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Cal/OSHA starts new year with more inspector, manager vacancies

Cal/OSHA began the new year with an increasing number of field enforcement inspector and manager vacancies, continuing the downward trend from 2019. Although these positions are fully funded, the problem remains a nearly frozen hiring and promotion process caused by restrictions placed on the Department of Industrial Relations in the wake of misconduct by former DIR Director Christine Baker.

The key take-aways from the latest “Organization Charts” for the Division are:

- The 198 filled field enforcement inspector (CSHOs) positions has fallen to under 200 again for the 19 million-worker California economy. But if one figures in the District Office Senior Safety Engineers who spend 50% of their time on administrative matters assisting the District Managers, then the “field-available” CSHO total is only 192.5 inspectors.
- There are 48 vacant CSHO positions. DOSH’s vacancy rate for field inspectors is now 19.5% -- almost one-in-every-five positions.
- Between November 2019 and January, three CSHO positions were eliminated, and the January total of 246 positions is five less than in July 2019.
- Some enforcement offices are particularly hard hit: Fremont has 6 of 11 CSHO positions vacant (55%); San Francisco has 4 of 8 positions empty (50%); Oakland and Santa Ana both have 33% vacancies and Santa Ana also has no District Manager. Overall, Region I (San Francisco Bay Area) has a CSHO vacancy rate of 40%.
- There is also a leadership vacuum throughout the Division: Two of six Regional Manager positions are vacant; five District Manager positions are empty; two of the three Mining & Tunneling manager positions are vacant; and five of the 16 Senior Safety Engineer positions in District Offices are empty.
- The inspector to worker ratio – which is the international standard used to compare OHS regulatory agencies – has grown to 1 inspector to over 101,000 workers. This compares to a ratio of 1 to 25,000 in Washington State, and 1 to 22,000 in Oregon.

In addition, faulty promotion exams conducted by DIR in late 2019, with oversight by California’s Human Resources (CalHR) department, have resulted in “failing” almost all the “Junior Safety Engineers” who have been working at Cal/OSHA for as much as two years. These dozen-plus “Juniors,” who earn substantially lower pay than Assistant and Associate Safety Engineers, are now blocked from moving to the higher-paid job classifications and continue to be restricted from conducting inspections on their own. Many of them are leaving Cal/OSHA

for higher paid jobs in other state government agencies – meaning that DOSH is losing all the time and effort put into training these inspectors, and having to fill yet more vacancies.

The field inspector and manager vacancies are a serious obstacle for the Division to meet its legal mandate and mission of protecting California workers. The ineffective hiring and promotion procedures of DIR and CalHR are compounding the problem. There is still no appointed Director for DIR.

Cal/OSHA Chief Doug Parker and Labor Secretary Julie Su will have to get the support of the Governor's Office – or the Legislature – to break through this logjam. But in the meantime, it is the workers of California who will continue to pay the price.

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