

# U.S. Labor Department to regulate worker safety alongside Cal-OSHA

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SACRAMENTO — The U.S. Department of Labor was scheduled today to assume "concurrent jurisdiction" over worker safety standards in California as the future of the embattled California Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Cal-OSHA) remained uncertain.

U.S. Labor Department acting regional administrator James Lake said federal officials "are fulfilling our mandate to ensure that working men and women in California are protected against workplace hazards."

Gov. George Deukmejian last January ordered the Cal-OSHA program — which is widely regarded as superior to federal enforcement standards — be dismantled, cutting 366 jobs and saving the state \$8 million. The funds have been restored by the Legislature, but the governor is expected to blue-pencil that appropriation when he receives the now-overdue state budget from the Legislature.

Deukmejian has been strongly criticized by legislators, labor leaders and some segments of the business communi-

ty, who say his action will jeopardize worker safety and cost the state more money over the long term.

A Sacramento Superior Court judge ruled in May that the governor did not have authority to dismantle the program without legislative concurrence. A hearing on a request by labor groups for a preliminary injunction to halt the cuts is scheduled July 6 before Sacramento Superior Court Judge Roger Warren. Representing labor groups throughout the state in that suit is the San Francisco firm of Remcho, Johansen & Purcell.

Another suit against the governor's action, brought by public employee groups affected by the cuts, is also pending in San Francisco Superior Court.

The governor's action was to take effect today with the beginning of the new fiscal year. Federal OSHA officials announced last month that they would assume "concurrent jurisdiction" over OSHA standards pending resolution of the state budget and court actions to halt the cuts.

Cal-OSHA, which maintains 27 offices and employs 500, has been decimated by attrition in the wake of the governor's ac-

tion. Some layoff notices have been sent to OSHA employees as well. Ron Rinaldi, Deukmejian's head of the Department of Industrial Relations and the governor's chief spokesman on the matter, has said the governor has no plans to change his position on Cal-OSHA.

In assuming mutual jurisdiction with state officials over worker safety in California, OSHA head John A. Pendergrass sent letters to "both industry and labor leaders in the state seeking their counsel and cooperation in bringing about a smooth change," according to the U.S. Labor Department.

Lake said five "transitional" OSHA area offices have been staffed and are now operated in Sacramento, Walnut Creek, West Covina, Long Beach and San Diego.

"We are fulfilling our mandate to ensure that working men and women in California are protected against workplace hazards," Lake said. "Our area offices are staffed with seasoned OSHA safety and health professionals drawn from around the nation who are dedicated to carrying out a strong enforcement program in the state."