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Newsom Dismisses Workplace Safety Regulator Ahead of Important Vote



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Cook Giovanni Gomez preparing chicken on the grill for food orders in the busy kitchen of the El Pollo Loco restaurant in Agoura Hills on Aug. 18, 2021. (Al Seib / Los Angeles Times via Getty Images)

Gov. Gavin Newsom removed an outspoken occupational safety expert from

a powerful regulatory body that adopts California's workplace safety rules.

In addition to ending Laura Stock's term as a member of the **Occupational Safety & Health Standards Board**, Newsom demoted David Thomas, the former chairperson.

Several worker advocates told KQED they were suspicious of the shakeup with just over a week before the board is **scheduled to vote** on indoor heat illness **prevention rules**. They are worried that the board could become less protective of vulnerable workers.

"It's concerning that a member like Laura Stock, who has so much expertise and is so committed to workplace health and safety, would be removed," said Tim Shadix, legal director at the Warehouse Worker Resource Center, which is pushing for the indoor heat illness protections.

Newsom's office confirmed that Stock is no longer on the workplace safety board. Joseph Alioto Jr., the San Francisco trial lawyer Newsom **appointed** last summer, was named chair. A spokesperson for the governor declined to comment on why

Newsom made the changes or when he'll make an appointment to fill the vacant seat on the seven-member body.

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In an interview with KQED, Stock said the governor's office told her on June 7 that she was terminated from the board. When she asked for more information, according to Stock, the person only said that Newsom had "decided to go in a different direction."

"I was shocked and surprised," said Stock, who directs the Labor Occupational Health Program at UC Berkeley. "There had been no indication that this decision was coming."

Stock spent 12 years on the board, contributing to the passage of life-saving protections for hazards such as COVID-19, lead poisoning and **silica dust from engineered stone** that has killed and disabled countertop fabrication workers.

"I was inspired by the many workers who had the courage to come and share their experiences and speak up about what was

needed to protect them on the job,” Stock said.

A representative of a large employer association did not lament Stock’s departure, claiming she often failed to listen to the concerns of member companies about proposed health and safety requirements.

“We as business stakeholders never really felt like Laura had any capacity for dispassionate analysis of the issues laid in front of her,” said the representative, who requested anonymity because they feared reprisal from Stock if she accepted another regulatory post. “She always had a position. You always knew how she’d vote. She never asked any questions of any criticism we would lay out.”

Heat illness protections for indoor workers have been delayed for years. In March, the board was expected to approve new requirements, but the Newsom administration **withdrew its support** seemingly at the last minute. Facing outrage from workers and their advocates, Stock and Thomas, a labor representative, openly criticized the move and called for a symbolic vote on the regulations. It passed unanimously.

Shadix questioned whether the board changes could be connected to those actions.

“It certainly seems a little bit suspicious and worrying that two of the members who were most outspoken for moving that indoor heat standard are now being demoted and removed,” he said. “We hope that this is not going to impact that being voted on and approved next week. Every summer that goes by without that standard in place, we see more suffering.”

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