

Cal/OSHA inspector vacancies continue at 33%

Enforcement budget cut of \$16 million complicates efforts to improve as on-site inspections occur only 40% of the time

Garrett Brown – December 10, 2026

The final update of the year! But not a lot new – which may indicate retention problems for new hires at Cal/OSHA if the vacancy rate stays high even while hiring is occurring.

The latest available data on Cal/OSHA field compliance inspector vacancies – as of October 1st – shows that there are 93 vacant inspector positions for a vacancy rate of 33%. Nine compliance offices have inspector vacancies of 50% or greater, crippling the offices' ability to protect California workers.

California only has one field inspector for every 100,000 workers – much less protective than the inspector to worker ratios in Oregon and Washington state. In July 2020, the CPS HR Consulting firm issued its report on a workload study of Cal/OSHA field inspectors and concluded that 328 inspectors – 45 positions more than those funded in September 2025 – were needed at that time. The inspector workload has increased since 2020.

Meanwhile the Department of Industrial Relations – Cal/OSHA's parent agency – claims the "Enforcement" vacancies in Cal/OSHA on October 31st are no more than 8% [<https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/DOSH-Recruitment-Hiring.html>]. At the November 13th Cal/OSHA Advisory Committee meeting, the Division's Deputy Chief for Enforcement stated that the field inspector vacancy rate was 29%.

A position-by-position hand count of all Cal/OSHA field inspector positions document 93 vacancies and a rate of 33% as of September 30th. To reach an 8% vacancy rate by October 31st – as the DIR website claims – 70 inspectors would have to have been hired in the month of October. That hiring did not occur, and DIR's web chart is inaccurate and unreliable.

The fact that inspector vacancies are still at 33% despite the hiring of recent months may indicate that Cal/OSHA has a significant retention problem. I have heard reports that some new hires have left the agency within 6-9 months of being hired because of the punishing workload and insufficient training and support.

As has been the case for months, nine enforcement District Offices have CSHO vacancy rates at or above 50%. These offices are Fremont (67%), Santa Barbara (67%), PSM Non-Refinery (63%), Long Beach (60%), Bakersfield (57%), San Bernardino (54%), Riverside (50%), San Francisco (50%), and Monrovia (50%).

Two Los Angeles basin District Offices – responsible for protecting workers involved in the clean-up and rebuilding after the January wildfires – have significant CSHO vacancies: Long Beach (60%) and Monrovia (50%).

In addition, there are four District Offices with no District Manager and three offices with no clerical staff. In these offices, field compliance officers have to fill in for managers and clerical workers, further reducing the resources available for field inspections.

The latest available data indicates that 23 field compliance safety and health officers (CSHOs) are “bilingual.” Seven of the 10 members of the Agriculture Safety enforcement unit are bilingual. Region II (Northern California and Central Valley) and Region VIII (Central Valley and Central Coast) are regions with numerous farmworkers, yet both Region II and Region VIII both have one bilingual inspector each. It is estimated that at least 5 million of the state’s 19 million worker labor force speak languages other than English, with many monolingual in their native tongue.

There are only two industrial hygienists among the 197 filled CSHO positions, which means that enforcement inspections involving “health” issues – such as heat, wildfire smoke, airborne lead and silica exposures, noise, and ergonomics – are severely limited by lack of qualified personnel.

Aftermath of State Audit

In July 2025, the California State Auditor issued its report on Cal/OSHA’s performance over a five-year period ending in June 2024. The report documented how numerous worker complaints and incidents that resulted in serious worker injuries simply were not investigated by Cal/OSHA’s enforcement offices.

In the last year the State Auditor examined (fiscal year 2023-24), Cal/OSHA responded to 82% of validated worker complaints with a “letter investigation” – simply a letter to the employer asking them to self-report about workplace hazards – and only 17% of worker complaints generated an on-site inspection. On-site inspections following employer reports of serious worker injuries and illnesses only occurred in 42% of the cases.

In inspections that were conducted, the Auditor found that many enforcement actions were incomplete, failed to follow standard protocols, and resulted in penalties to employers violating state laws that were lower than established by the agency’s own policies and procedures.

Deficiencies in Cal/OSHA’s field response has continued after the audit period. In the first three quarters of 2025, DIR reported that more than half (58%) of all Cal/OSHA’s response to worker complaints, accident reports, planned inspections and referrals consisted of

“letter investigations.” On-site inspections made up 42% of Cal/OSHA’s response in Q1-Q3 2025. (See the accompanying file.)

Chronic CSHO vacancies have generated tremendous pressure on District Managers and CSHOs themselves to “open and close, open and close, open and close” as many perfunctory inspections as possible to keep up with the steady incoming flow of worker complaints and employer accident reports.

The State Auditor report is posted at: <https://www.auditor.ca.gov/reports/2024-115/#summary>

Enforcement budget cut undermines efforts to improve

Cal/OSHA’s Enforcement budget for the current fiscal year 2025-26 was slashed by \$16 million – adding under-funding to under-staffing for the beleaguered worker safety agency. Governor Gavin Newsom – taking a page from President Trump’s playbook – proposed a \$21 million cut for worker protection enforcement, and the Democratic Legislature approved a \$16 million reduction. Cal/OSHA is financed by a completely independent fund which receives no state revenues, and which has run \$200 million surpluses in the last three fiscal years (including the present year). There is no fiscal reason requiring this budget cutback.

California’s worker H&S protections dramatically lower than neighboring states

The standard measure of worker health and safety protection agencies internationally is the ratio of inspectors to workers. The International Labor Organization (ILO) recommends a ratio of 1 inspector to 15,000 workers for advanced industrial countries.

The state of Washington has a ratio of 1 inspector to 28,000 workers, while the state of Oregon has a ratio of 1 inspector to 23,000 workers. This state data comes from the April 2025 “Death on the Job” report issued by the AFL-CIO. The hand count of Cal/OSHA positions on the latest available Organization Chart documents a ratio in California of 1 inspector to 100,000 workers.

Don’t the workers of California deserve the same level of protection that workers in Oregon and Washington enjoy?