

Cal/OSHA inspector vacancies continue at 36% while \$16 million is cut from the Enforcement budget

Garrett Brown – October 6, 2025

The latest available data on Cal/OSHA field compliance inspector vacancies – as of August 1st – shows that there are 101 vacant inspector positions for a vacancy rate of 36%. Eight compliance offices have inspector vacancies of 50% or greater, crippling the offices' ability to protect California workers.

At the same time, Cal/OSHA's Enforcement budget for the current fiscal year 2025-26 has been 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.

The Cal/OSHA Enforcement offices with inspector vacancies greater than 50% include: Fremont (70%), Santa Barbara (67%), San Bernardino (64%), Van Nuys (58%), Riverside (57%), Monrovia (56%), PSM – Non-Refinery unit (56%), and San Francisco (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 20 field compliance safety and health officers (CSHOs) are “bilingual.” Three of the six members of the Agriculture Safety enforcement unit 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 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 179 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.

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. The state of California has a ratio of 1 inspector to 106,000 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 Organization Chart also documents a ratio in California of 1 inspector to 106,000 workers.

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 – 50 positions more than those funded in July 2025 – were needed at that time. The inspector workload has increased since 2020, but having an inspector of 328 positions would at least reduce the inspector to worker ratio to 1 to 60,500 down from the current 1 to 106,000.

Former Director of the Department of Industrial Relations Katie Hagen, who let the contract to CPS HR Consulting, left DIR in July 2025 to become Chief Executive Officer of the consulting firm. Several other DIR contracts with CPS HR Consulting are in process and reports are pending.

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 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.

Given the now years-long understaffing of Cal/OSHA field inspectors, it is not surprising that the State Auditor found that Cal/OSHA is not capable of meeting either its legal mandate nor its mission of protecting California’s 19 million workers.

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.

DIR was due to provide the State Auditor with a 60-day report on its corrective actions based on the audit on September 17th. DIR’s report has not been made public. The State Auditor report is posted at: <https://www.auditor.ca.gov/reports/2024-115/#summary>