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Cal/OSHA District Office Vacancies Hit Critical Level

The latest available data on Cal/OSHA's field compliance inspector levels documents a dramatic and dangerous hollowing out of the worker protection's agency capacity to enforce workplace health and safety regulations.

An office-by-office head count of filled and vacant compliance health and safety officer (CSHO) positions as of July 1, 2023 (not released by the Department of Industrial Relations until September 5th) reveals Cal/OSHA has 95 vacant field inspector positions for a vacancy rate of 35%. If the additional fully funded 14 vacant CSHO positions being held in reserve are included, there are 109 vacant CSHO positions for a rate of 38%.

The senior manager positions for Region 3 (San Diego, Santa Ana and San Bernardino) and the Process Safety Management (PSM) unit are vacant.

There are three District Offices without managers – Fresno, Van Nuys, and Santa Ana LETF offices – and four offices without any clerical staff – American Canyon, Los Angeles, Concord PSM Refinery, and Concord PSM Non-refinery units.

There are 10 District Offices that have CSHO vacancies of more than 35% of enforcement personnel:

- San Francisco, 67%
- San Bernardino, 62%
- Bakersfield, 50%
- Long Beach, 50%
- Fremont, 45%
- San Diego, 45%
- Van Nuys, 45%
- Sacramento, 42%
- PSM Refinery unit, 40%
- PSM Non-Refinery unit, 40%

The PSM Refinery unit has only 10 positions – four of which are vacant – leaving only six CSHOs to inspect the state's 15 operating oil refineries. The PSM unit has no regional manager and Cal/OSHA does not use all the funds generated annually by a fee on the refineries' production.

Overall, Cal/OSHA's inspector to worker ratio is 1 inspector to every 110,000 workers in the state. This compares to ratios of 1 to 27,000 in Washington state and 1 to 26,000 in Oregon. Surely the workers of California deserve the same level of protection as workers in Oregon and Washington.

Other notable aspects of the most recent staffing data include:

- There are only 16 field enforcement inspectors at Cal/OSHA that are certified in speaking languages other than English;
- There is a vacancy rate of 32% (12 attorney positions) in the Cal/OSHA Legal Unit which handles employer appeals of citations, rulemaking, and legislative analysis;
- The Consultation unit (which provides free service to employers) has a vacancy rate of 28% in field consultants, and four of the seven Consultation Area Offices do not have an Area Manager.

Despite publicized efforts to fill these Cal/OSHA vacancies by the Department of Industrial Relations, the failure to do so over a period of years now means California cannot effectively protect the health, safety, and lives of the state's 19 million workers.

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