

## **Cal/OSHA faces a perfect storm: Inspector vacancies remain above 40% while Governor Newsom proposes a \$21 million cut in Cal/OSHA enforcement, and employers get a 74% decrease in assessments to fund Cal/OSHA**

**Garrett Brown – March 11, 2025**

The latest available staffing information documents that the vacancy rate for Cal/OSHA field inspectors is 42.5% with eight enforcement offices with vacancy rates at or above 50%. These crippling vacancies mean the agency is unable to meet its mandate or mission, with the cost paid in blood and tears by California workers and their families.

At the same time, in January 2025, Governor Newsom proposed cutting Cal/OSHA's enforcement budget by \$21 million dollars (\$21,028,000) for the fiscal year starting on July 1, 2025. Cal/OSHA is not funded by the state's General Fund but rather from an annual grant from Fed OSHA, an assessment on employers' workers compensation insurance premiums for the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Fund, and a fee-for-service for equipment inspections on elevators, amusement rides, etc. All these funds are independent of the state General Fund.

The Governor's proposed \$21 million cut to Cal/OSHA enforcement is not prompted by any concerns about the state budget, but is a deliberate decision to reduce worker protections in California that are fully funded by an independent sources of revenue.

Also in January, the *Cal/OSHA Reporter* trade journal reported that the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) sharply decreased the assessments employers paid to the Occupational Safety and Health Fund by 74% in state fiscal year 2024-25 (COR, January 17, 2025). The assessment paid by employers this year is 0.001885% of their workers comp premiums.

Cal/OSHA faces a perfect storm of years-long inspector vacancies now compounded by the Governor's decision to reduce worker protections and provide employers with refunds on their assessments to the OSH Fund.

Cal/OSHA had 114 vacancies in positions for compliance safety and health officers (CSHO) in November 2024, for a vacancy rate of 42.5%. The data, released by the DIR in March 2025, is from the October 31, 2024, "Organization Chart" for Cal/OSHA. DIR withholds release of staffing data for months after it has been generated.

Fifteen enforcement District Offices have CSHO vacancy rates at or above 40% -- with eight offices having vacancy rates of 50% or more. These offices are: Santa Barbara (80%), Riverside (71%), PSM Refinery unit (70%), San Francisco (67%), Bakersfield (62%), Fremont (60%), San Bernardino (57%), Oakland (50%), PSM/Non-Refinery (47%),

American Canyon (45%), Santa Ana (45%), Van Nuys (45%), Fresno (45%), Monrovia (40%), and Long Beach (40%).

There were six District Offices without a District Manager in Los Angeles, Long Beach, Modesto, Santa Barbara, Van Nuys, and the San Bernardino Mining & Tunneling office in November 2024. In these District Offices, a CSHO must serve as Acting District Manager, so those offices effectively have one additional CSHO vacancy as the ADMs do not conduct field inspections.

Four District Offices had zero clerical staff – Fresno High Hazard Unit, Riverside, Santa Ana, and Santa Barbara – which means CSHOs must spend time doing administrative work.

The California Employment Development Department (EDD) reported the California civilian labor force in November 2024 as 19,396,500 workers. The 161.5 FTE CSHO positions represents an inspector to worker ratio of 1 inspector to 120,102 workers. Cal/OSHA's inspector to worker ratio of 1 inspector to 120,000 workers is much less health protective than Washington State's ratio of 1 to 26,000, and Oregon's ratio of 1 to 24,000.

The new Agricultural Safety unit had zero CSHOs in November 2024, and only five designated position for the four slated enforcement offices (Bakersfield, El Centro, Lodi, and Salinas), plus about 10 satellite offices throughout the state.

The Cal/OSHA Org Chart indicates that 10 field CSHOs are "bilingual." Region II (Northern California and Central Valley) and Region VIII (Central Valley and Central Coast) – regions with numerous farmworkers – both have one bilingual CSHOs in the field. It is estimated that 5 million of the state's 19 million worker labor force speak languages other than English, with many monolingual in their native tongue.