I. Regulatory Limits on Claims Handling

A. Timing for Responses and Determinations

The Pennsylvania Administrative Code, Title 31, Insurance, Chapter 146, Subchapter A, Unfair Claim Settlement Practices, defines certain minimum standards which, if violated with a frequency that indicates a general business practice, will be deemed to constitute unfair claims settlement practices. Section 146.5. “Failure to acknowledge pertinent communications” provides that an insurer shall acknowledge receipt of the notice of a claim within 10 working days of receiving notification. Section 146.6. “Standards for prompt investigation of claims” provides that an insurer shall complete investigation of a claim within 30 days after notification of claim, unless the investigation cannot reasonably be completed within the time. If the investigation cannot be completed within 30 days, and every 45 days thereafter, the insurer shall provide the claimant with a reasonable written explanation for the delay and state when a decision on the claim may be expected.

Prompt settlement of a first-party claim requires that an insurer advise the insured of its decision within 15 working days after receipt of a properly executed proof of loss. See Willow Inn, Inc. v. Public Service Mut. Ins. Co., 399 F.3d 224,229 (3d Cir. 2005) (citing 31 Pa. Code § 146.7(a)(1)).

Pursuant to Section 146.7 (e), insurers may not continue negotiations for settlement of a claim directly with a claimant who is neither an attorney nor represented by an attorney until the rights of the claimant may be affected by a statute of limitations or a policy or contract time limit, without giving the claimant written notice that the time limit may be expiring and may affect the rights of the claimant. The notice shall be given to first-party claimants 30 days, and to third-party claimants 60 days, before the date on which the time limit may expire.

B. Standards for Determinations and Settlements

The Unfair Insurance Practices Act ("UIPA"), 40 P.S. §§ 1171.1 to 1171.15, prohibits certain unfair and deceptive conduct by insurers. The Insurance Commissioner enforces the statute. Section 1171.4, titled “Unfair methods of competition and unfair or deceptive acts or practices prohibited” provides:
No person shall engage in this state in any trade practice which is defined or determined to be an unfair method of competition or an unfair or deceptive act or practice in the business of insurance pursuant to this act.

Section 5 of the Act, 40 P.S. § 1171.5 defines “unfair methods of competition” and “unfair or deceptive acts or practices”. Subsection (10) identifies unfair claim settlement or compromise practices:

10) Any of the following acts if committed or performed with such frequency as to indicate a business practice shall constitute unfair claim settlement or compromise practices.

(i) Misrepresenting pertinent facts or policy or contract provisions relating to coverages at issue.

(ii) Failing to acknowledge and act promptly upon written or oral communications with respect to claims arising under insurance policies.

(iii) Failing to adopt and implement reasonable standards for the prompt investigation of claims arising under insurance policies.

(iv) Refusing to pay claims without conducting a reasonable investigation based upon all available information.

(v) Failing to affirm or deny coverage of claims within a reasonable time after proof of loss statements have been completed and communicated to the company or its representative.

(vi) Not attempting in good faith to effectuate prompt, fair and equitable settlements of claims in which the company's liability under the policy has become reasonably clear.

(vii) Compelling persons to institute litigation to recover amounts due under an insurance policy by offering substantially less than the amounts due and ultimately recovered in actions brought by such persons.

(viii) Attempting to settle a claim for less than the amount to which a reasonable man would have believed he was entitled by reference to written or printed advertising material accompanying or made part of an application.

(ix) Attempting to settle or compromise claims on the basis of an application which was altered without notice to or knowledge of the insured of such alteration at the time such alteration was made.

(x) Making claims payments to insureds or beneficiaries not accompanied by a statement setting forth the coverage under which payments are being made.
(xi) Making known to insureds or claimants a policy of appealing from arbitration awards in favor of insureds or claimants to induce or compel them to accept settlements or compromises less than the amount awarded in arbitration.

(xii) Delaying the investigation or payment of claims by requiring the insured, claimant or the physician of either to submit a preliminary claim report and then requiring the subsequent submission of formal proof of loss forms, both of which submissions contain substantially the same information.

(xiii) Failing to promptly settle claims, where liability has become reasonably clear, under one portion of the insurance policy coverage in order to influence settlements under other portions of the insurance policy coverage or under other policies of insurance.

(xiv) Failing to promptly provide a reasonable explanation of the basis in the insurance policy in relation to the facts or applicable law for denial of a claim or for the offer of a compromise settlement.

(xv) Refusing payment of a claim solely on the basis of an insured's request to do so unless:

(a) The insured claims sovereign, eleemosynary, diplomatic, military service, or other immunity from suit or liability with respect to such claim;

(b) The insured is granted the right under the policy of insurance to consent to settlement of claims; or

(c) The refusal of payment is based upon the insurer's independent evaluation of the insured's liability based upon all available information.

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court has held that the system of sanctions established under the UIPA need not be supplemented by a judicially created cause of action to deter bad faith conduct. D’Ambrosio v. Pennsylvania Nat’l Mut. Cas. Ins. Co., 494 Pa. 501, 431 A.2d 966 (Pa. 1981). In D’Ambrosio, the insured’s cause of action in tort for bad faith in denying a property damage claim was dismissed.

Accordingly, under Romano, a plaintiff seeking damages for an insurer's bad faith conduct under section 8371 may, in addition to other available methods, attempt to prove bad faith by demonstrating that the insurer has violated one or more provisions of related Pennsylvania insurance statutes or regulations, even if those provisions do not provide for private rights of action.

C. Privacy Protections (In addition to Federal Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act)


II. Principles of Contract Interpretation


The court's purpose in interpreting insurance contracts is to ascertain the intent of the parties as manifested by the terms used in the written insurance policy. When the language of the policy is clear and unambiguous, the court gives effect to that language. Alternatively, when a provision in the policy is ambiguous, the policy is to be construed in favor of the insured to further the contract's prime purpose of indemnification and against the insurer, as the insurer drafts the policy, and controls coverage. Fourth Street, Inc. v. Investors Ins. Group, 583 Pa. 445, 879 A.2d 166, 171 (2005).

Contractual language is ambiguous "if it is reasonably susceptible of different constructions and capable of being understood in more than one sense." Hutchison v. Sunbeam Coal Co., 513 Pa. 192, 519 A.2d 385, 390 (1986). It is not a question to be resolved in a vacuum. Rather, contractual terms are ambiguous if they are subject to more than one reasonable interpretation when applied to a particular set of facts. The court will not distort the meaning of the language or resort to a strained contrivance in order to find an ambiguity. Madison Constr. Co. v. Harleysville Mut. Ins. Co., 557 Pa. 595, 735 A.2d 100, 106 (Pa. 1999).

III. Choice of Law

"[T]he first step in a choice of law analysis under Pennsylvania law is to determine whether a conflict exists between the laws of the competing states. If no conflict exists, further analysis is unnecessary. If a conflict
is found, it must be determined which state has the greater interest in the application of its law. Weighing these interests requires a further determination as to which state had the most significant contacts or relationships with the insurance contract.” Budtel Assocs., LP v. Cont'l Cas. Co., 2006 PA Super 370, 915 A.2d 640, 643 (Pa.Super. Ct. 2006). The Third Circuit Court of Appeals has concluded that “Pennsylvania applies the more flexible ‘interest/contacts’ methodology to contract choice of law questions.” Hammersmith v. TIG Insurance Co., 480 F. 2d 220 (3d Cir. 2007).

In Hammersmith, the issue was late notice and there was a conflict between the laws of Pennsylvania and New York as to the requirement of prejudice. The Court analyzed each state’s contacts, bearing in mind that the court was concerned with the contract of insurance and not the underlying tort. Noting that when the policy covers a group of risks that are scattered throughout two or more states, the location of the insured risk has less significance to the choice of law determination. Because notice was the issue in Hammersmith, the place of contracting, negotiation, and performance were the most relevant contacts. Other contacts that are relevant depending on the issue are the location of the subject matter of the contract and the place of incorporation and place of business of the parties.

In a duty to defend context, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals noted that while the Pennsylvania Supreme Court had not spoken on the issue, the Superior Court consistently emphasized that Pennsylvania's choice of law rules were concerned with examining the states' contacts with the contract of insurance, not the tort involved in the underlying suit. In Specialty Surfaces International, Inc. v. Continental Cas. Co., 609 F.3d 223 (3d Cir. 2010), the Third Circuit accorded little weight to the place where the lawsuit was filed finding that contact was not significantly related to the coverage question at issue, which involved the “occurrence” definition and claims of poor workmanship.

IV. Duties Imposed by State Law

A. Duty to Defend

1. Standard for Determining Duty to Defend

The insurer agrees to defend the insured against any suits arising under the policy 'even if such suit is groundless, false, or fraudulent.' A refusal without good cause to defend breaches this obligation and gives rise to a cause of action regardless of the good faith of the insurer. Based on the usual contract rule for determining damages, the recovery for breach of the covenant to defend will ordinarily be the cost of hiring substitute counsel and other costs of the defense. This recovery may be in addition to any other obtained against the insurer. Gedeon v. State Farm Mutual Automobile Ins. Co., 410 Pa. 55, 188 A. 2d 320, 321-22 (1963).

It is well settled under Pennsylvania law that the allegations in the complaint in the underlying action alone fix the insurer's duty to defend. United Services Auto. Assn. v. Elitzky, 358 Pa. Super. 362, 517 A. 2d 982, 985 (1986). If the allegations of the complaint, taken as true and construed liberally, state a claim to which the policy potentially applies, the insurer must defend, unless and until it can narrow the claim to a recovery that policy does not cover. Cadwallader v. New Amsterdam Cas. Co., 396 Pa. 582, 152 A.2d 484, 488 (1959). The particular cause of action that a complaint pleads is not determinative of whether coverage has been triggered. Instead,

In *Kvaerner v. Commercial Union Insurance Co.*, 589 Pa. 317, 908 A.2d 888 (2006), the Pennsylvania Supreme Court held that it was error for the Pennsylvania Supreme Court to look beyond the allegations of the underlying complaint to determine that the insurer owed a duty to defend its insured. (In *Kvaerner*, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court reviewed the allegations of the underlying complaint and the language of the policy and reversed the Pennsylvania Superior Court. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court held that there was no duty to defend or indemnify because faulty workmanship does not constitute an “accident” as required to set forth an “occurrence” under the policy).

In *American and Foreign Insurance Co. v. Jerry’s Sport Center, Inc.*, 606 Pa. 584, 2 A.3d 526 (2010), the Pennsylvania Supreme Court held that the insurer was not entitled to a reimbursement of defense costs after a finding of no duty to defend noting that the policy did not contain a provision providing for reimbursement of defense costs under any circumstances.

2. **Issues with Reserving Rights**

It is generally recognized that a liability insurer will not be estopped to set up the defense that the insured's loss was not covered by the insurance policy, notwithstanding the insurer's participation in the defense of an action against the insured, if the insurer gives timely notice to the insured that it has not waived the benefit of its defense under the policy. However, a reservation of rights in this respect, to be effective, must be communicated to the insured. It must fairly inform the insured of the insurer's position and must be timely, although delay in giving notice will be excused where it is traceable to the insurer's lack of actual or constructive knowledge of the available defense. *Brugnoli v. United National Insurance Co.*, 284 Pa. Super. 511, 426 A.2d 164, 167 (1981) (quoting 14 G. Couch, *Cyclopedia of Insurance Law* § 51:83 (2d ed. 1965)).


In *Erie Ins. Exch. v. Lobenthal*, 2015 PA Super 78, 114 A.3d 832 (Pa. Super. 2015), Erie sent two reservation of rights letters addressed only to the named insureds, Mr. and Mrs. Lobenthal, the parents of the defendant driver, Michaela Lobenthal. Michaela was an adult and also an insured under the policy. Neither letter mentioned Michaela. Erie sent the second of the two reservation of rights letter to insurance defense counsel provided by Erie. The Pennsylvania Superior Court found the letters to be ineffective as to Michaela. The Court also found the Erie reservation of rights letter
that was sent seven months after the complaint was filed and that raised a controlled substance exclusion was untimely.

In Babcock & Wilcox Co. v. Am. Nuclear Insurers, 131 A.3d 445, 2015 Pa. LEXIS 1551 (Pa. 2015), the Pennsylvania Supreme Court was asked to decide the appropriate standard to apply in determining whether an insurer is liable under its insurance policy for a settlement made by its insured without securing the insurer's consent, when the insurer is defending the claim subject to a reservation of rights. The Court adopted a variation on a fair and reasonable standard limited to those cases where an insured accepts a settlement offer after an insurer breaches its duty by refusing the fair and reasonable settlement while maintaining its reservation of rights and, thus, subjects an insured to potential responsibility for the judgment in a case where the policy is ultimately deemed to cover the relevant claims. The Court observed that a determination of whether the settlement is fair and reasonable necessarily entails consideration of the terms of the settlement, the strength of the insured's defense against the asserted claims, and whether there is any evidence of fraud or collusion on the part of the insured. The Court further noted that if an insurer breaches its duty to settle while defending subject to a reservation of rights and the insured accepts a reasonable settlement offer, the insured need only demonstrate that the insurer breached its duty by failing to consent to a settlement that is fair, reasonable, and non-collusive, rather than demonstrating bad faith by the insurer, as the damages sought are subject to the policy limits to which the insurer originally contracted.

B. Duty to Indemnify

The duty to indemnify is more limited than an insurer's duty to defend and arises only when the insured is determined to be liable for damages within the coverage of the policy. The burden is on the insured to establish coverage under an insurance policy. Erie Insurance Exchange v. Transamerica Insurance Co., 516 Pa. 574, 533 A.2d 1363, at 1366-67 (1987). The insurer has the burden of showing that policy exclusions preclude coverage. American States Ins. Cos. v. Maryland Cas. Co., 427 Pa. Super. 170, 628 A.2d 880 (1993). Although the duty to defend is separate from and broader than the duty to indemnify, both duties flow from a determination that the complaint triggers coverage. General Accident Ins. Co. of America v. Allen, 547 Pa. 693, 692 A. 2d 1089, 1095 (1997). If there is no possibility that any of the underlying claims could fall within the coverage of the policy then the insurer has no duty to defend and indemnify. Germantown Ins. Co. v. Martin, 407 Pa. Super. 326, 595 A.2d 1172 (1991).

V. Extra Contractual Claims Against Insurers: Elements and Remedies

A. Bad Faith

1. Bad Faith Statute

In D’Ambrosio v. Pennsylvania Nat. Mut. Cas. Ins. Co., 494 Pa. 501, 431 A.2d 966 (1981), the Pennsylvania Supreme Court rejected a claim based in tort against an insurer for bad faith conduct in failing to pay a first party property damage claim. The insured sought damages for emotional distress and punitive damages. The Court noted that it was for the Legislature to determine whether sanctions beyond those under the UIPA are required to deter conduct which is less than scrupulous.
The Pennsylvania Legislature responded and in 1990, the Pennsylvania Bad Faith Statute became effective. The statute provides as follows:

**Actions on insurance policies**

In an action arising under an insurance policy, if the court finds that the insurer has acted in bad faith toward the insured, the court may take all of the following actions:

1. Award interest on the amount of the claim from the date the claim was made by the insured in an amount equal to the prime rate of interest plus 3%.
2. Award punitive damages against the insurer.
3. Assess court costs and attorney fees against the insurer.

42 Pa. C.S.A. § 8371.

The term 'bad faith' is not defined in the statute, and the Pennsylvania Supreme Court has not directly addressed what actions amount to bad faith. The Pennsylvania Superior Court has defined "bad faith" as "any frivolous or unfounded refusal to pay proceeds of a policy." Terletsky v. Prudential Prop. and Cas. Ins. Co., 437 Pa. Super. 108, 649 A.2d 680, 688 (1994) (quoting Black's Law Dictionary 139 (6th ed. 1990)). To make out a claim of bad faith, a plaintiff must show by clear and convincing evidence that the insurer (1) did not have a reasonable basis for denying benefits under the policy, and (2) knew or recklessly disregarded its lack of reasonable basis in denying the claim. Greene v. United Services Auto Ass’n, 2007 PA Super 344, 936 A.2d 1178 (2007); Keefe v. Prudential Prop. and Cas. Ins. Co., 203 F. 3d 218, 225 (3d Cir. 2000); See also, W.V. Realty Inc. v. Northern Ins. Co., 334 F.3d 306 (3d Cir. 2003).

A "motive of self-interest or ill will" level of culpability is not a third element required for a finding of bad faith, but it is probative of whether "the insurer knew or recklessly disregarded its lack of reasonable basis in denying the claim." Greene, supra. Mere negligence or bad judgment is not bad faith. Terletsky, supra. In addition to the above, harm has been found to be an essential element of a bad faith claim. Quaciari v. Allstate Ins. Co., 998 F. Supp. 578 (E.D.Pa. 1998).

In Rancosky v. Wash. Nat'l Ins. Co., 2015 PA Super 264, 130 A.3d 79, 92-93 (2015), the Pennsylvania Superior Court stated:

A "dishonest purpose" or "motive of self-interest or ill will" is not a third element required for a finding of bad faith. [citation omitted] A "motive of self-interest or ill will" may be considered in determining the second prong of the test for bad faith, i.e., whether an insurer knowingly or recklessly disregarded its lack of a reasonable basis for denying a claim. [citation omitted].

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court granted a Petition for Allowance of Appeal limited to the following issue:

Pa.C.S. § 8371, and assuming the answer to be in the affirmative, whether the Superior Court erred in holding that Terletsky factor of a "motive of self-interest or ill-will" is merely a discretionary consideration rather than a mandatory prerequisite to proving bad faith?


In Hollock v. Erie Insurance Exchange, 2004 PA Super 13, 842 A. 2d 409 (2004), the Pennsylvania Superior Court en banc reviewed a non-jury verdict in favor of the insured against Erie Insurance Exchange for bad faith. Hollock was awarded $865,000 in an underinsured motorist arbitration hearing, after Erie had offered only $30,000 for the claim. As a result of the award, Erie paid its underinsured motorist policy limit of $500,000. In the bad faith lawsuit, the trial court found that Erie had acted in bad faith. The verdict included compensatory damages for attorney’s fees, interest and costs in the amount of approximately $280,000 and punitive damages in the amount of $2,800,000. In reaching its decision to award punitive damages under the bad faith statute, the trial court considered the conduct of Erie’s witnesses at the trial of the bad faith action, which the court found to be an intentional attempt to conceal, hide or otherwise cover-up Erie’s conduct.

Despite its prior opinion that the only conduct of an insurer that is relevant to a bad faith claim is the insurer’s conduct “as an insurer” and not as a legal adversary, see O’Donnell v. Allstate Ins. Co., 1999 PA Super 161, 734 A. 2d 901 (1999), the Superior Court held in Hollock that it was appropriate for the trial court to consider Erie’s conduct at trial.

The Superior Court also upheld the award of punitive damages. Erie argued that punitive damages could not be awarded absent aggravating circumstances, such as malice, vindictiveness, and wanton disregard. The Superior Court relied on the language of the bad faith statute in concluding that the statute allows an award of punitive damages upon a finding of bad faith, without additional proof. See also, Zimmerman v. Harleysville Mut. Ins. Co., 2004 PA Super 383, 860 A.2d 167 (2004); Smith v. Allstate Ins. Co., 2012 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 160152 (W. D. Pa. 2012)(Predicting that the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania would interpret section 8371 to permit an award of punitive damages upon a finding of bad faith alone); Grossi v. Travelers Personal Ins. Co., 2013 PA Super 284, 79 A.3d 1141(2013)(“As made clear by this Court in Hollock, no additional showing beyond establishing bad faith conduct under section 8371 is required to permit the imposition of punitive damages.”)

Erie also challenged the amount of punitive damages as unconstitutionally excessive, relying on State Farm v. Campbell, 538 U.S. 408, 123 S. Ct. 1513, 155 L. Ed. 2d 585 (2003). Analyzing the factors set forth by the United States Supreme Court, the Pennsylvania Superior Court did not find a basis to disturb the punitive damages award.

Erie sought review of this decision by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court which originally accepted the appeal. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court dismissed the appeal as improvidently granted, with no explanation given.

A trial court, when evaluating a Section 8371 petition or motion for costs and/or counsel fees for the “bad faith” of an insurer, may look to other statutes on the same or similar subjects, such as the Unfair Insurance

In Jurinko v. The Medical Protective Company, 2008 U.S. App. LEXIS 26263 (3d Cir. 2009) (unpublished opinion), the Third Circuit Court of Appeals reduced a bad faith punitive damage award to reflect a 1:1 ratio. The compensatory damages were $1,658,345. In Willow Inn, Inc. v. Public Service Mut. Ins. Co., 399 F.3d 224 (3d Cir. 2005), the Third Circuit Court of Appeals concluded that the attorney’s fees and costs awarded as part of the bad faith claim is the proper term to compare to the punitive damages award for ratio purposes.

In Mishoe v. Erie Insurance Company, 573 Pa. 267, 824 A.2d 1153 (2003), the Pennsylvania Supreme Court held that there is no right to a jury trial in a bad faith action brought in Pennsylvania State Courts pursuant to 42 Pa. C.S.A. §8371. The United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit had previously ruled in Klinger v. State Farm Mutual Auto Insurance Co., 115 F.3d 230 (3d Cir. 1997), that the punitive damages remedy in the bad faith statute triggers the Seventh Amendment right to a jury trial in a case pending in Federal Court.

2. Third Party Cases and Excess Verdicts

The amount of recovery for breach of the duty to indemnify is usually determined by the terms of the policy. Gedeon v. State Farm Mutual Automobile Ins. Co., 410 Pa. 55, 188 A. 2d 320, 321-22 (1963). However, by asserting the right to handle all claims against the insured, including the right to make a binding settlement, the insurer assumes a fiduciary position towards the insured and becomes obligated to act in good faith and with due care in representing the interests of the insured. If the insurer is derelict in this duty, as where it negligently investigates the claim or unreasonably refuses an offer of settlement, it may be liable regardless of the limits of the policy. Gideon, supra. In determining whether to settle a liability claim, the insurer is not bound to submerge its own interest in order that the insured’s interest may be made paramount. Cowden v. Aetna Cas. & Sur. Co., 389 Pa. 459, 134 A. 2d 223, 228 (1957).


In The Birth Center v. St. Paul Companies, Inc., 567 Pa. 386, 787 A.2d 376 (2001), the Pennsylvania Supreme Court held that where an insurer acts in bad faith by unreasonably refusing to settle a claim, the insurer is liable for the known and/or foreseeable compensatory damages of its insured that reasonably flow from the bad faith conduct. In that case, the insurer had paid the excess verdict, but was still liable to its insured for lost profits and damage to reputation resulting from the entry of the excess judgment.

Based on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court’s decision in The Birth Center, an insurer is potentially exposed to liability for the amount of the excess verdict; to liability for punitive damages and attorney’s fees under the bad faith statute, 42 Pa.C.S.A. §8371; and to liability for its insured’s known
or foreseeable compensatory damages for breach of contract as a result of its bad faith conduct.

In Allstate Prop. & Cas. Ins. Co. v. Wolfe, 105 A.3d 1181 (Pa. 2014), the Pennsylvania Supreme Court concluded that the entitlement to assert damages under the Bad Faith Statute, 42 Pa. C.S. §8371, may be assigned by an insured to an injured plaintiff and judgment creditor. The question had been certified to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court by the Third Circuit Court of Appeals.

**B. Fraud**

The elements of fraud are as follows:

1. A representation;
2. which is material to the transaction at hand;
3. made falsely, with knowledge of its falsity or recklessness as to whether it is true or false;
4. with the intent of misleading another into relying on it;
5. justifiable reliance on the misrepresentation; and,
6. the resulting injury was proximately caused by the reliance.


"[T]he tort of intentional non-disclosure has the same elements as intentional misrepresentation except in the case of intentional non-disclosure the party intentionally conceals a material fact rather than making an affirmative misrepresentation.[citation omitted]." Id. However, mere silence is not sufficient to constitute fraud in the absence of a duty to speak. Duquesne Light Co. v. Westinghouse Electric Corp., 66 F. 3d 604, 612 -13 (3d Cir. 1995).

**C. Intentional or Negligent Infliction of Emotional Distress**

1. Intentional Infliction of Emotional Distress

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court has stated that "[t]he possibility cannot be ruled out that emotional distress damages may be recoverable on a contract where, for example, the breach is of such a kind that serious emotional disturbance was a particularly likely result. D’Ambrosio v. Pa. National Mut. Ins., 494 Pa. 501, 431 A. 2d 966 (1981).


While not expressly recognizing the tort, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court has identified the minimum requirements if the tort were to be accepted in Pennsylvania. Defendant’s conduct must be extreme and outrageous to state a cause of action for intentional infliction of emotional distress. For guidance, the Pennsylvania courts have looked to the Restatement (Second) of Torts § 46.

The Restatement (second) of Torts § 46 provides:
Outrageous Conduct Causing Severe Emotional Distress

(1) One who by extreme and outrageous conduct intentionally or recklessly causes severe emotional distress to another is subject to liability for such emotional distress, and if bodily harm to the other results from it, for such bodily harm.

The Restatement states that extreme and outrageous conduct goes beyond all possible bounds of decency.


2. Negligent Infliction of Emotional Distress

The Pennsylvania Superior Court has recognized four factual scenarios which may support a claim for negligent infliction of emotional distress:

"(1) situations where the defendant had a contractual or fiduciary duty toward the plaintiff; (2) the plaintiff was subjected to a physical impact; (3) the plaintiff was in a zone of danger, thereby reasonably experiencing a fear of impending physical injury; or (4) the plaintiff observed a tortious injury to a close relative."


The first scenario was presented in Toney, which involved a claim by the mother of a severely deformed baby who claimed that the defendants’ negligent misinterpretation of an ultrasound prevented her from preparing herself for the shock of witnessing her son's birth with such substantial physical deformities. In the decision in support of affirmance in the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, the reach of this cause of action was explained to be limited to:

preexisting relationships involving duties that obviously and objectively hold the potential of deep emotional harm in the event of breach. . . . [T]he special relationships must encompass an implied duty to care for the plaintiff's emotional well-being. . . . Compensable emotional harm has been described as likely to be experienced as a visceral and devastating assault on the self such that it resembles physical agony in its brutality. . . . [R]elationships involving life and death fall within this category. . . . It is impossible . . . to create an exhaustive list of qualifying relationships in this opinion. . . . Nonetheless, we would hold that some relationships, including some doctor-patient relationships, will involve an implied duty to care for the plaintiff's emotional well-being that, if breached, has the potential to cause emotional distress resulting in physical harm.

Toney, 36 A.3d at 95 (internal quotations and citation omitted).
In the insurance context, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court has stated that "[t]he possibility cannot be ruled out that emotional distress damages may be recoverable on a contract where, for example, the breach is of such a kind that serious emotional disturbance was a particularly likely result. D’Ambrosio v. Pa. National Mut. Ins., 494 Pa. 501, 431 A. 2d 966 (1981).

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court has generally denied recovery for emotional distress, unless accompanied by physical impact or physical injury, noting that the Second Restatement also follows this approach. See RESTATEMENT (SECOND) OF TORTS § 436A (1965) ("If the actor's conduct is negligent as creating an unreasonable risk of causing either bodily harm or emotional disturbance to another, and it results in such emotional disturbance alone, without bodily harm or other compensable damage, the actor is not liable for such emotional disturbance."); RESTATEMENT (SECOND) OF TORTS § 456 cmt. b (1965) ("Where the tortious conduct does not result in bodily harm, there can ordinarily be no recovery for mere emotional disturbance which has no physical consequences."). Physical impact and physical injury are not synonymous terms, however. Schmidt v. Boardman Co., 608 Pa. 327, 11 A.3d 924, 948 (2011).

D. State Consumer Protection Laws, Rules and Regulations

The Unfair Trade Practices and Consumer Protection Law (UTPCPL) bars certain types of "unfair methods of competition" and "unfair or deceptive acts or practices." 73 P.S. § 201-3. Unlike the UIPA, the UTPCPL explicitly creates a private cause of action in favor of consumers. 73 P.S. § 201-9.2. The provisions of the UTPCPL most likely to be cited in a complaint against an insurance carrier include the following:

(ii) Causing likelihood of confusion or of misunderstanding as to the source, sponsorship, approval or certification of goods or services;

(iii) Causing likelihood of confusion or of misunderstanding as to affiliation, connection or association with, or certification by, another;

... 

(viii) Disparaging the goods, services or business of another by false or misleading representation of fact;

(ix) Advertising goods or services with intent not to sell them as advertised;

(x) Making false or misleading statements of fact concerning the reasons for, existence of, or amounts of price reduction;

... 

(xv) Knowingly misrepresenting that services, replacements or repairs are needed if they are not needed;

... 

(xx) Engaging in any other fraudulent or deceptive conduct which creates a likelihood of confusion or of misunderstanding.
73 P.S. § 201-2(4) (emphasis added).


The cause of action under the UTPCPL is limited to persons purchasing goods or services primarily for personal, family or household purposes. It is not available to commercial policyholders. Trackers Raceway, Inc. v. Comstock Agency, Inc., 400 Pa. Super. 432, 583 A. 2d 1193 (1990).

In Grimes v. Enter. Leasing Co. of Phila., LLC, 105 A.3d 1188 (Pa. 2014), the Pennsylvania Supreme Court held that the mere acquisition of counsel would not suffice to satisfy the "ascertainable loss" requirement.

In Grimes, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court had also granted review to consider whether a private plaintiff who alleges deceptive conduct under the UTPCPL's "catchall" provision need not plead or prove justifiable reliance. The Court did not address that question because the "ascertainable loss" issue was dispositive.

However, in Toy v. Metropolitan Life Ins. Co., 593 Pa. 20, 928 A.2d 186 (2007), the Court stated that justifiable reliance is an element of a Consumer Protection Law claim. See also, Kern v. Lehigh Valley Hosp., 2015 PA Super 19, 108 A.3d 1281 (2015) ("[O]ur Supreme Court has decided and reaffirmed that justifiable reliance is an element of all private claims under the UTPCPL."�

In Schwartz v. Rockey, 593 Pa. 536, 932 A. 2d 885 (2007), an action by home purchasers against the sellers for fraudulent non-disclosure and/or concealment of water infiltration, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court held "as a matter of statutory construction, that the courts' discretion to [award] treble damages under the UTPCPL should not be closely constrained by the common-law requirements associated with the award of punitive damages". The effect of the Court's holding is that the standard for an award of punitive damages as described in Feld v. Merriam, 506 Pa. 383, 395, 485 A.2d 742, 747-48 (1984), i.e., that "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." (quoting Restatement (Second) of Torts §908(2) (1977)), does not apply to an award of treble damages under the UTPCPL. However, in affirming the decision of the Pennsylvania Superior Court, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court also cautioned that "courts of original jurisdiction should focus on the presence of intentional or reckless, wrongful conduct, as to which an award of treble damages would be consistent with, and in furtherance of, the remedial purposes of the UTPCPL."

VI. Discoverability Issues In Actions Against Insurers

A. Discovery of Claims Files Generally


"The scope of [the bad faith statute] has been extended to the investigatory practices of an insurer during litigation initiated by an insured to obtain the proceeds of his or her insurance policy." McAndrew v. Donegal Mut. Ins. Co., 56 Pa.D.&C.4th 1, 11 (Lackawanna Co. 2002) (citation omitted). Consequently, in a bad faith action, the insured may be entitled to discovery of adjuster notes or claims diary entries occurring after the denial of a claim and/or initiation of litigation. Id.; see also Hollock v. Erie Ins. Exchange, 2004 PA Super 13, 842 A.2d 409, 414-16 (2004) (discussing the lower court's finding of bad faith based on an insurer's post-litigation efforts to conceal, hide, and cover-up the conduct of employees).

Typically, there are two objections raised to the production of an insurer's claims diary and related materials; they are the "work product doctrine" and the "attorney-client privilege." Reusswig v. Erie Ins., 49 Pa.D&C.4th 338, 348 (Monroe Co. 2000). The Pennsylvania Rule of Civil Procedure concerning the protection of work product (meaning documents prepared in anticipation of litigation) is significantly weaker than its federal counterpart. Moreover, Pennsylvania courts have held that the work product doctrine applies "only to the litigation of the claims for which the impressions, conclusions, and opinions were made," and not to any subsequent litigation. Mueller, 31 Pa.D&C.4th 23, 27.

By its own terms, Pennsylvania Rule of Civil Procedure 4003.3 only protects an insurance adjuster's "mental impressions, conclusions or opinions respecting the value or merit of a claim or defense or respecting strategy or tactics." Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 26(b)(3), on the other hand, provides more protection, by applying to a broader spectrum of materials. See Garvey v. National Grange Mut. Ins. Co., 167 F.R.D. 391, 393-94 (E.D. Pa. 1996). However, the insurer must still show that the adjuster notes or claims diary entries were made in anticipation of litigation, and even in that circumstance, the insured is frequently able to make a showing of "substantial need" in order to overcome the protection of the work product doctrine.

The attorney-client privilege is protected in both state and federal court. The insurer, however, must be mindful that by placing the attorney's advice at issue, the insurer thereby waives the protection of the privilege. "The advice of counsel is placed in issue where the [insurer] asserts a claim or defense, and attempts to prove that claim or defense by disclosing or describing the attorney client communication." Rhone-Poulenc Rorer Inc. v. Home Indem. Co., 32 F.3d 851, 863 (3rd Cir. 1994); McAndrew, 56 Pa.D.&C.4th at
The Pennsylvania Supreme Court recently held that in Pennsylvania, the attorney-client privilege operates in a two-way fashion to protect confidential client-to-attorney or attorney-to-client communications made for the purpose of obtaining or providing professional legal advice. Gillard v. AIG Ins. Co., 609 Pa. 65, 15 A.3d 44 (2011).

In Rhodes v. USAA Cas. Ins. Co., 2011 PA Super 105, 21 A.3d 1253 (2011), the Pennsylvania Superior Court reversed an order compelling the production of the underinsured motorist claim file of counsel for the plaintiff-insured in a bad faith action involving an underinsured motorist claim, stating that it is the state of mind of the insurer that is relevant in the bad faith action and not the state of mind of the insured. The court however noted that it was conceivable that in certain circumstances, a plaintiff's attorney's work product in the underlying claim could become relevant in a subsequent bad faith action, and in that situation, the court should conduct an in camera review of the attorney's file to weed out any protected material.

B. Discoverability of Reserves


However, in Fidelity & Deposit Co. v. McCulloch, 168 F.R.D. 516 (E.D. Pa. 1996), the court refused to allow discovery of reserve information and distinguished North River, in which liability was undisputed and reserve information might provide insight into the company's mind set in refusing to settle the case, from the case before it, in which liability was disputed and the level of reserves would likely reveal no more than that the cost of defending the actions rose as time passed.


In Mirarchi v. Seneca Specialty Ins. Co., 2011 U.S. Dist. Lexis 80871 (E.D. Pa. 2011), a bad faith action arising out of a coverage dispute between plaintiff and his property insurer, the court concluded that the insurer’s reserve figures were not relevant. However, the court ordered the production of the unredacted documents for court review because the underlying facts that the insurer considered in arriving at a reserve figure could be relevant.
In PECO Energy Co. v. Ins. Co. of N. Am., 2004 PA Super 221, 852 A.2d 1230 (2004), which did not include a bad faith claim, the Pennsylvania Superior Court did not permit discovery of reserve information.

C. Discoverability of Existence of Reinsurance and Communications with Reinsurers


Federal courts appear to require a stronger showing of relevance before ordering disclosure of reinsurance materials, other than the agreement itself. See Medmarc Cas. Ins. Co., 2002 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 15082 (E.D.Pa. 2002). In Rhone-Poulenc Rorer Inc. v. Home Indem. Co., 139 F.R.D. 609 (E.D.Pa. 1991) (the "Rhone I"), the court denied discovery concerning reinsurance files, stating that there had been no allegation that the insurance policy was ambiguous, and discovery into extrinsic evidence would therefore not be permitted. Id. at 611-12. In Rhone-Poulenc Rorer Inc. v. Home Indem. Co., 1991 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 16336 (E.D.Pa. Nov. 7, 1991) (the "Rhone II"), the court permitted discovery of reinsurance materials, but only because the materials were directly related to the notice defense raised by many of the insurers.

D. Attorney/Client Communications

Section 5928 of the Pennsylvania Judicial Code provides:

In a civil matter counsel shall not be competent or permitted to testify to confidential communications made to him by his client, nor shall the client be compelled to disclose the same, unless in either case this privilege is waived upon the trial by the client.

42 Pa. C.S. §5928.


In order to invoke the privilege properly and shift the burden to the party seeking disclosure to prove waiver or an exception, the following elements must be established:
1) The asserted holder of the privilege is or sought to become a client.

2) The person to whom the communication was made is a member of the bar of a court, or his subordinate.

3) The communication relates to a fact of which the attorney was informed by his client, without the presence of strangers, for the purpose of securing either an opinion of law, legal services or assistance in a legal matter, and not for the purpose of committing a crime or tort.

4) The privilege has been claimed and is not waived by the client.

Red Visions Systems, supra.

In Gillard v. AIG Ins. Co., 609 Pa. 65, 15 A.3d 44 (2011), the Pennsylvania Supreme Court held that, in Pennsylvania, the attorney-client privilege operates in a two-way fashion to protect confidential client-to-attorney or attorney-to-client communications made for the purpose of obtaining or providing professional legal advice.

The Court in Gillard distinguished the attorney-client privilege from the work-product privilege stating:

[O]ur holding does not obviate the work product privilege. Such privilege, unlike the attorney-client privilege, does not necessarily involve communications with a client. See Pa.R.Civ.P. No. 4003.3 (exempting from discovery "disclosure of the mental impressions of a party's attorney or his or her conclusions, opinions, memoranda, notes or summaries, legal research or legal theories"). ... Thus, while the two privileges overlap, they are not coterminous.


In the Pennsylvania Superior Court decision in The Birth Center v. The St. Paul Companies, Inc., 727 A.2d 1144 (Pa. Super. 1999) aff’d on other grounds, 567 Pa. 386, 787 A.2d 376 (2001), the court found that St. Paul’s argument that its payment of the excess verdict was conclusive evidence of its good faith put its state of mind directly in issue. Therefore, St. Paul waived the right to challenge discovery of disputed materials withheld on grounds of privilege.

VII. Defenses in Actions Against Insurers

A. Misrepresentations/Omissions: During Underwriting or During Claim
In Rohm and Haas Co. v. Continental Cas. Co., 566 Pa. 464, 781 A.2d 1172, 1179 (2001), the Pennsylvania Supreme Court addressed the issue of fraud in the insurance context:

When an insured secures an insurance policy by means of fraudulent misrepresentations, the insurer may avoid that policy. New York Life Ins. Co. v. Brandwene et ux., 316 Pa. 218, 172 A. 669 (Pa. 1934). See also Smith and Judge, supra. The burden of proving fraud must be established by clear and convincing evidence and rests with the party alleging it. Id. The clear and convincing standard requires evidence that is "so clear, direct, weighty, and convincing as to enable the jury to come to a clear conviction, without hesitancy, of the truth of the precise facts of the issue." Lessner v. Rubinson, 527 Pa. 393, 592 A.2d 678, 681 (Pa. 1991). This court has previously observed that fraud "is never proclaimed from the housetops nor is it done otherwise than surreptitiously with every effort usually made to conceal the truth of what is being done. So fraud can rarely if ever be shown by direct proof. It must necessarily be largely inferred from the surrounding circumstances." Shechter v. Shechter, 366 Pa. 30, 76 A.2d 753, 755 (Pa. 1950).

In an insurance fraud case, the insurer must prove that the fraudulent misrepresentations were material to the risk assumed by the insurer. Evans v. Penn Mutual Life Ins. Co. of Philadelphia, 322 Pa. 547, 186 A. 133 (Pa. 1936). When knowledge or ignorance of certain information would influence the decision of an insurer in the issuance of a policy, assessing the nature of the risk, or setting premium rates, that information is deemed material to the risk assumed by the insurer. A.G. Allebach, Inc. v. Hurley, 373 Pa. Super. 41, 540 A.2d 289 (Pa. Super. 1988). Furthermore, "fraud consists of anything calculated to deceive, whether by single act or combination, or by suppression of truth, or suggestion of what is false, whether it be by direct falsehood or by innuendo, by speech or silence, word of mouth or look or gesture." Moser v. DeSetta, 527 Pa. 157, 589 A.2d 679, 682 (Pa. 1991). That is, there must be a deliberate intent to deceive. Evans, supra. Finally, "the concealment of a material fact can amount to a culpable misrepresentation no less than does an intentional false statement." Moser, supra 589 A.2d at 682

Pursuant to Pennsylvania case law, an automobile insurance policy cannot be rescinded based on misrepresentation so as to void coverage for an innocent injured third party, except within 60 days of the policy’s inception. Klopp v. Keystone Insurance Companies, 528 Pa. 1, 595 A.2d 1 (1991). After the 60-day period, the policy may only be canceled, not rescinded. However, an insurer may rescind a policy of auto insurance as to the actual perpetrator of the fraud, where the fraud could not reasonably have been discovered within the 60 day period immediately following issuance of the policy; limited to those circumstances where the undiscovered fraud was of such a nature that it is clear that an insurer would never have accepted the risk inherent in issuing the policy. Erie Insurance Exchange v. Lake, 543 Pa. 363, 671 A.2d 681 (1996).

In AJT Props. v. Lexington Ins. Co., 26 Pa. D. & C.5th 302 (Lacka. Cty. 2012), the court noted that no state or federal court in Pennsylvania had recognized, or even analyzed, the validity of a "post-claim underwriting"
theory in the context of a property damage claim. In AJT Props., the court found that even assuming arguendo that such a doctrine were cognizable in Pennsylvania, it was inapplicable in that case because in those jurisdictions that have recognized the theory, have applied it only to situations where an insurer fails to perform any actual underwriting until after a claim has been made. In AJT Props., the insurer had an underwriting inspection of the property completed almost three months prior to the flood and AJT's resultant claim.

B. Failure to Comply with Conditions


A cooperation clause is enforceable to avoid coverage only where an insurer can establish prejudice as a result of the failure to cooperate. Forest City Grant Liberty Assocs. v. Genro II, Inc., 438 Pa. Super. 553, 652 A.2d 948, 951 (1995).

C. Challenging Stipulated Judgments: Consent and/or No-Action Clauses

In an action against an insurer to recover an amount agreed upon by the insured and claimant to resolve a third party claim, the insured or claimant proceeding by assignment has the burden of justifying the settlement including the reasonableness of the amount. The burden of proof is satisfied by offering evidence to establish the case against the indemnitee. See Martinique Shoes, Inc. v. New York Progressive Wood Heel Co., 207 Pa. Super. 404, 217 A.2d 781 (1966).

D. Statutes of Limitations

Actions based on breach of contract are subject to a four-year statute of limitations. 42 Pa. C.S.A. §5525. Tort claims are subject to a two-year statute of limitations. 42 Pa. C.S.A. §5524. Fraud claims are subject to a two-year statute of limitations that runs from the date the claimant knew or should have known of the fraudulent act. Bolus v. Beloff, 950 F.2d 919 (3d Cir. 1991).


In Ash v. Continental Insurance Company, 593 Pa. 523, 932 A. 2d 877 (2007), the Pennsylvania Supreme Court answered the question of which statute of limitation was applicable to a claim under the bad faith statute, 42 Pa.C.S. § 8371. In Ash, the Court discussed the underpinnings of the Pennsylvania bad faith insurance statute. While noting that courts generally treat a breach of the duty of good faith and fair dealing as a breach of contract action, such decisions addressed the implied duty of good faith imposed on parties to a contract, rather than the duty of good faith imposed by § 8371. (The Supreme Court declined to engage in a discussion of whether
such a duty is implied in every contract as the issue was not presently before the Court.)

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court acknowledged that the bad faith statute was enacted by the Legislature to deter bad faith and was preceded by the decision of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in D’Ambrosio v. Pennsylvania National Mut. Cas. Ins. Co., 494 Pa. 501, 431 A. 2d 966 (1981) declining to recognize a cause of action in tort for the breach of an implied covenant of good faith and fair dealing. The Court concluded that the duty under § 8371 is one imposed as a matter of social policy rather than one imposed by mutual consensus, and “an action to recover damages for a breach of that duty derives primarily from the law of torts”. Therefore, the Court held that such an action is subject to the two-year statute of limitations under 42 Pa.C.S. § 5524.

VIII. Trigger and Allocation Issues for Long-Tail Claims

A. Trigger of Coverage

In the asbestos bodily injury context, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court has adopted the continuous trigger of coverage: coverage is triggered under all policies on the risk from exposure to asbestos through manifestation. J.H. France Refractories Co. v. Allstate Ins. Co., 534 Pa. 29, 626 A. 2d 502, 507 (1993).


Our holding in J.H. France remains an exception to the general rule under Pennsylvania jurisprudence that the first manifestation rule governs a trigger of coverage analysis for policies containing standard CGL language. We therefore find J.H. France distinguishable and decline to apply the multiple trigger theory of liability to determine coverage under the Penn National policies for the damages sustained by Appellants’ dairy herd.

B. Allocation Among Insurers

In J.H. France, supra, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court held that all insurers whose policies were triggered were jointly and severally liable. The insured could select one policy to cover the loss up to its limits. The insurer whose policy was selected could pursue other insurers on the risk through the “other insurance” clause or principles of contribution. The insured is not responsible for a share of the liability for those periods when it was not insured.

With respect to the duty to defend, the Court held: “The defense of a claim is a right, as well as a duty, falling upon the insurer. In order to effectuate that right, we hold that the selection of the insurer or insurers to undertake a defense is to be made by the insurers. In the event that the insurers are unable to agree as to the conduct of the defense, then J.H. France shall be entitled to select an insurer.” Id.
IX. **Contribution**

A. **Equitable Contribution**

To recover on a claim of equitable contribution under Pennsylvania law, an insurer must show by a preponderance of the evidence that (1) it is one of several parties liable for a common debt or obligation; and (2) it discharged the debt for the benefit of the other parties. See *Great Northern Ins. Co. v. Greenwich Ins. Co.*, 372 Fed. App'x 253, 254 (3d Cir. 2010) (citing *In re Mellon's Estate*, 347 Pa. 520, 32 A.2d 749, 757 (1943)).

In *Great Northern Ins. Co. v. Greenwich Ins. Co.*, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals found that Great Northern (“Chub”) had satisfied part one of the test by demonstrating that both Chubb and Greenwich insured the same party, Atlas Resources (“Resources”), and successfully showed that it and Greenwich were liable under their respective insurance policies for a common obligation to Resources.

B. **Statutory Contribution**

Pennsylvania’s “Fair Share Act” became effective June 28, 2011. Unless one of the statutory exceptions applies, a defendant will pay only its proportional share of liability and no more. Before the passage of the Fair Share Act, defendants in a negligence case who were found to be joint tortfeasors were jointly and severally liable for the entire verdict.

The Fair Share Act eliminates that risk with certain exceptions, including for a defendant found 60% or more at fault. The Act provides, in pertinent part:

42 Pa.C.S. § 7102

(a.1) Recovery against joint defendant; contribution.

(1) Where recovery is allowed against more than one person, including actions for strict liability, and where liability is attributed to more than one defendant, each defendant shall be liable for that proportion of the total dollar amount awarded as damages in the ratio of the amount of that defendant's liability to the amount of liability attributed to all defendants and other persons to whom liability is apportioned under subsection (a.2).

(2) Except as set forth in paragraph (3), a defendant's liability shall be several and not joint, and the court shall enter a separate and several judgment in favor of the plaintiff and against each defendant for the apportioned amount of that defendant's liability.

(3) A defendant's liability in any of the following actions shall be joint and several, and the court shall enter a joint and several judgment in favor of the plaintiff and against the defendant for the total dollar amount awarded as damages:

(i) Intentional misrepresentation.

(ii) An intentional tort.
Where the defendant has been held liable for not less than 60% of the total liability apportioned to all parties.

A release or threatened release of a hazardous substance under section 702 of the act of October 18, 1988 (P.L. 756, No. 108), known as the Hazardous Sites Cleanup Act.

A civil action in which a defendant has violated section 497 of the act of April 12, 1951 (P.L. 90, No. 21), known as the Liquor Code.

Where a defendant has been held jointly and severally liable under this subsection and discharges by payment more than that defendant's proportionate share of the total liability, that defendant is entitled to recover contribution from defendants who have paid less than their proportionate share. Further, in any case, any defendant may recover from any other person all or a portion of the damages assessed that defendant pursuant to the terms of a contractual agreement.

For purposes of apportioning liability only, the question of liability of any defendant or other person who has entered into a release with the plaintiff with respect to the action and who is not a party shall be transmitted to the trier of fact upon appropriate requests and proofs by any party. A person whose liability may be determined pursuant to this section does not include an employer to the extent that the employer is granted immunity from liability or suit pursuant to the act of June 2, 1915 (P.L. 736, No. 338), known as the Workers' Compensation Act. An attribution of responsibility to any person or entity as provided in this subsection shall not be admissible or relied upon in any other action or proceeding for any purpose. Nothing in this section shall affect the admissibility or nonadmissibility of evidence regarding releases, settlements, offers to compromise or compromises as set forth in the Pennsylvania Rules of Evidence. Nothing in this section shall affect the rules of joinder of parties as set forth in the Pennsylvania Rules of Civil Procedure.

X. Duty to Settle

By virtue of the fact that the insurer controls the defense of the litigation, the insurer’s conduct in handling the defense could give rise to a bad faith claim against the insurer. Cowden v. Aetna Casualty Insurance Co., 389 Pa. 459, 134 A.2d 223, 227 (1957). As the Court stated in Cowden: 

"[W]hen there is little possibility of a verdict or settlement within the limits of the policy, the decision to expose the insured to personal pecuniary loss must be based on a bona fide belief by the insurer, predicated upon all of the circumstances of the case, that it has a good possibility of winning the suit. While it is the insurer's right under the policy to make the decision as to whether a claim against the insured should be litigated or
settled, it is not a right of the insurer to hazard the insured's financial well-being. Good faith requires that the chance of a finding of nonliability be real and substantial and that the decision to litigate be made honestly. Good faith requires the chance of a finding of non-liability be real and substantial and that the decision to litigate be made honestly.”

By asserting in the policy the right to handle all claims against the insured, including the right to make a binding settlement, the insurer assumes a fiduciary position towards the insured and becomes obligated to act in good faith and with due care in representing the interests of the insured. If the insurer is derelict in this duty, as where it negligently investigates the claim or unreasonably refuses an offer of settlement, it may be liable regardless of the limits of the policy for the entire amount of the judgment secured against the insured. Gedeon v. State Farm Mutual Automobile Ins. Co., 410 Pa. 55, 188 A. 2d 320, 321-22 (1963).

As stated by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, requiring insurers who act in bad faith to pay excess verdicts protects the insured from liability that, absent the insurer's bad faith conduct, the insured would not have incurred. Where an insurer acts in bad faith, by unreasonably refusing to settle a claim, it breaches its contractual duty to act in good faith and its fiduciary duty to its insured. Therefore, the insurer is liable for the known and/or foreseeable compensatory damages of its insured that reasonably flow from the insurer's bad faith conduct. The Birth Center v. The St. Paul Companies, 567 Pa. 386 787 A.2d 376, 389 (2001).

In Wolfe v. Allstate Property & Casualty Insurance Co., 790 F. 3d 487 (3d Cir. 2015), the Third Circuit Court of Appeals addressed arguments raised by Allstate following a jury verdict of $0 in compensatory damages and $50,000 in punitive damages against Allstate under the Pennsylvania Bad Faith Statute, 42 Pa. C.S. §8371. In an underlying liability suit brought by Wolfe against Allstate's insured, Karl Zierle, and defended by Allstate, a jury had returned a verdict against Zierle of $15,000 in compensatory damages and $50,000 in punitive damages. Allstate paid the compensatory damage award, but not the $50,000 punitives award. The insured, Zierle, assigned his rights against Allstate to Wolfe in exchange for Wolfe’s agreement not to pursue Zierle for the punitive damages.

In the trial of the bad faith action, the judge allowed Wolfe to present evidence of Allstate's highest offer to settle of $1,200, the compensatory award of $15,000 and the punitive damages claim and award of $50,000. On appeal, on the issue of allowing evidence of the punitive damage award against Zierle, the Third Circuit predicted as follows:

We predict that the Pennsylvania Supreme Court would conclude that, in an action by an insured against his insurer for bad faith, the insured may not collect as compensatory damages the punitive damages awarded against it in the underlying lawsuit. Therefore, the punitive damages award was not relevant in the later suit and should not have been admitted.

The Third Circuit Court based its prediction on Pennsylvania’s long-standing rule that a claim for punitive damages against a tortfeasor who is personally guilty of outrageous and wanted misconduct is ex excluded from insurance coverage as a matter of law. The Court also concluded that “[i]t follows from our reasoning that an insurer has no duty to consider the
potential for the jury to return a verdict for punitive damages when it is negotiating a settlement of that case.” 790 F. 2d at 496.

The Court upheld the trial court’s denial of summary judgment for Allstate on the breach of contract claim stating: “if a plaintiff is able to prove a breach of contract but can show no damages flowing from the breach, the plaintiff is nonetheless entitled to nominal damages.” Id at 498. Finally, the Court found that the removal of the $50,000 punitive damages award against Zierle as damages in the later suit had no bearing on the damages that could be awarded against Allstate under the statutory bad faith claim. The Court remanded the case to the trial court for a new trial on both the breach of contract and bad faith claims, at which no evidence of the $50,000 punitive award would be allowed.

Pennsylvania legislative policy provides that insurers may not delay settling third-party claims just because the insured objects. See 40 P.S. § 1171.5(a)(10)(xv). See Caplan v. Fellheimer Eichen Braverman & Kaskey, 68 F.3d 828 (3rd Cir. 1995). Section 1171.5 of the Unfair Insurance Practices Act specifically provides that an insured’s objection cannot be the sole basis for refusing to pay a claim unless: (a) The insured claims sovereign, eleemosynary, diplomatic, military service, or other immunity from suit or liability with respect to such claim; (b) The insured is granted the right under the policy of insurance to consent to settlement of claims; or (c) The refusal of payment is based upon the insurer’s independent evaluation of the insured's liability based upon all available information. See 40 P.S. § 1171.5(a)(10)(xv)(a)-(c). Step-Plan Servs. v. Koresko, 12 A.3d 401(Pa. Super. 2010).