not liable to exemplary or punitive damages, unless he directed the injurious act to be done, or subsequently confirmed it. But if the principal directed the act, or, not directing it, if he subsequently adopted or confirmed it, the rule is recognized that he is liable to punitive damages.") Punitive damages may be awarded against an employer based upon the tort of negligent hiring, training or supervision. *Miller v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.*, 219 Wis.2d 250, 270 (1998)



Environmental Liability. Punitive damages can be awarded for a violation of Wis. Admin. Code §§RD 51.05–.06 (1969) (Solid Waste Law) or Wis. Stat. §292.11(2)(a) (Spills Law). *State v. Chrysler Outboard Corp.*, 219 Wis.2d 130, 162 (Wis. 1998). Where there is ample evidence in the record that the repeated dumping toxic waste was deceitful, flagrant and intentionally violated the property rights of others, in light of environmental harm done the trial court could submit the question of punitive damages to a jury. *City of W. Allis v. Wis. Elec. Power Co.*, 635 N.W.2d 873 (Wis. App. 2001).

Insurer's Bad Faith. Punitive damages have been repeatedly allowed in insurance bad faith actions in Wisconsin. See, e.g., *Majorowicz v. Allied Mut. Ins. Co.*, 569 N.W.2d 472 (Wis. 1997); *DeChant v. Monarch Life Ins. Co.*, 547 N.W.2d 592 (Wis. 1996); *Schlussler v. Am. Family Mut. Ins. Co.*, 460 N.W. 2d 756 (Wis. 1990); *Upthegrove Hardware, Inc. v. Pa. Lumbermens Mut. Ins. Co.*, 431 N.W.2d 689 (Wis. 1988) (evidence that insurance company investigators lied and knowingly destroyed possibly crucial evidence was held to rise to the level of "malice or ill will."); *Jones v. Secura Ins. Co.*, 249 Wis. 2d 623, 632 (2002). An insurance company is liable if it fails to exercise good faith in settling the claim, resulting in a verdict in excess of the policy. *Roehl Transp. Inc. v. Liberty Mut. Ins. Co.*, 325 Wis. 2d 56, 79 (2010).

Product Liability. Punitive damages are available in product liability actions. *Wangen v. Ford Motor Co.*, 294 N.W.2d 437 (Wis. 1980).

Professional Liability. Punitive damages are not allowed in medical malpractice actions, pursuant to Ch. 655 and §893.55(5). *Lund v. Kokemoor*, 195 Wis. 2d 727, 734 (Wis. Ct. App. 1995). Punitive damages permitted against an accounting firm that allegedly willfully copied the plaintiff's software without consent and used it in competition against the plaintiff. *Hawkins, Ash, Baprie & Co.*, 557 N.W.2d at 81–82 (Wis. 1996).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes, insurance coverage of punitive damages is permitted in Wisconsin. *Brown v. Maxey*, 369 N.W.2d 677 (Wis. 1985) (holding policy language encompassed coverage for punitive damages; coverage did not violate public policy); *Hartland Cicero Mut. Ins. Co. v. Elmer*, 363 N.W.2d 252 (Wis. Ct. App. 1984) (punitive damages exclusion did not apply to statutory double damages); *Koehring Co. v. Am. Mut. Liab. Ins. Co.*, 564 F. Supp. 303 (E.D. Wis. 1983) (policy covered punitive damages; coverage did not violate Wisconsin public policy, as public policy in favor of enforcing contracts is at least as strong as policy underlying punitive damages award); *Harris v. Racine*, 512 F. Supp. 1273 (E.D. Wis. 1981) (county's liability policy covered punitive damages assessed against county police officer in civil rights action; coverage did not violate public policy); *Cieslewicz v. Mut. Servs. Cas. Ins. Co.*, 267 N.W.2d 595 (Wis. 1978) (homeowner's policy covered statutory treble damages assessed in dog bite case; coverage did not violate public policy).

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable. See II. A. above.

C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

To support an award of punitive damages, a cause of action for compensatory damages must exist and actual damages must have been suffered. *Miller v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.*, 580 N.W.2d 233 (Wis. 1998); *Estate of Wells v. Mount Sinai Med. Ctr.*, 497 N.W.2d 779 (Wis. Ct. App. 1993). There is no mathematical formula for assessing punitive damages. *Fahrenberg v. Tengel*, 291 N.W.2d 516 (Wis. 1980). Wisconsin law rejects the use of a fixed multiplier, but there must be a reasonable relationship between the punitive damages award and the award of compensatory damages." *Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church & Sch.-Freistadt v. Tower Ins. Co.*, 661 N.W.2d 789. The court may also consider "the harm likely to result from the defendant's conduct." *Kimble v. Land Concepts, Inc.*, 845 N.W.2d 395 (Wis. 2014). The plaintiff may introduce evidence of the wealth of the defendant when



determining punitive damages. Wis. Stat. § 895.043(a)(4)(a-b). Generally, there can be no award of punitive damages where the plaintiff is only entitled to nominal damages; however, a specific exception exists in an action for intentional trespass to land. *Jacque v. Steenberg Homes, Inc.*, 563 N.W.2d 154 (Wis. 1997).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

The new Wisconsin statute caps punitive damage awards at a 2:1 ratio of compensatory damages or \$200,000, whichever is greater. Wis. Stat. § 895.043(6) (2021).

This subsection does not apply to a defendant whose actions included the operation of a vehicle, including a motor vehicle as defined under s. 340.01(35), a snowmobile as defined under s. 340.01(58a), an all-terrain vehicle as defined under s. 340.01(2g), a utility terrain vehicle as defined under s. 23.33(1)(ng), and a boat as defined under s. 30.50(2), while under the influence of an intoxicant to a degree that rendered the defendant incapable of safe operation of the vehicle.

Id. An award for punitive damages, however, must not violate due process. A violation of due process occurs if the award is more than necessary to serve the purposes of punitive damages, or inflicts a penalty or burden on the defendant that is disproportionate to the wrongdoing. *Hawkins v. Ash, Baptie & Co.*, 557 N.W.2d 67 (Wis. 1996). A high ratio punitive damage award may be sustained where the harm is physical, as opposed to economic, and involves “indifference to or a reckless disregard of the health and safety of others.” *Kimble v. Land Concepts, Inc.*, 845 N.W.2d 395 (Wis. 2014).

The United States Supreme Court has applied a three-part test to determine whether an award of punitive damages is excessive. That test asks the reviewing court to weigh: (1) the degree of egregiousness or reprehensibility of the conduct, (2) the disparity between the harm or the potential harm suffered and the punitive damages award, and (3) the difference between the punitive damages and the possible civil or criminal penalties imposed for the conduct. *State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co. v. Campbell*, 538 U.S. 408, 419 (2000). Wisconsin case law calls on courts to apply a substantively identical test applying six factors rather than three:

- (1) the grievousness of the acts;
- (2) the degree of malicious intent;
- (3) whether the award bears a reasonable relationship to the award of compensatory damages;
- (4) the potential damage that might have been caused by the acts;
- (5) the ratio of the award to civil or criminal penalties that could be imposed for comparable misconduct; and
- (6) the wealth of the wrongdoer.

Kimble v. Land Concepts, Inc., 845 N.W.2d 395 (Wis. 2014). Wisconsin courts are called upon to analyze only those factors which are most relevant to the case, in order to determine whether a punitive damages award is excessive. *Id.*

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Generally punitive damages are payable to the plaintiffs. See *Sharp Elecs. Corp. v. Copy Plus, Inc.*, 939 F.2d 513 (7th Cir. 1991); Wis. Stat. Ann. §895.043(3) (2021) (“The plaintiff may receive punitive damages . . .”). Punitive damages are recoverable by parents of injured children incidental to their action for compensatory damages. See *Estate of Wells*, 497 N.W.2d at 779; *Wangen*, 294 N.W.2d at 437.



WYOMING

I. PUNITIVE DAMAGES

A. May they be awarded?

Yes.

B. If so, in what circumstances?

Standard of Conduct. Outrageous conduct, malice and willful and wanton misconduct have been found to be sufficient to f1995); *Sheridan Commercial Park, Inc. v. Briggs*, 848 P.2d 811 (Wyo. 1993); *McCullough v. Golden Rule Ins. Co.*, 789 P.2d 855 (Wyo. 1990); *Alexander v. Meduna*, 47 P.3d 206, 218 (Wyo. 2002) (Such damages are to be awarded only for conduct involving some element of outrage similar to that usually found in a crime.). Willful and wanton misconduct is defined as:

the intentional doing of an act, or an intentional failure to do an act, in reckless disregard of the consequences and under circumstances and conditions that a reasonable person would know, or have reason to know that such conduct would, in a high degree of probability, result in harm to another.

See WY Civil Pattern Jury Instruction 4.06 (2022 Edition); see also *Thunder Hawk By and Through Jensen v. Union Pac. Ry. Co.*, 844 P.2d 1045, 1051 (Wyo. 1992); *Weaver v. Mitchell*, 715 P.2d 1361, 1369-70 (Wyo. 1986). However, an intention act does not necessarily involve willful and wanton misconduct. See *Farmers Ins. Exchange v. Shirley*, 958 P.2d 1040, 1052 (Wyo. 1998). Gross negligence also does not amount to willful and wanton conduct, but intentional neglect of a statutory duty does rise to that level, if performed with a disregard for probable injury. See *Thunder Hawk* supra at 1045; *McCullough*, 789 P.2d at 861. Award of punitive damages is not appropriate in circumstances involving inattention, inadvertence, thoughtlessness, mistake or gross negligence. *Vroman v. Town & Country Credit Corp.*, 158 P.3d 141 (Wyo. 2007). There "must be more than mere mistake resulting from inexperience, excitement or confusion, and more than mere thoughtlessness or inadvertence, or simple inattention." *Danculovich v. Brown*, 593 P.2d 187, 191 (Wyo. 1979); *Cramer v. Powder River Coal, LLC*, 204 P.3d 974 (Wyo. 2009)(aggravating factor which distinguishes willful misconduct from ordinary negligence is the actor's state of mind. In order to prove that an actor has engaged in willful misconduct, one must demonstrate that he acted with a state of mind that approaches intent to do harm).

Standard of Proof. Preponderance of the evidence that the Defendant was guilty of willful and wanton misconduct. See WY Civil Pattern Jury Instruction 4.06 (2022 Edition). However, the history of punitive damages in Wyoming demonstrates that juries are given very general instructions with respect to their determination of punitive damages. *Farmers Ins. Exch. v. Shirley*, 958 P.2d 1040, 1044-1045 (Wyo. 1998).

Actions Against State. Punitive damages are not recoverable against a governmental entity. Wyo. Stat. § 1-39-118 (2010).

Breach of Contract. An unjustified breach of contract does not entitle the opposing party to punitive damages. To obtain punitive damages in a breach of contract claim, there has to be action amounting to aggravation, outrage, malice or willful and wanton misconduct. *U.S. ex rel. Farmers Home Admin.v. Redland*, 695 P.2d 1031 (Wyo. 1985). A breach of implied covenant of good faith and fair dealing that rises to the level of independent tort may be actionable for punitive damages under limited circumstances. *State Farm Mut. Auto Ins. Co. v. Shrader*, 882 P.2d 813, 825 (Wyo. 1994); *McCullough v. Golden Rule Ins. Co.*, 789 P.2d 855, 858 (Wyo. 1990).



Employer Liability for Employee Conduct. Under Wyoming law, punitive damages may be awarded against an employer for the acts of an employee only if the plaintiff proves the following:

1. The particular act or conduct was authorized by the employer or a managerial agent; or
2. The employee was unfit, and the employer or a managerial agent acted recklessly in employing or retaining the employee; or
3. The employee was employed in a managerial capacity and was acting within the scope of employment at the time of the act; or
4. The employer or a managerial agent ratified or approved the employee's act.

Campen v. Stone, 635 P.2d 1121, 1125 (Wyo. 1981) (citing Restatement (Second) of Torts § 909 (1977) and Restatement (Second) of Agency § 217C (1958)). See also, *Condict v. Condict*, 664 P.2d 131, 136 (Wyo. 1983).

Environmental Liability. There is no law in Wyoming expressly addressing the issue of punitive damages and environmental liability. However, in any civil action, an award of punitive damages requires the wrongful conduct on the part of the defendant to be outrageous, with malice, or willful and wanton. *Veschoor v. Mountain West Farm Bureau Mut. Ins. Co.*, 907 P.2d 1293 (Wyo. 1995).

General Liability. No punitive damages were awarded against a landlord who detained leased property of a tenant from a secured creditor under a mistaken claim of right. *Sheridan Commercial Park, Inc. v. Briggs*, 848 P.2d 811 (Wyo. 1993). "If a plaintiff has failed to establish his basic cause of action, there is no separate cause of action for punitive damages alone." *Bird v. Rozier*, 948 P.2d 888 (Wyo. 1997) (plaintiff failed to claim valid cause of action against police department and the request for punitive damages was dismissed).

Insurer's Bad Faith. An insurer's breach of duty of good faith and fair dealing may entitle a plaintiff to an award for punitive damages. *State Farm Mut. Auto Ins. Co. v. Shrader*, 882 P.2d 813 (Wyo. 1994); *Cathcart v. State Farm Mut. Ins. Co.*, 123 P.3d 579 (Wyo. 2005).

Product Liability. In order to recover punitive damages, a plaintiff must make a showing that punitive damages are reasonably related to the harm that has occurred from the defendant's conduct, that there is a degree of reprehensibility in the defendant's conduct such as concealment of a hazard, or that the wrongful conduct was profitable to the defendant. *Loredo v. Solvay Am., Inc.*, 212 P.3d 614, 633 (Wyo. 2009) (citing *Alexander v. Meduna*, 47 P.3d 206, 219 (Wyo. 2002)).

Professional Liability. There is no entitlement to punitive damages for negligent misrepresentation by an insurance agent concerning coverage under a policy. *Veschoor v. Mountain W. Farm Bureau Mut. Ins. Co.*, 907 P.2d 1293, 1301 (Wyo. 1995). Punitive damages may be available if an attorney's misconduct involved more than simple negligence and was, instead, outrageous, malicious and/or willful and wanton. *Horn v. Wooster*, 165 P.3d 69 (Wyo. 2007).

II. IF PUNITIVE DAMAGES MAY BE AWARDED

A. Are they generally insurable (to the benefit of the wrongdoer)?

Yes, insurance coverage of punitive damages is permitted under Wyoming law. See *Sinclair Oil Corp. v. Columbia Gas.*, 682 P.2d 975 (Wyo. 1984) (policy covered punitive damages; coverage did not violate public policy). They are automatically covered unless they are "expressly excluded" in the insurance policy. *Id.*

B. If not generally insurable to the benefit of the wrongdoer, would such prohibition apply as well to those whose liability is vicarious?

Not applicable. See II. A. above.



C. What is the relationship of punitive to compensatory damages?

Actual damages are needed to support a punitive damages award, and punitive damages cannot be awarded when compensatory damages are not recoverable. *Alexander v. Meduna*, 47 P.3d 206, 218 (Wyo. 2002); *Bear v. Volunteers of Am., Wyo., Inc.*, 964 P.2d 1245, 1255 (Wyo. 1998); *Cates v. Barb*, 650 P.2d 1159, 1161 (Wyo. 1982). There is no fixed ratio between actual damages and punitive damages, but the punitive award must not be so disproportionate to the actual damages as to be the result of prejudice or passion instead of reason. *Danculovich v. Brown*, 593 P.2d 187, 191 (Wyo. 1979); *Petsch v. Florom*, 538 P.2d 1011 (Wyo. 1975).

D. Are there any statutory caps or other state law limitations on the amount of punitive damages that may be awarded?

No. Although there is no statutory cap, an award of punitive damages should bear a reasonable relationship to the harm that is likely to occur from the defendant's conduct, as well as to the harm actually caused. *Farmers Ins. Exch. v. Shirley*, 958 P.2d 1040, 1044 (Wyo. 1998); see also *BMW of N. Am. v. Gore*, 517 U.S. 559 (1995).

In determining the amount, the following factors are to be considered:

1. Punitive damages should bear a reasonable relationship to the harm that is likely to occur from the Defendant's conduct as well as to the harm that actually has occurred. If the actual or likely harm is slight, the damages should be relatively small. If grievous, the damages should be much greater;
2. The degree of reprehensibility of a Defendant's conduct should be considered. The duration of this conduct, the degree of the Defendant's awareness of any hazard that [he][she] has caused or is likely to cause, and any concealment or "cover up" of that hazard, and the existence and frequency of similar past conduct are all relevant in determining this degree of reprehensibility;
3. If wrongful conduct was profitable to the defendant, the punitive damages should remove the profit and should be in excess of the profit, so that the Defendant recognizes a loss;
4. The financial position of the Defendant;
5. All of the costs of litigation should be included, so as to encourage plaintiffs to bring wrongdoers to trial;
6. If criminal sanctions have been imposed on the Defendant for his/her/its conduct, this should be taken into account in mitigation of the punitive damage award;
7. If there have been other civil actions against the same Defendant, based on the same conduct, this should be taken into account in mitigation of the punitive award.

See WY Civil Pattern Jury Instruction 4.06A (2022 Edition).

In appropriate cases there may be an eighth factor. For example, in *Farmers Ins. Exch. v. Shirley*, 958 P.2d 1040, 1053 (Wyo. 1998), the Wyoming Supreme Court noted that, "[i]n arriving at an appropriate amount of punitive damages with respect to insurance carriers, it is appropriate to give as an instruction Wyo. Stat. §26-1-107(1997)." *Id.*

E. To whom are punitive damages payable?

Generally, an award of punitive damages is payable to the plaintiffs. *State Farm Mut. Auto Ins. Co. v. Shrader*, 882 P.2d 813 (Wyo. 1994).

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