

**As Dangerous Heat Spikes in California,
Cal/OSHA inspector vacancies continue at 35%;
Enforcement data shows steep decline of worker protections;
Newsom proposes more budget cuts despite surplus funding**

Garrett Brown – March 16, 2026

A new year but very much the same story at Cal/OSHA – one-third of inspector positions remain vacant; the latest performances data indicates a steep decline in worker protections in terms of response to worker complaints and citations issued to unsafe employers; and Governor Newsom has proposed another round of budget cuts to Cal/OSHA enforcement after slashing \$16 million in the current budget, despite a large surplus in the independent funding source (no state taxes) for Cal/OSHA.

One-third of Cal/OSHA inspector positions still vacant

The latest available data on Cal/OSHA field compliance inspector vacancies – as of December 31, 2025 – shows that there are 100 vacant inspector positions for a vacancy rate of 35%. Five other “unassigned” inspector positions are empty for a total of 105 vacancies. Nine compliance offices have inspector vacancies of 50% or greater, three District Offices have no manager, and four offices have no clerical staff, all crippling the offices’ ability to protect California workers.

California only has one field inspector for every 101,000 workers – much less protective than the inspector to worker ratios in Oregon (1:23,000) and Washington state (1:28,000), and less protective than Federal OSHA (1:84,000) 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 – 40 positions more than funded positions in December 2025 – were needed at that time. The inspector workload has increased since 2020 and there are more than 100 vacant inspector positions.

The fact that inspector vacancies are still at 35% 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 Concord PSM/Non-Refinery (88%), Fremont (70%), Long Beach (70%), Santa Barbara (67%), San Bernardino (62%), Bakersfield (57%), San Francisco (50%), Riverside (50%), and Monrovia (50%). The Concord PSM/Non-Refinery office literally had just one half-time inspector and 8 vacant positions

at the end of December.

Two Los Angeles basin District Offices – responsible for protecting workers involved in the clean-up and rebuilding after the January 2025 wildfires – have significant CSHO vacancies: Long Beach (70%) and Monrovia (50%).

In addition, there are three District Offices with no District Manager and four 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 14 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 filled District Office CSHO positions, which means that enforcement inspections involving “health” issues – such as heat, infectious diseases, wildfire smoke, airborne lead and silica exposures, noise, and ergonomics – are severely limited by lack of qualified personnel.

DIR Website Chart Inaccurate, Again

As has been the case with other staffing information posted on the Cal/OSHA website, the data for December 31st (see attached) is inaccurate and misleading. The position-by-position hand-count of all enforcement inspector positions for December 31st confirms a vacancy rate of 35%. Yet the website chart alleges that 93% of “Enforcement” positions were filled at the end of the year. “Cooking the books” for public consumption will not provide more resources and protection for California workers.

Cal/OSHA inspections data reveals lack of protections

In July 2025, the California State Auditor issued its report on Cal/OSHA’s performance over a five-year period ending in June 2024. 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 have 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 attached file.)

Cal/OSHA data for the first nine months of 2025 – the latest available – shows that the number of on-site inspections increased 5% over the previous year, but the number of citations for unsafe conditions and violations of state plummeted in 2025.

Comparing the first three quarters of 2025 to the same period in 2024:

- Agriculture citations are down 14%;
- Construction citations were down 25%
- Waste management citations were down 28%
- Manufacturing citations were down 37%
- Transportation and warehousing citations were down 50%
- Health care and social assistance citations were down 53%

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.

According to the latest available performance data, Cal/OSHA responds to worker complaints with actual, on-site inspections less than 45% of the time; and even when inspections are conducted, the number of citations issued to correct unsafe and unhealthy conditions have dropped dramatically.

Governor Newsom proposes more cuts to Cal/OSHA's Enforcement budget

In January, Governor's Newsom's proposed budget for fiscal year 2026-27 (starting in July) calls for a cut of \$725,000 from the Cal/OSHA Enforcement funding. This would be on top of the \$16 million slashed from Cal/OSHA's Enforcement budget for the current fiscal year.

Newsom – taking a page from President Trump's playbook – originally proposed a \$21 million cut for the current year, while the Legislature approved the \$16 million reduction. Newsom has proposed an additional 3.3% cut (\$350,000) for the 2026-27 budget of the Process Safety Management, unit which covers the state's 13 oil refineries and more than 1,000 workplaces using highly hazardous chemicals.

Cal/OSHA is financed by a completely independent fund which receives no state tax revenues, and which has run a \$200 million surplus in the last fiscal year and a \$130 million projected surplus in the current fiscal year. The OSH Fund is financed by a very small surcharge on the worker compensation premiums paid by employers. In December 2025, 50% of the OSH Fund was being “held in reserve” and not available for protecting California workers.

There is no fiscal reason requiring this budget cutback, and California workers will pay the price in injuries, illnesses and deaths from weakened regulatory enforcement.