

State of California

DIVISION OF OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH



Memorandum

Date: November 9, 2011

To: All Cal/OSHA Staff

From: *Ellen Widess*
Ellen Widess
Chief
Division of Occupational Safety and Health

Re: "Listening Tour" follow-up

As you all know, early in my administration I asked Garrett Brown and Peter Riley to conduct a listening tour of Cal/OSHA staff across the state to find out what staff felt was working and not working well, what changes staff felt would help improve morale, communication, and organizational structure to improve Cal/OSHA's effectiveness in meeting its important mandate. This was a considerable commitment of time and resources, but well worth the effort.

I want to thank Garrett and Peter for their thoroughness and dedication to this task. They completed 375 interviews, including field inspectors, administrative staff, lawyers, and managers in every office and program. Due to the resource limits created by our many vacancies, we could not interview staff in the public safety units, but hope to do so in the near future. I also want to thank all of you who participated and appreciate your openness and suggestions about how to improve Cal/OSHA.

It is clear that our experienced and dedicated staff is our greatest asset. This is true despite the years of hiring freezes, furloughs, and pressure to do more with less resources. Feedback from the listening tour indicates the tremendous commitment of so many to carry out our vital mandate to ensure safe and healthy workplaces for California's 17 million workers and provide information and consultation to employers to enable them to protect their workers.

The Deputy Chiefs and I have been reviewing the report and summary of staff suggestions and concerns. This was also the major focus of our recent leadership meeting. To give you a sense of the major areas of staff feedback, they include ways to improve communication and accountability at all levels of our organization, improved internal atmosphere, and greater clarity and consistency of Division policies and procedures.

Because the interviews Garrett and Peter conducted were confidential and often touched on personnel matters, we will not be able to release the report. However, I have asked Garrett to write a summary report of the listening tour's main findings and key recommendations. I expect to have the Listening Tour summary report for all staff by the end of the month.

We have already initiated several of the key suggestions-- such as renewed staff meetings (between Regional Managers and headquarters, between RM's and DM's, between DM's and their staff) and the weekly headquarters newsletter, just in the area of communications. Headquarters has been out to more of the district offices, with more visits planned. I have enjoyed every meeting with staff and learned much from all of you. Input from the field has

directly informed many headquarters’ decisions and strategies, including our successful campaign to protect mission critical travel and save our cell phones. There has been more attention to and communication with Southern California offices—a serious issue raised by many staff.

The biggest impact of greater communication and coordination between the field and Headquarters is our ability to hire 43 new staff for now (and hopefully more to come) ---in enforcement, consultation, administration, legal and medical units. This would not have happened if we could not demonstrate the compelling needs--- where headquarters could rely on the detailed assessment of workloads and mandates. We realize there are many more needs we cannot address yet. There is obviously much more to do. Other improvements suggested by staff are currently in the works.

We have also formed a Working Group at Headquarters, consisting of Garrett Brown, Lynda Christy, Deeg Gold and Peter Riley, to begin meeting regularly to start implementing as many of the staff recommendations as are feasible and that we have the resources to undertake. Some proposals are simple, no cost or low cost, and would clearly improve the Division’s functioning and effectiveness. Other ideas need more evaluation and thought about feasibility and resources to implement them. Some proposals clearly involve resources beyond our reach at present, but we know would benefit our agency, but necessarily are on a longer term track.

The members of the Working Group all have many other major assignments in the Division, so this will be a process of months rather than weeks. I appreciate very much the added workloads they have assumed. I have asked the group to begin work immediately, however, and to give me a progress report in the first quarter of next year as to what new initiatives have been made and what are pending.

The Listening Tour has given us a rich batch of suggestions. Yet it is not the only opportunity for field input as we strive to improve Cal/OSHA—internally and externally. If any staff member has additional ideas, suggestions, proposals or recommendations, please communicate those to the members of the Working Group. Thanks to all of you for your efforts to make the Division better able to do its important work of protecting the safety and health of California’s workers.