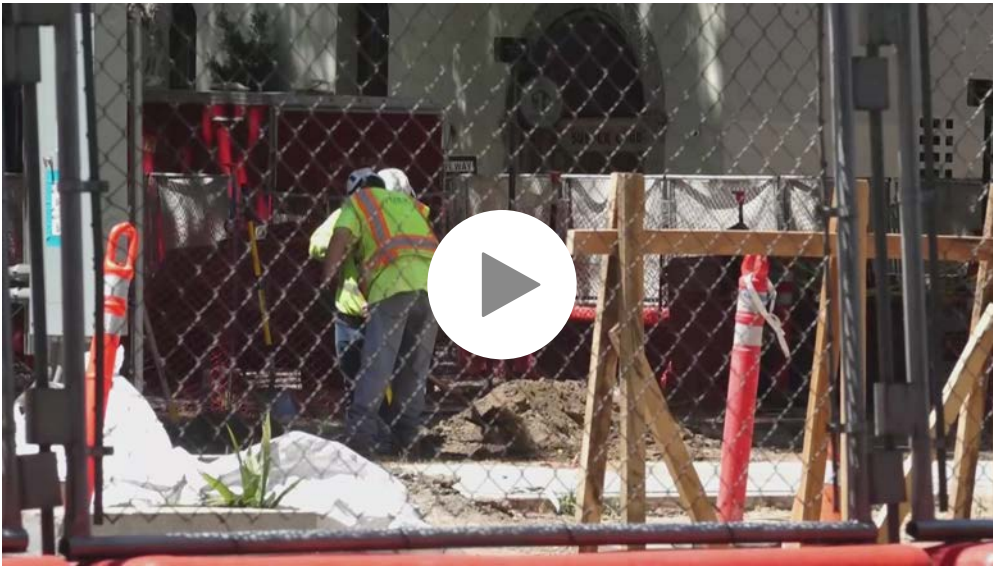


SACRAMENTO

New state audit reveals CAL/OSHA's missed inspections risk worker safety

A state audit criticizes CAL/OSHA for inadequate workplace safety enforcement, sparking calls for stronger oversight.



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SACRAMENTO, Calif. — The state agency responsible for enforcing workplace safety in [California](#), CAL/OSHA, is falling dangerously short, according to a new state audit.

The new report from the California State Auditor's office comes after a 2024 hearing related to farmworker safety.

"Some of the stories that came out of that hearing were shocking and surprising and disappointing, and I wanted answers," said [Assemblymember Liz Ortega](#) (D-San Leandro).

Asm. Ortega authored the original request for this audit. That audit found CAL/OSHA did not inspect some complaints and accidents, despite evidence an inspection may have better protected workers.

According to the report, auditors choose to "inspect by letter," having the employer inspect alleged hazards themselves.

"Stop with the fake letters and the fake investigations, because there's when there's no consequence. There will continue to be risk," Asm. Ortega said.

In a statement to ABC10, CAL/OSHA said, in part, "Prior to this report, CAL/OSHA had already begun the important work of modernizing and improving our operations. This includes replacing outdated manual systems with new technology, initiating revisions to existing policies, and establishing new ones to support both intermediate and long-term improvements in enforcement."

The topic of workplace safety comes amid CAL/OSHA's ongoing investigation into the Esparto fireworks explosion earlier this month.

Garrett Brown worked with CAL/OSHA for 20 years, mainly as a field compliance officer in the Oakland District Office. He retired in 2014 and said many of these new findings don't surprise him.

"The working people of California are not receiving the protections they deserve under law, and we can see this, unfortunately, in comparison to other states on the West Coast," Garrett Brown said.

The state audit said CAL/OSHA had a 40% vacancy rate in late 2024, higher than the 20% vacancy rate for state government positions. However, the agency itself says they've reduced their overall vacancy rate to 12%.

Farmworker advocates like Luis Magaña continues to demand change to protect vulnerable workers.

"It's not just the lack of budget or funding, it's a lack of communication, and we need to improve that to have a better conditions for everybody in the fields or the working place," Magaña said.

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CAL/OSHA, for their part said they are working to make it easier to file complaints and expanding its presence across the state. Still, state auditors are calling for increased protections along with stronger oversight and enforcement efforts.

A full statement from Daniel Lopez, deputy director of communications for the Department of Industrial Relations, is available below.

"We acknowledge the state auditor's findings and recommendations. Prior to this report, Cal/OSHA had already begun the important work of modernizing and improving our operations. This includes replacing outdated manual systems with new technology, initiating revisions to existing policies, and establishing new ones to support both intermediate and

long-term improvements in enforcement.

Cal/OSHA has undertaken the biggest technology project in its history. One that will transform our work and improve worker safety across the board. We embarked on a multi-year plan to build our own electronic data management system. This system will allow us to be more consistent in our process and standardize our collection of information.

Once live, this system will make it easier for the public to file complaints and improve the documentation of violations. Many of the improvements offered by this new system align with recommendations made in this report.

Through a variety of efforts, Cal/OSHA has been able to reduce its overall vacancy rate to 12%—a significant reduction from over 30% just two years ago. This progress is due in part to the implementation of online exams, the hosting of in-person and virtual hiring events, and the creation of a dedicated enforcement hiring and recruitment team to streamline and improve the hiring process.

Cal/OSHA has expanded its presence in the State by adding enforcement offices in Fresno, Santa Barbara and Riverside counties. In addition, an Agricultural Enforcement Task Force and Outreach unit has been created to perform programmed inspections in the agriculture industry and provide outreach to farm workers throughout the State.

These collective efforts reflect our deep commitment to continuous improvement and ensure that Cal/OSHA is better positioned than ever to protect the health and safety of California’s workers.

The recommendations made in the audit report will help focus our future efforts to further Cal/OSHA’s mission of protecting workers in our state from injury and illness and empowering employers and employees with necessary information about keeping workplaces safe.”

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