DAILY PRESS

COURTS

A Barstow man died after half a year in jail with no trial. Now his family plans to sue San Bernardino County for 'justice.'

Charlie McGee Victorville Daily Press

Published 3:34 p.m. PT Oct. 15, 2021 | **Updated 11:03 a.m. PT Oct. 16, 2021**

A 29-year-old Barstow man was going on seven months of confinement without a trial when he died in one of California's biggest county jails for reasons that remain murky.

Now, family members are preparing to file a lawsuit in December with high-profile legal backing. Their targets are San Bernardino County, its sheriff's department and the Rancho Cucamonga-based West Valley Detention Center.

Their allegation: The law-enforcement system killed Isaiah Hernandez-Sanchez by depriving him "of his rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, including his right to adequate conditions of confinement and necessary medical care," according to a claim for damages that the family's attorney filed in San Bernardino County on Wednesday.

Later that day, family and friends organized at West Valley to protest at the site of Hernandez-Sanchez's death. They displayed a variety of old photos and donned signs with phrases such as "Justice 4 Isaiah" and "West Valley killed my brother!"

In a separate move on Wednesday, a county judge dismissed all charges — to which Hernandez-Sanchez had pleaded not guilty — posthumously under California's "interest of justice" provision, according to court records.

The family's claim adds another chapter to the case.

Hernandez-Sanchez's mother, Cynthia, and a guardian acting on behalf of his two young daughters, Andrea Baker, are the named claimants. Representing them is Ed Lyman, an attorney at The Cochran Firm, which is based in Los Angeles and named after late founder Johnnie Cochran.

The claim accuses the county, sheriff's department and jail of denying Hernandez-Sanchez his prescribed diabetes and mental-illness medications, obstructing his communication with family, and allowing guards to target him with abuse, mockery and neglect.

The family argues that county authorities knew — or at least, had a legal obligation to know — this alleged treatment "would result, and did result, in the loss of his life."

By enabling such treatment, it continues, the family now faces "substantial economic and noneconomic damages," such as "loss of support, loss of past and future earnings," costly expenses and emotional suffering.

San Bernardino County and the sheriff's department declined to comment on "this pending litigation" for this story.

To sue the government in California, Lyman said one first has to file a claim with the relevant county and wait 45 days from that time.

"Once the County rejects our claim, we will file a civil rights action in federal court to hold the sheriff's department and its officials accountable for killing Isaiah," Lyman told the Daily Press.

'He looked like an old man'

Barstow Police Department arrested Hernandez-Sanchez on March 4.

Lyman said the arrest resulted from an "altercation" Hernandez-Sanchez had while "suffering from symptoms of high blood sugar" with his younger sister, Emma, who called Barstow Police.

Hernandez-Sanchez's older sister, Erica, said she asked one of the officers why he was carrying a shotgun upon their arrival, according to Lyman. "My brother is just mentally ill," she said.

The officers arrested Hernandez-Sanchez after they found him "hiding in his bed, under the covers, crying," according to Lyman. Erica says she explained to them that her brother was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes and multiple mental illnesses that required a few medications, but the officers "brushed her off."

Erica called the Barstow Police station later that night to reiterate her concerns and asked to bring his medication in, but she said the station rejected her offer.

Barstow Police declined to comment for this story.

She then learned Barstow Police had transferred Hernandez-Sanchez to the High Desert Detention Center in Adelanto, placing him into sheriff's department custody.

On the day of his arrest, according to court records, the county District Attorney's Office filed two felony charges against Hernandez-Sanchez for "criminal threats."

California law says threatening "death or great bodily injury to another person" is a felony "even if there is no intent of actually carrying it out," so long as it causes a person "to be in sustained fear for his or her own safety or for his or her immediate family's safety."

This felony is punishable by no more than one year in a county jail or state prison, the law states.

The DA's office sought an enhancement of the punishment in Hernandez-Sanchez's case to what would likely be a sentence of between 25 years and life in prison with a conviction. Court records show that the county alleged he had violated California's "Three Strikes" law, which says anyone with two "violent" or "serious" felony convictions on their record must face a 25-year to life sentence for any additional felonies they go on to accrue.

Aside from the charges issued last March, the Daily Press could not identify any felony convictions or charges against Hernandez-Sanchez in San Bernardino County Superior Court's electronic records database. It is possible such records exist in a different jurisdiction.

County records do show that Hernandez-Sanchez's mother, Cynthia, obtained a two-year restraining order against him in 2016 over domestic violence-related concerns that did not involve children. No felonies appear to have been involved in that case, however, and Cynthia is now one of the claimants seeking accountability for her son's death.

For the first week after Hernandez-Sanchez's arrest, his mother and older sister said they "repeatedly called" High Desert Detention Center and asked to bring his medications in, but they said they were rejected and told "their brother was fine and would be taken care of."

A week into his detainment, Hernandez-Sanchez "called to inform his family he had been transferred to the West Valley Detention Center," Lyman said.

West Valley is one of the largest county-level jails in California, according to its website. It has a payroll of more than 600 employees and books between 50,000 and 60,000 people

For half a year from that point, the family said it called West Valley "on an almost daily basis" to reiterate their medication concerns. In response, "staffers purported to have checked up on Isaiah and reported that he was healthy and doing fine," Lyman said.

Hernandez-Sanchez painted a different picture when speaking directly with his family. He said the jail was not providing him his medications, causing him to face untreated diabetes symptoms such as:

An inability to keep food down without vomiting on himself
An inability to control his bladder, leading him to soil his pants and bed
Developing an untreated infection on his foot, and struggling to walk.

"The guards would ridicule him for peeing on himself and the bed," according to Erica, Hernandez-Sanchez's older sister.

She said she last saw Hernandez-Sanchez at a Sept. 7 hearing. She "could hardly recognize him."

"My brother was pale. His eyes were glazed over. He had lost weight. He looked like an old man," she said in a statement shared by Lyman. "But the Deputy kept pushing him along."

Hernandez-Sanchez told his family the jail denied him a wheelchair upon requests, adding that he "had to borrow a cellmate's wheelchair just to get to the phones."

His family members said their final call with Hernandez-Sanchez came on Sept. 13, two days before his death. He said, in slurred words, that "this was the last time he could ever call" given the difficulty he faced reaching the phones. They then said their goodbyes.

'Constantly shielded'

Hernandez-Sanchez first appeared in court on March 8. He pleaded not guilty to the felony charges and asked the court to deny the county's request for a "Three Strikes" enhancement.

Judge Joseph Widman set a $200,000 bail for him in response, according to court records. The family said it could not afford such a cost.

The first in a slew of pretrial hearings occurred on March 16, but Hernandez-Sanchez was not present for his defense that day. Instead, authorities kept him at West Valley "in quarantine until to be determined for the health and safety of all involved," according to court records.

A public defender attended the March 16 hearing on Hernandez-Sanchez's behalf. A few weeks later, the Barstow resident retained private attorneys Melvin Betnun and Roger Chien, who were relieved June 30. The defense then returned to a different public defender.

Proceedings were suspended at least twice — on May 10 and Aug. 2 — when the court declared doubt about Hernandez-Sanchez's mental health potentially invalidating the county's prosecution.

But the court ended both suspensions by declaring him mentally competent and finding good cause to continue the proceedings, first on June 7 and then on Aug. 30.

Roughly two weeks after that second reinstatement of proceedings, Hernandez-Sanchez died.

The sheriff's department announced his death on Sept. 20, five days after it reportedly occurred. It said deputies responded to "a possible medical emergency" and found Hernandez-Sanchez "unresponsive on his bunk" in West Valley at about 10:40 a.m. Sept. 15.

Hernandez-Sanchez was later pronounced dead at a local hospital, according to the department, which did not identify the hospital.

The sheriff's Specialized Investigations Division took over the death investigation soon after it occurred. An autopsy to determine the cause of his death was conducted by the county Coroner's Division, which is part of the sheriff's department.

The family said sheriff's Det. Cory Drost and Sgt. Joseph Steers informed them of Hernandez-Sanchez's death at their home a day later, on Sept. 16.

The officers "were accompanied by a supposed supervisor from the West Valley Detention Center who interrogated the family about what medications Isaiah was treated with," Lyman said. But the officers told the family a toxicology report was still in the works and shared little detail on how Hernandez-Sanchez perished.

Family members said that last week, on Oct. 7, they spoke again with Steers. Hernandez-Sanchez's mother, Cynthia, alleges that the sergeant "told me that he knows we have a lawyer and he's not threatened."

The claim filed by the family does not blame specific individuals for his death.

Rather, it accuses an unlimited number of "unknown individuals" — including deputies; directors; independent contractors and third parties performing services for the county; the sheriff's department and West Valley.

Lyman told the Daily Press the county coroner has not provided him or the family any autopsy results, "and I doubt they will." He added that attempts by public officials to delay or hide documentation of in-custody deaths are a broader problem.

Lyman referenced another in-custody death at West Valley this year that he is currently fighting in federal court, saying he requested documents under the California Public Records Act six months ago and still has not received a response in that case.

"This information is constantly shielded from these families and the public at-large, so we have attorneys working at the county level that are breaking the law too," Lyman said. "I think a lot of the time, people forget who they work for."

Charlie McGee covers the city of Barstow and its surrounding communities for the Daily Press. He is also a Report for America corps member with the GroundTruth Project, an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization dedicated to supporting the next generation of journalists in the U.S. and around the world. McGee may be reached at 760-955-5341 or cmcgee@gannett.com. Follow him on Twitter @bycharliemcgee.

https://www.fontanaheraldnews.com/news/attorneys-for-inmates-family-file-claim-against-west-valley-detention-center/article_80f31664-2e0e-11ec-aea8-1b2f5313adf0.html

Attorneys for inmate's family file claim against West Valley Detention Center

By RUSSELL INGOLD and GILBERT GONZALEZ
Oct 15, 2021



Emma Hernandez speaks during a protest at West Valley Detention Center on Oct. 13. Her brother, Isaiah Hernandez photo by Gilbert Gonzalez)

During the month of September, three inmates — including a Fontana resident — died after being in custody at West Valley Detention Center (WVDC) in Rancho Cucamonga.

According to the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department:

• Brian Alberts, 43, of Apple Valley was found dead in his cell;

• Isaiah Hernandez, 29, of Barstow was found unresponsive in his cell and later died at a hospital;

• Russell Garcia, 56, of Fontana experienced a medical emergency and was transported to a hospital, where he died 11 days later.

In response to the death of Hernandez, a government damages claim has been filed against San Bernardino County and WVDC by civil rights attorneys Brian Dunn and Ed Lyman of Cochran Firm California.

On Oct. 13, family members and friends of Hernandez held a protest at WVDC to denounce what they said was the poor treatment of the inmate at the jail, which is operated by the Sheriff's Department.

"Hernandez, who suffered from Type 2 diabetes and mental health conditions, was arrested by Barstow police in March after having an altercation with a family member," Lyman said. "He spent seven months at the WVDC, during which time he was purportedly denied medication to manage his diabetes, despite him and his family continuously voicing concerns that his health was deteriorating and he was suffering symptoms consistent with untreated Type 2 diabetes. This included slurring his words, complaining of chest pains and requesting a wheelchair days before his death — all of which were signs to his family that he was going into a diabetic coma."

Hernandez died on Sept. 15.

"During the seven months he was detained, WVDC staff repeatedly told his family they had checked up on Hernandez and that he was healthy and doing fine," Lyman said.

The protesters alleged that the conditions at the WVDC as well as negligence throughout the facility contributed to his death.

Emma Hernandez, one of Isaiah's sisters who spoke at the event, said that her brother "suffered severe neglect, abuse, humiliation, and was denied human rights" in a previous message to the Herald News.

"He had two 10-year-old daughters (twins), as well as two sisters and a mother, who are completely devastated and torn apart," Emma Hernandez said. "Especially knowing how his last months were spent due to the horrific environment at the West Valley Detention Center."

She said she was seeking justice for Isaiah Hernandez as well as the other persons who “have suffered and passed away while in the care of the West Valley Detention Center.”

A Sheriff’s Department spokesperson said the county would not be commenting on the pending litigation.

https://www.fontanaheraldnews.com/news/san-bernardino-county-and-city-of-fontana-offer-flu-and-covid-19-vaccinations-and-testing/article_b65466b2-2e06-11ec-88c6-afa6240466bc.html

San Bernardino County and City of Fontana offer flu and COVID-19 vaccinations and testing

Oct 15, 2021



The Fontana Community Senior Center (16710 Ceres Avenue) is hosting two free flu and COVID-19 vaccination events open to all San Bernardino County residents on Oct. 27 and Nov. 17 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The County of San Bernardino, in partnership with the City of Fontana, is offering flu and COVID-19 vaccinations and testing at two locations to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and help keep the community safe during flu season.

• The Fontana Community Senior Center (16710 Ceres Avenue) is hosting two free flu and COVID-19 vaccination events open to all San Bernardino County residents on Oct. 27 and Nov. 17 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

• The Jessie Turner Health and Fitness Center (15556 Summit Avenue) is hosting free COVID-19 and flu vaccinations and testing on a regular basis, Monday through Friday from noon to 8 p.m. A parent or guardian must be present for anyone under age 18.

Vaccines offered by San Bernardino County:

• Flu vaccine is available for individuals ages 3 and older.

• Pfizer vaccine for COVID-19 is available for individuals ages 12 and older.

• Johnson & Johnson one-dose vaccine for COVID-19 is available for individuals ages 18 and older.

To make an appointment:

• For COVID-19 testing, go to https://sbcovid19.com/testing-sites/.

• For flu and COVID-19 vaccinations, go to ca.gov.

Residents can also call the COVID-19 hotline at (909) 387-3911, Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Persons are urged to not call any City of Fontana offices to schedule a COVID-19 testing or vaccination appointment.

For more information, visit Fontana.org/coronavirus.

DAILY PRESS

NEWS

Barstow locals gather to oppose COVID vaccine mandates

Charlie McGee Victorville Daily Press

Published 5:32 p.m. PT Oct. 17, 2021

Several dozen Barstow residents gathered next to the northbound exit of Interstate 15 across from Barstow Station on Sunday to demonstrate against COVID-19 vaccine mandates, displaying messages ranging from "COVID = 99% recovery with NO VAX" to "Arrest Fauci & Gates!"

A steady stream of drivers honked horns and waved while passing through the intersection.

In California, some professionals — such as healthcare workers — are required to get the COVID-19 vaccine. The Biden administration's plans to require large companies to ensure workers are vaccinated or tested regularly for the virus could be finalized next week. According to data from the California Department of Public Health, from Sept. 26 to Oct. 2, unvaccinated people were seven times more likely to get COVID-19 than fully vaccinated people.

Some signs and flags were indirectly related to the virus, such as "Make America First Again" and "Infowars," which respectively reference former President Donald Trump and the popular but controversial conspiracy-theory show hosted by Alex Jones.

Charlie McGee covers the city of Barstow and its surrounding communities for the Daily Press. He is also a Report for America corps member with the GroundTruth Project, an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization dedicated to supporting the next generation of journalists in the U.S. and around the world. McGee may be reached at 760-955-5341 or cmcgee@gannett.com. Follow him on Twitter @bycharliemcgee.

As state tightens vaccine rules, some parents, school employees urge walkouts today

Statewide vaccine mandate for school employees kicks in to high gear on Monday, with jobs on the line and pushback from some school employees, parents and students.



LAUSD parents and students rallied against student COVID-19 vaccine mandates at the corner of Victory Blvd and Balboa Blvd. in Lake Balboa on Monday, October 18, 2021, in conjunction with a statewide Schools Walkout campaign. (Photo by Dean Musgrove, Los Angeles Daily News/SCNG)

By RYAN CARTER | rcarter@scng.com | Daily News

PUBLISHED: October 18, 2021 at 8:05 a.m. | UPDATED: October 18, 2021 at 8:18 a.m.

Amid debate over intensified vaccination requirements statewide, scattered walkouts by students and staff were urged by parent and teacher groups around the region on Monday, Oct. 18.

Word of possible sit-outs and other protests spread on social media over the weekend, with activists urging parents to pull their children from school — and teachers and other school employees to join them by staying home from work.

Demonstrations were urged throughout the state — with the largest, the "Our Children, Our Choice!" rally, expected in Sacramento at 10 a.m. Monday, according to media reports. Cal Matters reported that around 2,500 people intend to protest in front of the state Capitol building in Sacramento, citing a permit approved by the California Highway Patrol.

It wasn't clear how the protests would impact individual school districts, or how large the movement would be in Los Angeles County.

Newsom previously decreed that all teachers and school staff in public and private schools had to be vaccinated by Oct. 15, or undergo weekly COVID-19 testing.

Also, California became the first state to mandate vaccinations or testing for eligible students studying on campus when Newsom signed the requirement Oct. 1. Newsom's goal is to have all students in seventh through 12th grades vaccinated by next fall once the shots gain final federal approval for everyone 12 and over. Students who don't comply can be assigned to independent study, though exemptions for medical and religious reasons would be considered.

The state plans to require students in kindergarten through sixth grades to get the vaccine, Newsom said, when the anticipated final federal approval is granted for students ages 5 to 11.

Summer Bailey, whose son is a senior at West Torrance High School, said he would not attend school on Monday. He'll miss English, a government class and an ASB meeting. But she said he will be allowed to attend football practice.

The 17-year-old, like most high schoolers, spent nearly two academic years away from the classroom. He attended online school part of sophomore year and his entire junior year.

Bailey is a founder of South Bay Parents Push Back — a Facebook group advocating for vaccine and mask choice for students that has expanded to about 500 members.

"It's really disheartening and sad — and it's not fair," said Bailey, about the mandates. "All we want is the option, or the choice."

Participating in the sit-in today, however, is not so much for high schoolers like her son, said Bailey. Rather, it's a way to advocate for younger students who suffered mentally and physically from lack of social interaction in the classroom.

Still, said Bailey, in her experience, schools are unwilling to work with parents who aren't ready to accept vaccinations. Students, she said, feel excluded.

And she added, for her this is not a political issue.

"I know people think that this is far right, political and all that," said Bailey, who added her group has a mixture of vaccinated, unvaccinated as well as anti-mask and pro-mask parents.

"We all understand each other's choices, and we respect that," Bailey said. "We understand what can happen if you start taking away people's choice."



Gov. Gavin Newsom (Jane Tyska/Bay Area News Group)

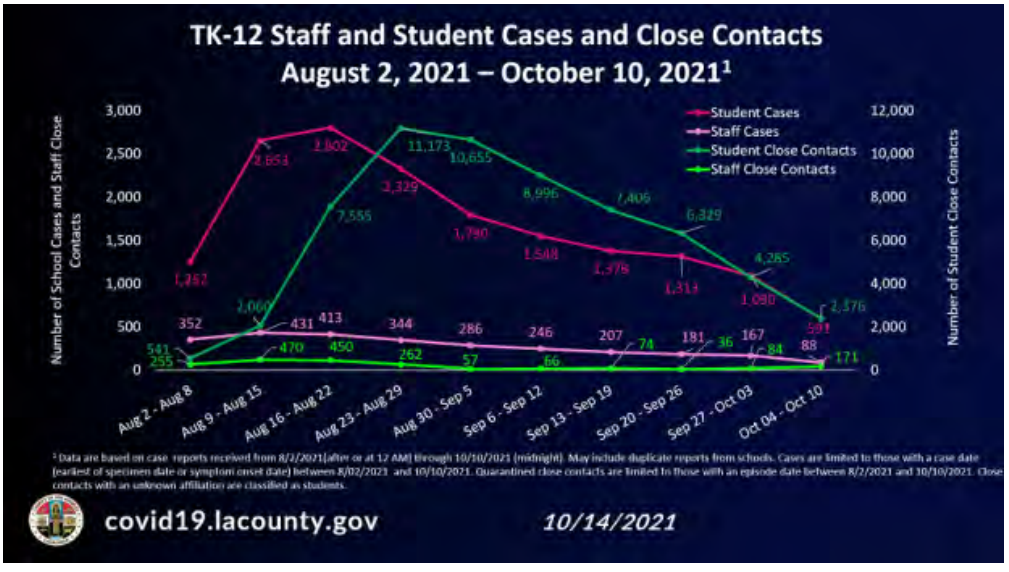
Newsom issued the first-of-its-kind order in August, at a time when the delta variant of COVID-19 was ravaging the region during a nationwide summer surge.

Since then, after a doubled-down effort to encourage masking and vaccinations, rates statewide and in Los Angeles County have waned. But public health officials lament a lagging rate of vaccinations that is keeping the region short of its goal of much-coveted herd immunity.

Officials fear the county is still vulnerable to yet another surge — and the emergence of more variants — during the winter flu season.

Newsom defended his move — and the efficacy and safety of vaccines — in a statement: “This is about protecting our children and school staff and keeping them safely in the classroom. Vaccines work and are how we end the pandemic.”

The order, issued Aug. 11 and effective Oct. 15, requires verification of vaccination status among eligible K-12 school workers statewide. It establishes diagnostic screening tests of unvaccinated workers in an attempt to minimize the risk that they will transmit infections while on K-12 school campuses, where many students 12 and younger are not yet eligible for vaccines.



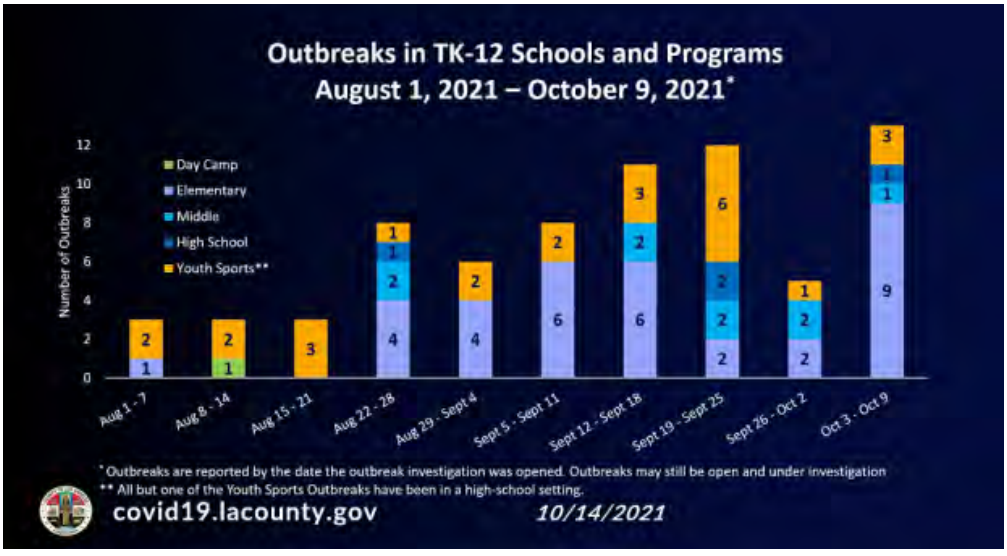
Public health officials have been buoyed by the success of measures such as masking, distancing and quarantines already happening at the more than 3,000 schools across L.A. County that serve a total of about 1.7 million students.

The virus’ trend lines have been falling at schools. The week ending Oct. 3 saw 1,090 student cases. A week later that number dropped to 591. And two weeks ago, there were 167 staff cases. Last week there were only 67.

“These are strikingly low numbers,” County Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer said last week. “The very low numbers represent a lot of hard work by superintendents, staff, parents and students to consistently implement the mitigation strategies. And these efforts make it possible to keep our school community safe.”

Concern remains over the threat of outbreaks in local schools.

Since Aug. 16, there were a total of 21 outbreaks in youth sports programs. There were 394 cases and 1,527 contacts. Most of those infected were unvaccinated, officials said.



In Los Angeles County, the state's mandate kicking in this week coincides with the launching of the Los Angeles Unified School District's worker requirements. District employees at the second-largest school system in the nation who get their first dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccine can remain working on campus, provided they get their second shot by Nov. 15.

The nation's second-largest school district gave employees through the weekend to receive their first dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccines or the one-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Those who did not provide proof of vaccination by the end of the weekend could be barred from campus come Monday And unless granted an exemption or accommodation to work remotely, they would effectively be placed on temporary paid leave.

The government has fully approved the COVID-19 vaccine for those 16 and over but only granted an emergency authorization for anyone 12 to 15. Once federal regulators fully approve the vaccine for that group, the state will require students in seventh through 12th grades to get vaccinated in both public and private schools, Newsom's office said.

The requirements have not sat well with many, however, reflecting the fractious nature of the virus that has not only killed but divided people over pandemic-era policy.

At LAUSD, which has a more stringent policy than the state's, students 12 and older who participate in in-person extracurricular programs must have received their first vaccine dose by Oct. 3 and their second dose by Oct. 31. For students not in those programs, all 12 and older must receive their first dose by Nov. 21 and their second by Dec. 19. All other students must receive their first dose within 30 days after turning 12 and their second dose no later than eight weeks after their 12th birthday. Students would have to provide proof of vaccination by uploading the information to the district's Daily Pass web app before Jan. 10 in order to access LAUSD school facilities.

The district has been sued over the mandate, its challengers arguing that the requirement is unlawful because it does not allow for religious or personal exemptions.

A lawsuit was filed last week on behalf of a parent of a 12-year-old student who claims that their child, along with other LAUSD students who do not comply with the mandate, would be discriminated against by being denied an in-person education and the opportunity to participate in extracurricular programs.

A similar lawsuit was filed against San Diego Unified by the group Let Them Breathe, which was formed in opposition to school masking mandates and which subsequently launched a Let Them Choose initiative to oppose COVID-19 vaccine mandates for students.

The San Diego school board voted in September to require students 16 and older to be vaccinated against the coronavirus in the coming months.

Culver City Unified School District has also issued a requirement — proof of vaccination by Nov. 19.

Staff writers Lisa Jacobs and Linh Tat contributed to this story, along with the Associated Press.

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Threats, Resignations and 100 New Laws: Why Public Health Is in Crisis

An examination of hundreds of health departments around the country shows that the nation may be less prepared for the next pandemic than it was for the current one.




By Mike Baker and Danielle Ivory

Oct. 18, 2021, 3:00 a.m. ET

PORT ANGELES, Wash. — As she leaves work, Dr. Allison Berry keeps a vigilant eye on her rearview mirror, watching the vehicles around her, weighing if she needs to take a more circuitous route home. She must make sure nobody finds out where she lives.

When the pandemic first hit the northern edge of Washington's Olympic Peninsula, Dr. Berry was a popular family physician and local health officer, trained in biostatistics and epidemiology at Johns Hopkins University. She processed Covid-19 test kits in her garage and delivered supplies to people in quarantine, leading a mobilization that kept her counties with some of the fewest deaths in the nation.

But this summer, as a Delta variant wave pushed case numbers to alarming levels, Dr. Berry announced a mask mandate. In September, she ordered vaccination requirements for indoor dining.

By then, to many in the community, the enemy was not the virus. It was her.

Dr. Berry should be attacked "on sight," one resident wrote online. Someone else suggested bringing back public hangings. "Dr. Berry, we are coming for you," a man warned at a public meeting. An angry crowd swarmed into the courthouse during a briefing on the Covid-19 response one day, looking for her, and protesters also showed up at her house, until they learned that Dr. Berry was no longer living there.

"The places where it is most needed to put in more stringent measures, it's the least possible to do it," Dr. Berry said. "Either because you're afraid you're going to get fired, or you're afraid you're going to get killed. Or both."

State and local public health departments across the country have endured not only the public's fury, but widespread staff defections, burnout, firings, unpredictable funding and a significant erosion in their authority to impose the health orders that were critical to America's early response to the pandemic.

While the coronavirus has killed more than 700,000 in the United States in nearly two years, a more invisible casualty has been the nation's public health system. Already underfunded and neglected even before the pandemic, public health has been further undermined in ways that could resound for decades to come. A New York Times review of hundreds of health departments in all 50 states indicates that local public health across the country is less equipped to confront a pandemic now than it was at the beginning of 2020.



Dr. Allison Berry, left, health officer for Clallam and Jefferson Counties in Washington, is escorted to her car by Undersheriff Ron Cameron after a Covid-19 briefing in Port Angeles, Wash., in September. Ruth Fremson/The New York Times

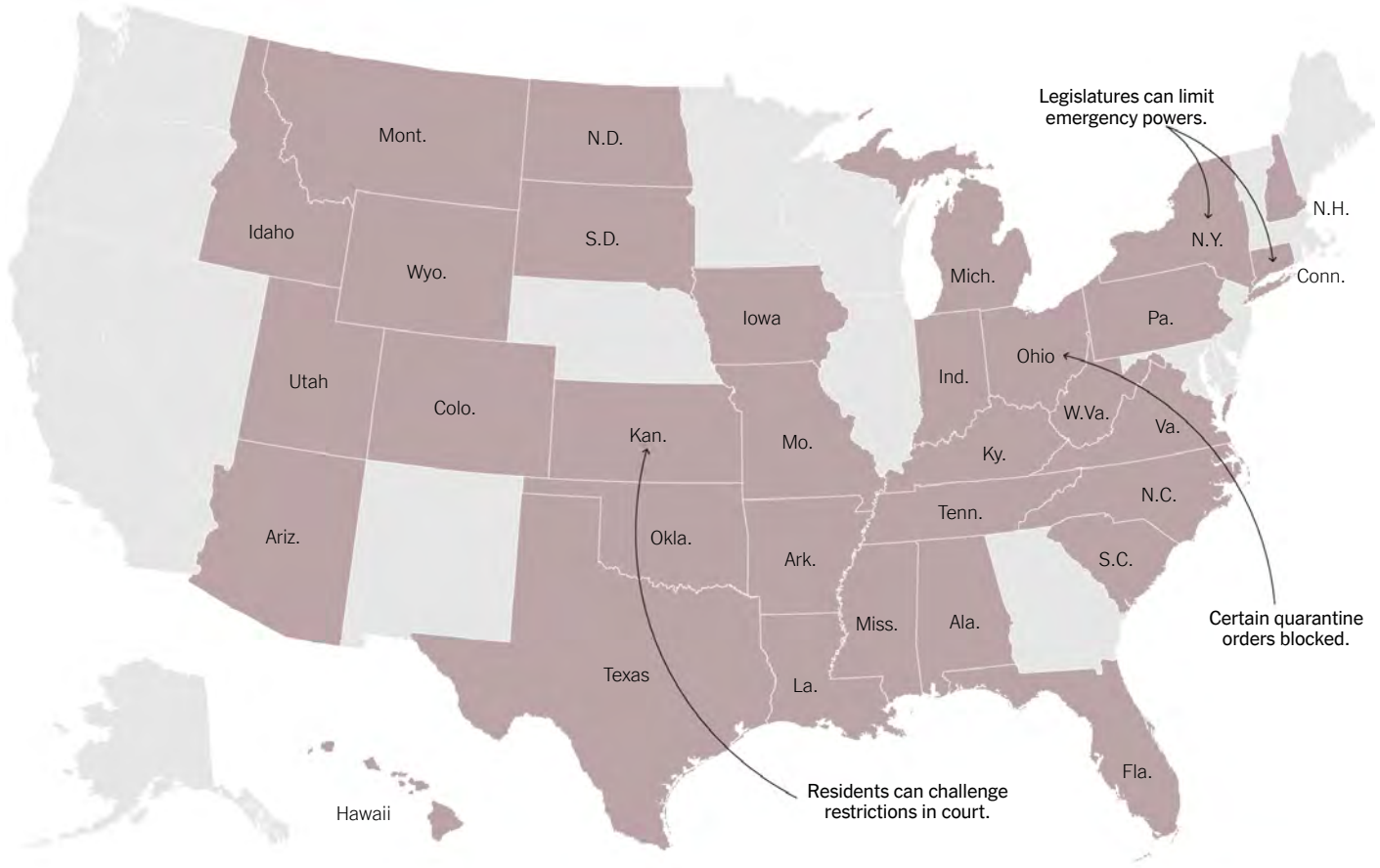
"We have learned all the wrong lessons from the pandemic," said Adriane Casalotti, chief of public and government affairs for the National Association of County and City Health Officials, an organization representing the nearly 3,000 local health departments across the nation. "We are attacking and removing authority from the people who are trying to protect us."

The Times interviewed more than 140 local health officials, public health experts and lawmakers, reviewed new state laws, analyzed local government documents and sent a survey to every county health department in the country. Almost 300 departments responded, discussing their concerns over long-term funding, staffing, authority and community support. The examination showed that:

- Public health agencies have seen a staggering exodus of personnel, many exhausted and demoralized, in part because of abuse and threats. Dozens of departments reported that they had not staffed up at all, but actually lost employees. About 130 said they did not have enough people to do contact tracing, one of the most important tools for limiting the spread of a virus. The Times identified more than 500 top health officials who left their jobs in the past 19 months.
- Legislators have approved more than 100 new laws — with hundreds more under consideration — that limit state and local health powers. That overhaul of public health gives governors, lawmakers and county commissioners more power to undo health decisions and undermines everything from flu vaccination campaigns to quarantine protocols for measles.
- Large segments of the public have also turned against agencies, voting in new local government leaders who ran on pledges to rein in public health departments. In Idaho, commissioners last month appointed a new physician representative to the health board in the Boise region who advocates unapproved treatments for Covid-19 and refers to coronavirus vaccinations as "needle rape." "We have heard from the voters," Ryan Davidson, one of the commissioners, said.
- Billions of dollars have been made available to public health by the federal government, but most of it has been geared toward stemming the emergency, rather than hiring permanent staff or building long-term capability. Most of the departments that responded to The Times's survey said they were worried about their funding levels, which in most cases had been decreasing or flat before the pandemic. About three dozen departments said their budgets were the same or smaller than they were at the beginning of the pandemic.

Where State Laws Newly Limit Public Health Powers

At least 32 states have enacted legislation restricting state or local authority over health and emergency decisions.



The laws also include limits on the following measures in at least these states:

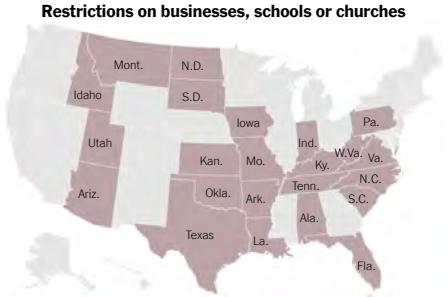
Vaccine orders



Mask orders



Restrictions on businesses, schools or churches



Note: Some of these laws have been challenged in court. • Source: State legislatures • By Taylor Johnston

There are already signs that the growing shortfalls in public health could have lasting impacts beyond the pandemic.

More than 220 departments told The Times they had to temporarily or permanently abandon other public health functions to respond to the pandemic, leading to a spike in drug overdoses and a disturbing drop in reports of child abuse. Several health officials pointed to runaway infections of sexually transmitted diseases, with gonorrhea cases doubling and syphilis on pace to triple in one county in Pennsylvania. Oswego County, N.Y., recorded a surge in lead poisoning. In Texas, requests for exemptions to the usual suite of required childhood immunizations have risen sharply.

Mandates and mobilizations to protect public health have long been part of American life; colonists issued quarantine laws and fines for disobeying them as early as the 1700s. Public health departments later delivered vaccines to halt diseases such as smallpox and polio, upgraded water systems to limit typhoid and cholera, curbed sexually transmitted diseases and helped guarantee the safety of food in restaurants.

But not since the flu pandemic of 1918 has the country faced a disease outbreak that called for unelected health officials to impose widespread mask mandates and business closures.



A protest against a vaccination mandate in Staten Island, N.Y., in August. Yana Paskova for The New York Times

As scientists helped overcome many infectious diseases, the focus on keeping Americans healthy turned more to individualized treatment for ailments such as heart disease and cancers, said David Rosner, a historian at Columbia University who specializes in the history of public health.

Many, particularly in conservative circles, have increasingly embraced individual rights over collective responsibilities, a trend that Dr. Rosner said is undercutting the notion of a social contract in which people work together to achieve a greater good.

“It’s a depressing moment,” he said. “What makes a society if you can’t even get together around keeping your people healthy?”

During the pandemic, the federal government made tens of billions of dollars available to bolster testing, contact tracing and vaccinations.

In May, the Biden administration announced that it would invest an additional $7.4 billion from the Covid-19 stimulus package to train and recruit public health workers.

But while health officials described the money as critical to helping them quickly build out teams after years of budget cuts, many of those new hires were temporary workers and much of the spending went to urgent needs such as testing and vaccinations. The new funding often came routed through states or grant programs with conditions, like a short time frame for spending money or time-consuming requirements for state or county approvals. Some departments said they had to lay off employees at inopportune times over the past year because grants had run out of money.

And the funding is not permanent. Many local health officials said they expected that the extra money would peter out over the next two to three years. They likened the Covid-19 funds to the money that flowed into health departments after the 9/11 attacks but then vanished when political priorities changed.

Dozens of departments said that, in order to be prepared for more surges or a future pandemic, what they truly needed was a higher baseline of qualified, permanent employees. Instead, they purchased equipment or, more frequently, hired temporary staff, knowing they would need to let them go when the money dried up.

A health official in Berrien County, Mich., said it was so time-consuming to get approval from the county to hire temporary staff members in the fall of 2020 that, when her department received more funding later, she focused instead on quicker purchases, like software. When the virus closed in, she had to pull existing employees off their regular duties.

“If a ship is sinking, throwing treasure chests of gold at the ship is not going to help it float,” said Melissa Lyon, public health director for Erie County, Pa.

A steady erosion of authority



Health officers like Dr. Jennifer Bacani McKenney of Wilson County, Kan., have seen their authority gutted by recent laws. Christopher (KS) Smith for The New York Times

When the pandemic struck last year, Dr. Jennifer Bacani McKenney, the top public health officer for Wilson County, Kan., began doing Facebook Live presentations and coordinated with hospitals, schools and churches. She helped implement a state lockdown, but when it came time to reopen businesses, she did it more slowly than her county commissioners desired.

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- Powell, whose immune system was weakened, died of Covid-19 despite being vaccinated.
- South Korea relaxes its virus restrictions.
- The U.S. may be less prepared for the next pandemic than it was for the current one, a Times review finds.

The Kansas State Legislature, alarmed by the persistence and power of public health orders around the state, passed a series of laws that gutted the authority of health officials like Dr. McKenney. The new laws limited Covid-19 contact tracing, gave authority for health decisions to elected leaders and allowed anyone “aggrieved” by a mask mandate, business closure or limit on public gatherings the ability to sue the agencies that imposed the order.

“It was a huge slap in the face to all of us who are doing the public health work,” Dr. McKenney said.

The Wilson County commissioners, emboldened with new powers over much of what she does, have discussed replacing Dr. McKenney, saying she focused too much on health and not enough on businesses, she said. The public grew so hostile toward her that she at one point had her elementary-age children sit away from the windows when they did their homework.

New laws passed in at least 32 states similarly restrict the ability of health officials to impose mask and vaccine mandates, close churches, schools and businesses, conduct contact tracing or apply penalties for violating health restrictions. Some limit the length of time that governors’ emergency orders can be in effect. Many require a legislative body to approve health orders.

The Times spoke with dozens of lawmakers who have introduced such legislation, most of whom shared a concern that health officials had overstepped their authority and required a check on that power.

“It’s a very dangerous situation when you decide to take away anybody’s rights,” said Bob Rommel, a Republican lawmaker in Florida. He drafted a bill, whose main provisions were incorporated into a law that took effect this summer, allowing the governor to squelch local health orders deemed too restrictive.

Citing that law, Gov. Ron DeSantis’s government, which has been aggressive in slapping down local restrictions, fined Leon County $3.5 million this month for mandating Covid-19 vaccinations for its employees — $5,000 for each person required to get a shot. The state has threatened to levy millions of dollars more in fines for similar county mandates.

In Bismarck, N.D., the state capital, the health director Renae Moch credited a state mask mandate last year with curbing a devastating outbreak.

Cases have recently surged again, but a new state law bars the state government from requiring masks. Ms. Moch would need to get approval from her city commissioners before ordering a local mandate, a hurdle she regards as insurmountable.

Some of the new laws are so sweeping they contradict public health practices that stretch back decades. In Montana, new laws could make it harder to quarantine people with diseases such as measles and will prevent hospitals from enforcing their usual requirement that staff members get a flu shot.

Jim Murphy, an epidemiologist who worked in leadership roles at Montana’s Department of Public Health and Human Services for three decades before retiring this summer, said the department had enjoyed the support of governors from both parties — until Gov. Greg Gianforte took office this year, pledging to reopen the economy.

The new administration immediately raised questions about how Covid-19 deaths were being counted and whether testing was accurate. Health department officials, Mr. Murphy said, were left out of conversations over changes to public health laws.

What to Know About Covid-19 Booster Shots

Who is eligible for a booster shot?

The F.D.A. authorized booster shots for a select group of people who received their second doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine at least six months before. That group includes: vaccine recipients who are 65 or older or who live in long-term care facilities; adults who are at high risk of severe Covid-19 because of an underlying medical condition; health care workers and others whose jobs put them at risk. People with weakened immune systems are eligible for a third dose of either Pfizer or Moderna four weeks after the second shot.

Will people who receive Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines be eligible?

What underlying medical conditions qualify for a booster shot?

What occupations are eligible for boosters?

Can I mix Covid vaccines?

Can I get a flu shot at the same time as a Covid vaccine or booster shot?

“The dialogue and the problem-solving approach was completely gone,” Mr. Murphy said. “We don’t have a lot of say in this anymore.”

In Gallatin County, Ron Marshall, a state representative who owns a vape store, said he had been battling the local health board's ban on indoor vaping. But after passage of a new law restricting local public health authority, he said, the board relented and told him that it would no longer enforce the ban.

Mr. Marshall said other local boards were also easing off on health orders. "They were out of control," he said. "I think a lot of them are still trying to figure out how hard they got spanked."

'You're going to pay for this'

Last fall, two days after signing an order requiring masks in public places, Dr. Vernon Miller, the health officer for Hot Springs County, Wyo., found his staff huddled around the phone, listening to a voice mail.



Dr. Vernon Miller, the health officer for Hot Springs County, Wyo., received a threatening voice mail last year after he signed an order requiring masks in public places. Jessi Dodge for The New York Times

"Well Dr. Miller, you've got some nuts facing off against this whole goddamn town," a man said in an eerily sing-song voice. "You're going to pay for this."

Dr. Miller canceled the day's appointments, sent the staff home and called the sheriff. The police arrested a local machinist, Connor Fairbairn, who, according to court documents, admitted he left the message and wished he could take it back.

Mr. Fairbairn, who through his lawyer declined to comment, told a deputy that he had wanted Dr. Miller "to feel the way the rest of us feel," which was "helpless and insecure."

Public meetings have turned into battlegrounds. In California, a health officer resigned after a resident announced her home address at one meeting. In Nevada, a woman warned ominously that those protesting health orders made the meals, changed the tires and filled the prescriptions of local officials. "We're everywhere," she said. "I'm not the one who should be scared." In Michigan, a man shouted another warning: "There's a lot of good guys out there ready to do bad things!"

Several health officials said they had installed security cameras, were getting police patrols at their houses or were now carrying pepper spray.

The threats have come not just from members of the public. In Klickitat County, Wash., the sheriff announced over the summer that his office would "arrest, detain and recommend prosecution" of any government official enforcing health restrictions that he deemed unconstitutional.

Erinn Quinn, the county's public health director, said she suspended some outreach work and thought seriously about resigning. "It was the first time I truly gave pause to my career in public health," she said. But she resolved to push back.

Two weeks later, dozens of people held a rally for the sheriff, who was later hospitalized with Covid-19.

'Who wants to work there?'

The pandemic has already started to reshape the public health work force in ways that could impair the ability to fight future pandemics.

Some of the most experienced staff members have walked out the door, and departments have struggled to find replacements. Few can compete financially with hospitals in the middle of a nationwide nursing shortage. In the past, health departments could lure workers with better hours and less heartache. That is no longer the case.

Kathy Emmons, the executive director of the Cheyenne-Laramie County Health Department in Wyoming, said her department had a turnover approaching 80 percent during the pandemic.

In January, hundreds of people gathered at the State Capitol to protest health orders and burn masks. A few days later, red paint was spattered across almost every entrance to the county health department.

Ms. Emmons worried that for people privately wondering whether to stay or quit, the job had changed too much.

"They didn't join our department to Covid-test 10 hours a day or to give vaccinations 10 hours a day," she said. "We were asking people to completely change their work priorities."

Sue Rhodes, the health department administrator in Marshall County, Kan., was one of many officials who said finding people to do contact tracing had become a challenge with the public sometimes threatening or verbally abusing tracers. She has been trying to hire an extra nurse to help with the work. But she has had no luck.

"Everybody looks at public health now and says, 'Who wants to work there?'" she said. "Who wants to work in that chaotic mess?"

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A version of this article appears in print on , Section A, Page 1 of the New York edition with the headline: Public Health Crisis Grows With Distrust and Threats

DAILY PRESS

EDUCATION

Lucerne Valley Unified trustees formally oppose COVID shots for students, say Newsom plan violates 'fundamental rights'

Charlie McGee Victorville Daily Press

Published 12:46 p.m. PT Oct. 16, 2021

The Lucerne Valley Unified School District has declared opposition to requiring COVID-19 vaccines for students and staff, standing against Gov. Gavin Newsom's plans for such a mandate if the shots are approved for all ages.

LVUSD's five-member Board of Trustees voted unanimously Thursday to pass a resolution stating that mandatory COVID vaccines for in-person schooling would be a "blatant and serious infringement of its students' fundamental rights," citing legal, ethical and medical principles for why it opposes enforcing such a move.

"LVUSD has operated in-person learning safely since August 20, 2020, without available vaccines for most of that time and without mandates," the resolution states.

The rural High Desert school district argues that a mandate is not legally enforceable, and that such enforcement would violate the rights to informed consent and education. The resolution also says a mandate would ignore the students and staff who have built natural immunity through past infections, and the low rate of severe COVID outcomes in people under 65 with no preexisting conditions.

This marks the latest point of conflict between LVUSD and California's government on policies in relation to the novel coronavirus. Lucerne Valley schools were among the first to reopen in California last year after closures that followed the virus' emergence, and LVUSD argues that the state government spurned it of $500,000 the district should have received for enrollment increases that occurred as a result.

Newsom announced on Oct. 1 that COVID vaccination would be mandatory for all schoolchildren if the U.S. Food and Drug Administration greenlights the jabs for their age bracket.

The FDA is still conducting studies and has not approved any coronavirus vaccines for children under 12 years of age, though Pfizer Inc. and BioNTech SE asked the regulator last week to grant their mRNA shot an emergency-use authorization.

LVUSD Superintendent Peter Livingston said that at no point before or after Newsom's Oct. 1 order has anyone from the state reached out to LVUSD about its plans and announcements on the topic of mandating COVID shots for schoolchildren.

"With the diversity of our state and being the largest in the nation (by population)," he said, "seeking the input of all areas and districts would have been nice."

A particular issue Livingston noted is the fact that U.S. regulators have not yet decided whether to approve any of the vaccines for children under age 12. He criticized the manner in which Newsom rolled out the mandate as "clearly poor leadership" that implied more authority than actually exists.

"It was clearly a political move by the governor to get national news," Livingston said. "He wanted to once again say he was the first in the nation at something."

Beyond religious or medical exemptions, parents can also opt their kids out of getting the shot based on personal beliefs under the mandate announced this month by Newsom. The state Legislature can change that if it passes legislation overriding the personal-beliefs provision.

There are 10 traditional vaccines that California legislatures have made a requirement for schoolchildren regardless of personal preferences, according to Livingston. Newsom and some state lawmakers have floated the idea of adding a COVID vaccination to the list.

LVUSD's new resolution also states that the "benefits of COVID-19 vaccination do not outweigh the potential harms for all students and staff."

The mortality rate among people ages 0 to 17 who are infected with the novel coronavirus is miniscule. Research studies and official data show a likelihood that the chance of death in that group is one in multiple millions, with a slightly higher chance of hospitalization. But given the novelty of the virus, scientists do not know what kind of long-term effects may exist from infection.

Potential effects of the COVID vaccines have also become a hotly-argued point of cost-benefit analysis between advocates and opponents of shot mandates.

Health authorities worldwide maintain databases to collect reports of these “adverse events,” such as the FDA’s Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) and the World Health Organization’s VigiBase.

These databases show a significant total of such reports for COVID vaccine-recipients relative to other widely used shots: More than 2 million adverse reactions worldwide are listed on the WHO's database for recipients of all COVID-19 vaccines compared to about 267,000 for all influenza vaccines. Yet, because these databases are made up partially of self-reported reactions, some argue they are not a credible source.

Charlie McGee covers the city of Barstow and its surrounding communities for the Daily Press. He is also a Report for America corps member with the GroundTruth Project, an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization dedicated to supporting the next generation of journalists in the U.S. and around the world. McGee may be reached at 760-955-5341 or cmcgee@gannett.com. Follow him on Twitter @bycharliemcgee.

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CORONAVIRUS

$500 to meet a COVID vaccine mandate. How many Stanislaus court employees got it?

BY ERIN TRACY AND KRISTIN LAM
OCTOBER 10, 2021 11:26 AM



Stanislaus Superior Court Presiding Judge Robert Westbrook explains the courthouse's new vaccine mandate and other COVID-19 safety procedures.
BY MARIJKE ROWLAND

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incentive to comply.

On Thursday — the deadline by which the court's 234 employees had to get the jab — 85% had complied, said Court Executive Officer Hugh Swift. That is up from 60% when the court announced the requirement.

"We feel that the increase in the number of vaccinated employees was significant," Swift said. "We appreciate the employees' willingness to get vaccinated because it allows us to continue to provide the services we provide the public and it makes this a safer workplace. Hopefully it has an impact on the community at large."

Of the remaining 37 employees who did not get the vaccine, 25 received religious or medical exemption and seven are currently out on leave and will have to meet the court's policy when they return to work.

The remaining five employees who did not provide proof of vaccination or get an exemption by Thursday received a notice of disciplinary action and were put on paid leave. They have 10 days to appeal the decision, Swift said.

The 25 employees who received exemptions will be subject to twice-weekly testing.

Only employees who got the vaccine were eligible for the $500 retention pay, which came out of the court's operating budget.

Swift said the mandate also applies to 109 independent contractors, mostly interpreters but also some private security and janitorial staff. He said 79 of those contractors got the vaccine and the remainder will no longer be able to work in the courts.

Employers, mostly starting with the healthcare industry, began mandating the vaccines earlier this year and Stanislaus Court was among the first courts in the state to make the move. President Joe Biden in September announced a nationwide mandate for employers with more than 100 employees, but it is still undergoing a lengthy rule-making process.

Employers across the county have offered some kind of financial incentive to encourage employees to get time off or reimbursement for travel to get the shots to considera ses. The financial-assets management company Vanguard is offering its 16,500 employees $1,000 bonuses for getting vaccinated, according to Fortune Magazine.

In Stanislaus County, 55 percent of eligible residents are fully vaccinated, according to the county COVID-19 dashboard.

MANTECA ALSO OFFERS EMPLOYEE INCENTIVE

The Manteca City Council on Tuesday approved a $400 COVID-19 vaccine incentive for some city employees who show proof of full vaccination by Dec. 15. About 240 employees are eligible and the program will cost Manteca about $200,000 in federal coronavirus relief from its American Rescue Plan Act allocation of $13.7 million.

Executive management, members of two mid-managers unions and non-represented full-time employees qualify for the incentive but the city is not requiring the vaccines at this point. Other city employee unions can agree to the incentive, which aims to help reach the federal goal of a 70% vaccination rate.

City employees have a 52% vaccination rate, per the staff report, while 72% of eligible Manteca residents are fully vaccinated as of San Joaquin Public Health data reported last week.

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CALIFORNIA

What sways homeless people to get COVID-19 shots? It could be other homeless people



Chelsea Shover, left, and Zach Gustine talk to Kimberly Conti about getting the COVID vaccine as part of an outreach effort in Lincoln Heights. (Al Seib / Los Angeles Times)

BY EMILY ALPERT REYES | STAFF WRITER

OCT. 18, 2021 5 AM PT

It was a familiar voice that coaxed Kimberly Conti to step out, barefoot, from the back of the hulking former bookmobile parked in an industrial corner of Lincoln Heights.

“Hey, what’s up?”

It was Zack Gustine, who used to park his RV on this same block. “Have you gotten vaccinated already?” he asked her. “Do you want to?”

Conti shrugged. “I don’t really care,” she said.

“That’s how I was too,” Gustine replied. But just a few hours earlier, the 42-year-old had gotten the Johnson & Johnson shot to protect himself against COVID-19. And now he was a “peer ambassador,” talking to others about the vaccine.

“We bring it right to you,” he assured her. “It’s super easy.”



Zack Gustine gets a COVID shot from registered nurse Leah Edoloverio. (Al Seib / Los Angeles Times)

Soon Conti had gotten her shot too — and was joining Gustine and an L.A. County Department of Health Services team as another newly minted ambassador, talking to her neighbors in tents and RVs on the next block.



CALIFORNIA

What will it take to get out of the pandemic? California still has a long way to go

Oct. 14, 2021

It’s a simple and intuitive idea: People tend to listen more to those they know.

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So in L.A. County, health officials are enlisting people living in tents, RVs and makeshift shelters to help get unhoused people vaccinated against COVID-19. The fledgling effort, which launched in August, is being funded as a study through the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA.

“A lot of people who are experiencing homelessness are not going to look at me or my healthcare colleagues as people who can speak to their experiences,” said Chelsea L. Shover, a UCLA School of Medicine assistant professor and principal investigator for the study. “It means more to have someone they’ve lived with and spent time with say, ‘I got mine, and it wasn’t a big deal.’”



A team from L.A. County Health Services works in Lincoln Park recruiting homeless people to serve as “peer ambassadors.” (Al Seib/Los Angeles Times)

Dozens of people have become peer ambassadors through the demonstration project, which compensates them to do the work for up to eight hours in total, providing $25 gift cards to stores such as Target or Ralphs for each hour worked. To be eligible, they must have a “lived experience” of homelessness; most are currently unhoused.

They work side by side with L.A. County Department of Health Services workers, sharing their personal experiences with the vaccine. The teams also hand out snacks, water and other critical supplies, including naloxone kits to treat opioid overdoses. If the people they reach on the streets decide to get vaccinated, a medical team is on hand to provide the shots.

“Peers are able to communicate with their peers and build trust at an exponentially quicker and easier rate than we can,” said José Mata, a senior program manager with the county Housing for Health COVID Response Team. “We’ve seen peers convince people who have told us no — repeatedly.”

In one instance, Mata recalled, his team asked a group of men hanging out in the Lawndale area whether they were vaccinated. The men initially said yes — and his team moved on. He came back shortly to find two of the same men getting their shots, after they had talked to a peer ambassador.



Shover, right, Anthony Coleman and José Mata talk to Denise Lerma and Paul Carrera about the COVID vaccine. (Al Seib / Los Angeles Times)

Conti said she was more open to getting vaccinated because a friend was reaching out. “Usually when somebody comes up and talks to me it’s not a good thing — if it’s not somebody I know,” Conti said.

In L.A. County, homeless people have been less likely to get vaccinated against COVID-19 than the general population. As of late September, public health officials estimated that 56.7% of people experiencing homelessness across the county were at least partially vaccinated, compared with nearly 78% of the broader population. More than 200 homeless people have died of COVID-19 across the county, according to the L.A. County Department of Public Health.

Gustine said he hadn't bothered getting the vaccine before because he wasn't especially worried about catching the coronavirus. But when the Department of Health Services team showed up outside his RV, offering to bring him the vaccine, he decided it was "kind of a no-brainer."

A nurse in tomato-red scrubs crouched next to him on the shoulder of Valley Boulevard and swabbed his upper arm for the shot. Afterward, when he was handed his vaccination card in a plastic sleeve, Gustine joked, "This'll get me into any club in Hollywood or West Hollywood, right?"

"I'm probably kind of a unicorn here," he said to the team afterward. "Like how many people do you actually get to take the vaccine?"

"Every day is different," said Anthony Coleman, a community health worker who led the team around Lincoln Park, cautioning them to watch for protective dogs outside tents and RVs. "One day we can get a hundred, next day we might get none."

Gustine, who has worked as a radio personality, had heard wild theories about the vaccines on the streets: stuff about nanobots, that "the government somehow can control you." He was already having trouble swaying others in his RV, who were leery of coming outside.

"All of the people out here, basically, they're scared of any big institutions of any kind," he said. "You're not going to undo a lifetime of that in, like, five minutes."

Yet Shover has found that many homeless people do want the shots, even if they haven't gotten them yet. In surveys of more than 500 people living without shelter in L.A. County in May and June, 36% said they were already vaccinated, 30% said they didn't want the shots, and 34% said they wanted to get the vaccine.

And in some cases, Shover said, "a 'no' today is really a 'not yet.'" Out of those who declined, more than half answered "not yet" or "not today" instead of "never."

One couple, seated side by side on chairs overlooking the train tracks, said they had tried to get the shots when the L.A. Fire Department was giving them across the street in Lincoln Park. "They said we had to do it online and all that," Denise Lerma, 54, recalled.



CALIFORNIA

70,000 Californians have died from COVID-19

Oct. 14, 2021

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"I said, 'But we're right here!'" said Paul Carrera, 62, who had been with Lerma for a dozen years.

Lerma had ultimately gotten her first dose of the Moderna vaccine — she believed it happened when she was in a convalescent home — but still needed her second. Carrera didn't have one at all. A nurse ferried the shots over to them.

At a tent draped in gray and blue tarps, Gustine stopped by to see a friend. "You haven't had the vaccination yet?" he asked the woman.

Gustine let her know they had snacks and other things to give out — and added that if she got vaccinated, there would be a gift card too. (The county Housing for Health program relies on private funders, including the United Way, to pay for cards as an incentive for homeless people to get vaccinated. UCLA provides additional gift cards

to compensate the ambassadors.) Gustine told the woman he had gotten the vaccine just a couple of hours ago.

“I wasn’t even really planning on getting it,” he said. “But these guys came, I did it, and it’s fine.”

The woman decided to go for it. As they waited for the medical team to come over, they gabbed about things on the block, who had moved where. Soon the woman began calling to others along the street, “Hey, you want to get a shot?”

Others on the block remained leery. At one point, Gustine said he was a little surprised that more people weren’t swayed to get vaccinated when he recommended it.

A Department of Health Services staffer reassured him it was “like 10 times what we normally get here.” Four people on the block had opted to get vaccinated that day after Gustine approached them, in addition to the four — including Gustine — who had gotten vaccinated in and around Lincoln Park.

Shover said one of the big benefits of bringing on peer ambassadors is that they can say things to their friends and neighbors that wouldn’t fly from health workers. She recounted a peer ambassador telling a friend, “Get out of my tent. Don’t come back until you get vaccinated!”

That kind of candid talk is already happening on the streets, Shover added. She pointed to a viral video, shot on Hollywood Boulevard by local activist William Gude, in which a vaccination opponent with a megaphone on Hollywood Boulevard demanded to know why the homeless people around them weren’t dead of COVID-19.

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“Because I’m vaccinated,” a man pushing a shopping cart shot back, punctuating the comeback with a profanity.

Shover already knew the man, named Ray, who had gotten vaccinated through a Department of Health Services pop-up clinic. She reconnected with him, helped get him a phone and gave him one of their caps, which reads “ASK ME ABOUT THE COVID-19 VACCINE.” An online fundraiser, set up by Gude and an assistant, has since raised more than $30,000 to help him.

“People are already doing vaccine education!” Shover said. “So we might as well pay them for it.”

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Great California ShakeOut, Oct. 21

Oct 15, 2021

The Great California ShakeOut is Thursday, Oct. 21, at 10:21 a.m. Every year, Californians practice earthquake safety like drop, cover and hold on the third Thursday of October.

“Earthquakes can happen anytime and anywhere. And just because we have one ongoing emergency, the pandemic, it doesn’t mean other natural disasters can’t happen, too,” said San Bernardino City Unified School District Safety and Emergency Manager Eric Vetere.

On Oct. 21, teachers, students, staff members and visitors will be asked to participate in earthquake preparedness training whether in-person or during distance learning. This means setting aside time for everyone to practice what to do when the shaking starts:

• Before an earthquake happens, identify safe areas in your home, school or office to protect yourself from earthquakes.

• Drop onto your hands and knees. This position protects you from being knocked down and also allows you to stay low and crawl to nearby cover.

• Cover your head and neck with tables, chairs, or one arm and hand. You can also hold a sturdy object over your head and neck for protection.

• Try to crawl away from windows.

• If a sturdy table or desk is nearby, crawl under it.

• Stay on your knees and bend over to protect vital organs.

• Keep your eyes shut to protect them from dust and debris.

• Hold on until the shaking stops and be ready to evacuate.

Check out a video demonstration from 2020 from the official ShakeOut YouTube channel.

People with mobility concerns should practice these alternatives:

• Lock your wheelchair, walker or other mobility assistance device.

• Try to move away from windows or close to an interior wall first if possible.

• Cover your head and neck with your arms and hands or hold a sturdy object over your head and neck for protection.

• If you can’t fully lift your arms to cover your head, do the best you can to cover as much as you can.

• Bend over to protect your vital organs.

• Keep your eyes shut to protect them from dust and debris.

• Hold on until the shaking stops and be ready to evacuate.

Additional information and resources are available at shakeout.org/california/.

NEWS • News

Drop, cover and hold on! The Great Shakeout is almost here



First-grader Juan Sierra, 6, does “Drop, Cover and Hold” during an earthquake drill on ShakeOut Day on Thursday, October 17, 2019 at Stanley Mosk Elementary School in Winnetka. (Photo by Sarah Reingewirtz, Pasadena Star-News/SCNG)

By LISA JACOBS | lisa.jacobs@TBRnews.com |

PUBLISHED: October 18, 2021 at 6:30 a.m. | UPDATED: October 18, 2021 at 8:05 a.m.

At least 2 million people throughout Los Angeles County will drop, cover and hold on this week.

It’s all part of the annual International Shakeout Day, set for Thursday, Oct. 21.

It's a day when everyone — from students to business owners to government employees — are encouraged to practice earthquake preparedness. And, as of last week, there were plenty of people in the Los Angeles County pledging to do just that on the Great California Shakeout website.

Southern Californians know about earthquakes.

But what should you really do when a 4.3 magnitude earthquake sends you bolting out of your Netflix stupor on a Friday night just before 8 p.m.? That was the case last month when a tremblor in Carson rattled people along the coast from Oxnard to San Diego County and as far inland as Riverside.

The Great Shakeout recommends everyone stop what you're doing at 10:21 a.m. Thursday and practice the following to reduce injuries should the "big one" strike:

- Drop: Get on your hands and knees right where you are. This protects you from being knocked down. And you can crawl to shelter if nearby.
- Cover: Put one arm and hand over your head and neck. If there's a sturdy table or desk nearby, crawl there. If not, crawl next to an interior wall, away from windows. Stay bent over to protect vital organs.
- Hold on: If you found that table or desk, hold on with one hand. If not, hold on to your head and neck with both arms. Do this until the shaking stops.

Standing in a doorway or running outside are among the actions considered dangerous, according to the Earthquake Country Alliance.

Of course, where you're located when the shaking starts can dictate what you should do. Here's a summary of what experts advise. In all these instances, drop, cover and hold on applies:

- Indoors: Avoid exterior walls, windows, hanging objects and kitchen cabinets. Do not go outside during shaking.
- Outdoors: If you are outside when the shaking starts, move to a clear area and avoid power lines, trees, signs, buildings and vehicles.
- In bed: Do not get out of bed and stay face down to protect your vital organs, and cover your head and neck with a pillow.
- In a high-rise: Do not use elevators. Avoid windows and other hazards.
- Driving: Pull over to the side of the road, stop and set your parking brake. Stay inside the vehicle until the shaking stops. If a power line falls on the car, stay inside until a trained person removes the wire.

You can find more tips about preparing for an earthquake here.

If you're technologically inclined, you can sign up for one of the many alert systems available. Check out Earthquake Warning California or ShakeAlert.

A mobile phone alert just might give you enough time to act before the shaking starts.

But once you feel that first jolt, you must protect yourself immediately. The best way to do that, of course, is to drop, cover and hold on.

And on Thursday, you can practice doing just that.

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NEWS • News

Inland warehouse workers look to a sustainable, equitable future



Abel Diaz, an inbound dock problem solver, verifies inbound inventory at Amazon fulfillment center in Eastvale on Thursday, Oct. 14, 2021. (Photo by Watchara Phomicinda, The Press-Enterprise/SCNG)

By DEEPA BHARATH | dbharath@scng.com | Orange County Register
PUBLISHED: October 18, 2021 at 8:21 a.m. | UPDATED: October 18, 2021 at 8:21 a.m.

A 39-year-old undocumented immigrant in Perris who balances two warehousing jobs to support her young children after her husband was deported to Mexico.

A 25-year-old college graduate in San Bernardino who works as a forklift operator during the weekends to supplement income from his day job.

A 20-year-old student, an Indian immigrant, who is earning extra income by working as a safety specialist in Eastvale to put herself through college where she is pursuing a computer engineering degree.

The profiles of warehouse workers in the Inland Empire are diverse. But the trajectory of their lives and careers in an industry that has taken root and flourished in the region, advocates and industry experts say, could well depend on who they are, where they come from, the language they speak and, often, the color of their skin.

While warehousing brings thousands of jobs and a degree of optimism to the Inland Empire, racial inequality when it comes to job opportunities in the industry are a concern for advocates of logistics workers. They also worry a failure to elevate the quality of warehousing jobs, as well as the pay, especially for communities of color who predominantly staff the lowest-paying jobs in the industry, could lead the region down a dangerous path to poverty and further income inequality.

Wages still low

If there was any question about the logistics industry dominating Riverside and San Bernardino counties, those doubts were erased by the coronavirus pandemic that shuttered storefronts and led to explosive growth for online retailers whose goods move in and out of hundreds of warehouses across the region.

In 2020 alone, the top 500 North American retailers generated $849.5 billion in online sales, up 45.3% from 2019 and the biggest jump since 2006, according to a report by Digital Commerce 360. Increased online sales drove employment in warehousing, especially in the Inland Empire, already home to more than 20 of the nation's 100 biggest logistics leases, according to the California Attorney General's Office.

Employment in the logistics field — which ranges from the sourcing of goods to manufacturing, storage and transportation — was up 17% the first year of the pandemic throughout the Inland Empire. That means work in warehousing and transportation is now nearly 12% of all jobs in Riverside and San Bernardino counties, compared to 7.9% in 2015-19.

But advocates and academics who research pay and treatment of logistics workers say higher employment needs in the industry have not translated into pay increases or more benefits for those who do the most difficult tasks.

According to a 2019 report released by Economic Roundtable, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit, 86% of logistics workers in Riverside and San Bernardino counties earn less than the basic living wage, defined by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as "the minimum standard that, if met, draws a very fine line between the financial dependence of the working poor and the need to seek out public assistance or suffer consistent and severe housing and food insecurity."

According to MIT's living wage calculator online, a San Bernardino County family of four with two adults and two children where both adults are working needs $101,718 before taxes annually to earn a living wage. In Riverside County, that number is slightly higher at $102,828. The average salary for a logistics worker in both San Bernardino and Riverside counties, according to MIT, is $33,802.

According to an Amazon spokesperson, the average pay at the world's largest logistics company is $18 an hour, $4 over California's 2021 minimum wage.

While warehousing wages have increased slightly over the years, they are still low, especially given the cost of housing in Southern California, said Ellen Reese, professor of sociology at UC Riverside. Reese co-authored a study titled "Warehouse Employment as a Driver of Inequality in the Inland Empire," for which she spoke with young Amazon warehouse workers.

"They can afford to live in the Inland Empire only because they are living with four other people or are living with their parents," she said. "A big number of these workers rely on government assistance like food stamps or Medi-Cal. Even though Amazon provides health benefits for employees, many of them still rely on Medicaid because these are poverty-level wages."

Meanwhile, the lowest-paid jobs in the logistics industry tend to be disproportionately held by workers of color, Reese said.

"Nationally, Black people comprise the largest proportion of those jobs, but in the Inland Empire, it's Latinos who are in their 20s and 30s," she said. "And the age issue is probably linked to the physical nature of the work. Most don't have college degrees, but some do, which amazes me."

'Life is a struggle'

In the Inland Empire, immigrants, including undocumented immigrants, represent a large and significant part of the logistics workforce, particularly in the lower-tier jobs, Reese said.

For one 39-year-old Perris woman, life changed one afternoon in March, when her husband, who was a construction worker, went to buy tools and never came back.

“I heard from him in the afternoon and then later that night when he called me from Tijuana,” said the woman, whose identity is being withheld. “He had been deported.”

Now, she is the sole breadwinner and caregiver for her two young children. Choking back tears as she recounted how life has changed in recent months, she described how she works three jobs as a seamstress, seven days a week.

Each day, she wakes up at 4 a.m. and heads out to her first warehouse job. Once she finishes her shift there at 1:30 p.m., her next shift, at another warehouse, begins at 2 p.m. She gets home at 6:30 p.m. in time to help her children with their homework and spend a few hours with them. She also works weekends from home, taking on sewing assignments.

Her warehouse jobs pay $19 an hour, but it’s not enough, she said, adding that she is expected to do more as a woman and often faces discrimination because she can’t speak English and writes work notes in her native Spanish. It shouldn’t be a problem, since most of her colleagues are Spanish-speaking and understand her notes, she said, but her bosses “get annoyed.”

She also worries about injuries.

“Sewing is hard work,” she said. “A lot of days I deal with finger pain. I see co-workers struggle with arthritis and chronic pain. I hope one day, that will not be me.”

While her life now is “a struggle,” she said it is better than moving back to Jalisco where drugs and violence run rampant. She shudders just thinking about raising her two daughters there.

“They would have no future there,” she said, her voice shaking.

Forging a path

Some younger workers view logistics jobs as a way to supplement their incomes or to learn skills that could take them to higher places.

Gerzon Cesena, 25, graduated from Cal State San Bernardino with a business degree. During the week, he works for a local nonprofit helping run programs for high school students. It’s his passion to work with children, he said. But once he got married and his wife became pregnant with their first child, he needed another job to supplement his income.

He started to work 20 to 25 additional hours on weekends sorting boxes at a warehouse in San Bernardino and later, driving a forklift.

“It’s really sad that I can’t spend that time with my family,” said Cesena, who lives in San Bernardino. “But I think it’s more important for me to be able to provide for them.”

He likes warehouse jobs, he said, because they pay “at least $5” more than minimum wage and while they are physically strenuous, they don’t tax his mind. Cesena said he expects to continue having a second job until he makes his way up in the nonprofit sector, which he believes is his life’s purpose.



Inbound dock manager Marisol Santa Cruz, left, and process assistance, Adam Arista, offload boxes from a trailer at Amazon fulfillment center in Eastvale on Thursday, Oct. 14, 2021. (Photo by Watchara Phomicinda, The Press-Enterprise/SCNG)

In some families, the logistics industry employs more than one member. Ashka Patel, 20, of San Bernardino, works at Amazon’s Eastvale facility, as does her 51-year-old father. She works in the safety department while her father is a “picker,” an employee who gathers products to fulfill orders from supervisors. Patel’s older sister is an area manager, also with Amazon, in Rialto.

“Yes, we’re an Amazon family,” Patel said with a smile.

She immigrated with her family from Ahmedabad, India, in 2014. This is the first and only job she’s ever had, and her father’s second. He used to work at a 7-Eleven, she said. Patel is also working on a computer engineering degree at Pasadena College. She is getting ready to transfer to San Francisco State University.

“I feel like this job has prepared me for my future life and given me so many skills I will use,” she said. “I had no interest in working in a warehouse. But I’m glad I did.”

Abel Diaz, 29, who mans the “inbound desk” problem-solving and loading/unloading trucks at Amazon’s Eastvale facility, said he started out as a driver delivering Amazon packages, but saw an opportunity to grow in a warehouse job. He has an associate’s degree in automotive technology.

His goal now is to move up to a managerial position for which he needs a bachelor’s degree or two years of experience. He is working to gain that experience, motivated to move up in the organization after hurting his back on the job a few months ago.

“Getting injured doing this job is a concern,” he said. “That’s why it’s important for me to move up. And I know I have the opportunities to do that here.”

Amazon offers a career choice program, which pays 95% of tuition and books for employees who pursue higher education or want to expand their skill sets, said company spokeswoman Eileen Hards.

“People are hungry for high-paying jobs,” she said. “There is that opportunity if they want to get their bachelor’s degree or pursue other programs that could even lead them to other fields and companies.”

Sustainable future?

For the warehousing industry to be a sustainable source of livelihood, which can provide opportunities for growth and advancement in an equitable manner, workers need to have a voice, said Lola Smallwood-Cuevas, founder and director of the Inland Empire Black Worker Center, which is an advocacy group for Black workers.

“Right now, people have to stitch three of these (warehousing) jobs to live in a growing region where homeownership is going out of reach and rents are increasing,” she said.



A package moves along a conveyor at Amazon fulfillment center in Eastvale on Tuesday, Aug. 31, 2021. (Photo by Watchara Phomicinda, The Press-Enterprise/SCNG)

Smallwood-Cuevas said she sees companies like Amazon growing, but that to her, it still represents a "dark future" if workers get left behind without a voice.

"It's a world where workers are disenfranchised and have no control over wages, benefits and work hours," she said. "There is also the looming threat of automation. As these companies continue to grow exponentially, it's an increasingly zero-sum game for our workers."

As the warehousing industry grows into a pillar of the Inland Empire's economy, logistics companies need to step up, and not prevent workers from forming unions to protect their rights, Smallwood-Cuevas said, referring to heated battles between Amazon and its workers in states like Alabama.

She said there have been victories for workers in California as well. Last month, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill 701 into law establishing new protections for warehouse workers by requiring employers to disclose worker production quota. The new law, which will go into effect Jan. 1, 2022, also prohibits disciplinary action against workers for missing quotas as a result of health- or safety-related breaks.

"If our workers don't have income and can't build wealth, our stores aren't supported, our church and social networks aren't supported," Smallwood-Cuevas said. "This is why a majority of Black workers support unions. When you have a union, you have a voice, a system and a legal agreement that sets a standard."

Addressing inequities

In addition to paying fair wages, logistics companies must stop trying to get workers of color "into the dirtiest and lowest-paying jobs," Smallwood-Cuevas said.

"We need to see Black, Latino and immigrant folks in quality jobs," she said. But the logistics industry has a system of hiring that is "subjective and discriminatory," she said.

"They pick individuals who speak the same language, people who look like them and folks they are comfortable with, for the good jobs," she added. "We are increasingly finding out Black workers are excluded and immigrant workers are exploited. There is a real need to address the racial inequity that exists here."

According to reports filed between 2018 and 2020 with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, more than 60% of the nearly 400,000 workers Amazon hired nationwide for its hourly laborer jobs that pay the lowest wages were either Black or Latino.

The company's demographic data from 2020 also shows that nearly 63% of its warehouse workers were Black, Latino, Native American or multiracial, while just over 18% of its corporate and tech workers were. The executive positions were overwhelmingly occupied by White men, the data shows.

The Seattle Times reported that Amazon has been making progress in diversifying its executive ranks. Between 2019 and 2020, people of color accounted for 42% of the additions to the company's highest-ranking employees and the number of Black senior leaders at Amazon more than doubled. The Times also reported that the company employed 98 Black executives in 2020 compared to 39 the year before.

In the Inland Empire, there's a reason the majority of lower-tier warehouse workers are Latino and largely immigrants, said Veronica Alvarado, deputy director of the Ontario-based Warehouse Worker Resource Center.

"This is a trend, it's a pattern of discrimination," she said. "Immigrants will do what is asked of them, even when they are pushed to the brink. Often, we see that Black workers are pitted against Latino immigrants."

Alvarado said she's heard anecdotally from Black workers that they are accused of "complaining a lot" and asked why they don't work as hard as immigrants do.

"It's sad when communities of color are pitted against one another like that," she said.

The lower wage jobs in warehousing are not sustainable because they take a toll on the body, Alvarado said, yet workers of color tend to stay in such positions longer than their White counterparts.

“This kind of manual labor becomes untenable as you get older,” she said. “We find that there is a different (employment) track for managers and supervisors where there is disparity. Managers are overwhelmingly White. And people at the bottom are largely Black and Brown.”

Striking a balance

Despite the inequalities that currently exist in the industry, some are optimistic for improvement. Rex Beck, professor of business and logistics management at Norco College, said the state of the logistics industry can sometimes be “oversimplified.”

“The industry is as broad as human endeavor gets,” he said. “There’s the need for truck drivers, maintenance workers, schedules, information technology, shipping, computer maintenance personnel, forklift mechanics — you name it. It’s all about matching the right person with the right job.”

Norco College started its logistics program nearly two decades ago and offers classes in warehouse, transportation and purchasing management, Beck said.

“Our students are very optimistic” for their future, he said. “A majority are here because they are already working in the industry and perceive opportunities to move up. Most of our students quickly go on to work either in the technical side or the business side. A large number of them go into supervisory positions. Others go on to study business and supply chain management.”

While the logistics industry presents significant challenges for workers and their families, it’s here to stay and local groups are partnering to improve conditions for everyone, said Karen Suarez, co-chair of Inland Economic Growth and Opportunity, a program under the Inland Empire Community Foundation.

“We definitely need opportunities for our residents who don’t have jobs that pay a living wage in warehousing,” she said. “But on the flip side, for many workers, this is their livelihood and they don’t want regulation (against the logistics industry) that is going to affect their ability to provide for their families.”

There are workers who suffer from injuries and physical ailments as a result of the rigors of warehousing, but Suarez said there are plenty of workers who love their jobs.

“They love the work, the consistency of it,” she said. “We want businesses to be successful, but not at the expense of people. When there is economic prosperity for everyone, the entire region prospers.”

https://www.highlandnews.net/news/public_works/local-water-storage-totals-are-excellent-for-a-drought-year/article_1853c3aa-2ddd-11ec-9f18-0b5c28cd83b5.html

FEATURED

Local water storage totals are excellent for a drought year

In the clutches of California's third driest year in a century, the San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District reports higher than average recharge of local surface water when compared to other dry years.

Oct 15, 2021



A newly reconnected channel of Plunge Creek shows signs of recent erosion and widening due to the return of long absent stormwater flows.

Planning for that not-so-rainy day has helped replenish the Bunker Hill Basin with above-average levels of groundwater storage when compared to other recent periods of drought, the San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District announced on Oct. 1.

Totals for the 2020-21 water year, running from Oct. 1 to Sept. 30, reflect a 66 percent increase from the amount of native surface water stored in previous dry years. A total of 7,266 acre-feet of native surface water was stored in 2020-21 compared to 4.004 acre-feet in 2007-08; 6,097 acre-feet in 2013-14; 2,625 acre-feet in 2014-15; 4,277 acre-feet in 2015-16 and 4,617 acre feet in 2017-18.

This year's water storage, achieved at a time when local precipitation was just 44 percent of normal, totals about 2.4 billion gallons, enough to serve nearly 22,000 families for a year.

General Manager Daniel Cozad attributes the higher-than-average levels of dry weather storage to the work of staff preparing the Upper Santa Ana River Wash for optimal surface water capture, and to the recent completion of the district's Plunge Creek restoration project.

In the near future, the active recharge projects done in coordination with the San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District will contribute to higher levels of recharge. And long-planned diversion improvements at Mill Creek are expected to be underway next year making the most of dry years such as this one.

These and other collaborative approaches serve as a model for other regions to follow. At a time when much of the state faces mandates to increase groundwater storage, local agencies have been working together voluntarily – on recharge infrastructure projects and through participation in the San Bernardino Basin Groundwater Council – to ensure the sustainability of the region's underground water storage.

"California will be seeing wetter wet periods and drier dry spells in the years ahead," Cozad said. "We have been preparing for that and are building infrastructure to capture as much water as we can, no matter what the weather brings us."

About the San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District

For nearly a century, the SBVWCD has stewarded the San Bernardino Valley water basin and the native species of the Upper Santa Ana River Wash. Its collaborative approach to project management assures high-quality local water supplies for people, agriculture and the environment. This includes groundwater recharge and oversight, and protection of habitat and native species in the Wash. Visit sbvwcd.org.

https://www.highlandnews.net/news/public_works/san-bernardino-valley-municipal-water-district-to-purchase-harmony-property/article_6a4d7ac4-2de3-11ec-a1cc-6b81ca0ab135.html

FEATURED

San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District to purchase Harmony property

By Hector Hernandez Jr.
Oct 15, 2021



Aerial view of the Harmony project.

On Oct. 5, the Orange County Board of Supervisors accepted a bid from the San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District for the purchase of 1,657-acres of property in the Santa Ana River Wash, formerly designated for the Harmony housing development, for $31,815,000.

Orange County's acceptance of the bid was reported to the SBVMWD Board of Directors during its Oct. 5 meeting. The land is owned by Orange County Flood Control and was originally purchased for use in the construction of Seven Oaks Dam.

"Due to the district's need for water infrastructure and mitigation land in this area staff was authorized by the board to participate in the public sale process conducted by Orange County and on Sept. 8 the district submitted the highest responsive bid," said Wen Huang, SBVMWD deputy general manager.

The district's offer was considered and approved by the Orange County Board of Supervisors on Oct. 5, Huang reported to the SBVMWD. The Orange County Board of Supervisors, acting on behalf of Orange County Flood Control, received two other bids for the property. Redlands Parks Conservancy and Shopoff Advisors each bid $25 million. Richland Real Estate Fund submitted in incomplete bid package for $16 million.

"There's many moving pieces relating to the sale of this property," said Heather Dyer, SBVMWD general manager. "It will now go to Riverside County Flood, San Bernardino County Flood and the Corps of Engineers for review and approval, mainly because they were all three involved in the acquisition of the property for the construction of Seven Oaks Dam."

Orange County began the process of selling the land, which sits in the city of Highland at the east end of Greenspot Road, after its attempt to develop the 3,600-home Harmony project failed due to two lawsuits filed by the Center for Biological Diversity, the Sierra Club and the Greenspot Residents Association. The lawsuits lead to a San Bernardino County Superior Court ruling to invalidate the project's environmental impact report in July 2018.

LOCAL NEWS • News

Visitors flock to Big Bear area to start winter season in the snow



Christian Boldt, 13, left, is hit with a snowball from his brother Nicholas Boldt, 14, both of Porter Ranch, as they enjoy snow-tubing at Big Bear Snow Play in Big Bear Lake on Sunday, October 17, 2021. (Photo by Terry Pierson, The Press-Enterprise/SCNG)

By BRIAN WHITEHEAD | bwhitehead@scng.com | The Sun

PUBLISHED: October 17, 2021 at 5:25 p.m. | UPDATED: October 17, 2021 at 5:52 p.m.

Big Bear Snow Play kicked off the winter season earlier than ever this weekend as the popular recreation space opened to visitors two weeks before Halloween.

Open across the street from Octoberfest, the San Bernardino Mountains resort area drew travelers and families visiting for the myriad other activities going on in the area.

The snowy hill served as a haven for tubing, building snowmen and plenty of wintery fun, while the Alpine Slide at Magic Mountain offered views for the mountain.

Resort officials said they expect snow depths to eventually reach 30 feet or more above the surrounding terrain, ensuring a wintery wonderland into next spring.

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Los Angeles County wants Vanessa Bryant and others to take a psychiatric exam ahead of trial



Vanessa Bryant arrives at the Los Angeles premiere of "F9: Fast & Furious 9" at the TCL Chinese Theatre on Friday, June 18, 2021. (Photo by Jordan Strauss/Invision/AP)

By CNN COM WIRE SERVICE |
PUBLISHED: October 17, 2021 at 9:22 a.m. | UPDATED: October 17, 2021 at 9:40 a.m.

By Amanda Watts and Dakin Andone, CNN

(CNN) — Los Angeles County wants to compel the widow of NBA legend Kobe Bryant and others involved in a lawsuit over leaked photos of the helicopter crash that killed him, their daughter and seven others to take psychiatric exams before the case goes to trial, court filings show.

In a motion filed in court Friday, Los Angeles County argued independent medical examinations are necessary to determine whether the emotional distress suffered by Bryant and others were caused by the leak of the photos or the helicopter crash itself.

Vanessa Bryant's civil lawsuit against Los Angeles County claims photos of the January 2020 crash were shared by county fire and sheriff's department employees in settings irrelevant to the investigation, including at a bar. The lawsuit, filed in federal court in September 2020, seeks undisclosed damages, claiming civil rights violations, negligence, emotional distress and violation of privacy.

A "central tenet" of the county's defense is the "severe emotional and mental injuries were not caused by any conduct of Defendants, but rather by the tragic helicopter crash and resulting deaths of their loved ones," the court filing says. The county argues the plaintiffs "cannot be suffering distress from accident site photos that they have never seen and that were never publicly disseminated."

The plaintiffs are seeking "tens of millions of dollars to compensate them for their alleged mental and emotional injuries," the county says, and the medical examinations would help evaluate the "existence, extent and cause" of their "alleged harm."

Attorneys for Vanessa Bryant and the other plaintiffs argued against the examinations, saying a "complaint that merely claims damages for emotional distress does not place a party's mental condition 'in controversy.'" They added the county should work to evaluate emotional stress by "less intrusive means."

"It does not take an expert — and it certainly does not take an involuntary eight-hour psychiatric examination — for a jury to assess the nature and extent of the emotional distress caused by Defendants' misconduct," attorneys for Bryant said.

The plaintiffs' distress "are the feelings that any reasonable person would experience if the public officials entrusted to protect the dignity of their deceased family members snapped graphic photos of their loved ones' remains, used the photos for cocktail-hour entertainment, and failed to contain and secure the photos."

A hearing on the matter is slated for November 5, according to Friday's court filing, and the trial is set to begin in February 2022.

Earlier this year, family members of those killed in the crash settled a wrongful death lawsuit with the company that owned and operated the helicopter.

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CALIFORNIA

L.A. County supervisors may order audit to examine Mark Ridley-Thomas bribery charges



After Los Angeles City Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas, a former L.A. County supervisor, was indicted this week, his former colleagues on the county board are calling for an audit of contracts implicated in the indictment. (Allen J. Schaben / Los Angeles Times)

BY JACLYN COSGROVE | STAFF WRITER

OCT. 16, 2021 5 AM PT

Two Los Angeles County supervisors are calling for an independent investigation into federal criminal charges against their former colleague Mark Ridley-Thomas, who is accused of taking bribes from a USC dean in exchange for lucrative county contracts.

On Tuesday, the Board of Supervisors will consider a motion to hire an outside law firm for the investigation, which would focus on both the allegations against Ridley-Thomas and "the associated county processes and policies."

The proposed motion, written by board chair Hilda L. Solis and Supervisor Kathryn Barger, requires the law firm to retain a forensic auditor.

Ridley-Thomas, 66, one of the most powerful figures in Los Angeles politics, now serves on the L.A. City Council.

In a 20-count indictment, he and Marilyn Louise Flynn, a former dean of USC's School of Social Work, face charges of conspiracy, bribery and mail and wire fraud.

"Public servants who engage in corruption are a serious threat to our democracy," Solis said in a statement. "The alleged pay-to-play tactics that benefited Councilmember Ridley-Thomas and his family were at the expense of putting the needs of his vulnerable constituency at the forefront."

CALIFORNIA

Times Investigation: Mark Ridley-Thomas, his son and the USC School of Social Work

Oct. 13, 2021

Prosecutors accuse Ridley-Thomas of conspiring with Flynn beginning in 2017, when he was board chair, to steer county contracts to USC in return for admitting his son Sebastian into the social work school with a full-tuition scholarship and a paid professorship.

In exchange, Ridley-Thomas allegedly ensured that the social work school received millions of dollars in contracts with the county Department of Children and Family Services, Probation Department and Department of Mental Health.

Ridley-Thomas has denied the allegations and said he "has no intention of resigning" from the City Council.

"Going forward, I intend to do two things: disprove the allegations leveled at me and continue the work I was elected to do — most importantly, addressing the homeless and housing crisis," he said in a statement on Friday.

CALIFORNIA

Many sites bear the name 'Mark Ridley-Thomas.' What happens now that he faces charges?

Oct. 14, 2021

Barger, who has worked at the county for more than 30 years, said in a statement that Ridley-Thomas' alleged behavior "is an anomaly."

"The accusations against Mark Ridley-Thomas force me to call into question what happened during his time in office," Barger said. "This requires a thorough and independent audit to identify any questionable contracts and pursue proper legal actions to recover taxpayer funds as appropriate."

CALIFORNIA

The view from Sacramento

For reporting and exclusive analysis from bureau chief John Myers, get our California Politics newsletter.

CALIFORNIA

‘Stinky City’ Anger grows in Carson as noxious smell sickens residents, eludes solution



Otilia Marquez, who lives and works in Carson, says the smell emanating from the Dominguez Channel is overwhelming. Residents report headaches and nausea and have had to keep their doors and windows closed. (Carolyn Cole / Los Angeles Times)

BY HAILEY BRANSON-POTTS, ANDREW J. CAMPA

PUBLISHED OCT. 15, 2021 **UPDATED** OCT. 16, 2021 7:26 AM PT

When Otilia Marquez drives through Carson with her mom and little sister, the air stinks so much that one of them always jokes: “Who farted? Who didn’t take a shower? Put your shoes back on!”

One afternoon, Marquez’s sister whipped out a can of Febreze, stuck it out the open car window and gave a spray. At home, Marquez has been burning black-cherry-scented candles, trying in vain to beat back the stench.

“It’s like we’re gonna be known as that stinky city now, and I don’t want that,” said Marquez, 27, who has lived in Carson her entire life.

For nearly two weeks, an overpowering foul smell — likened to rotten eggs, a dead body and poop — has been wafting from the Dominguez Channel, which spills into Los Angeles Harbor.

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Richard Mootry, who said he works across the street at the Verizon store, looks out at the Dominguez Channel, the source of a foul odor in Carson. (Mel Melcon / Los Angeles Times)

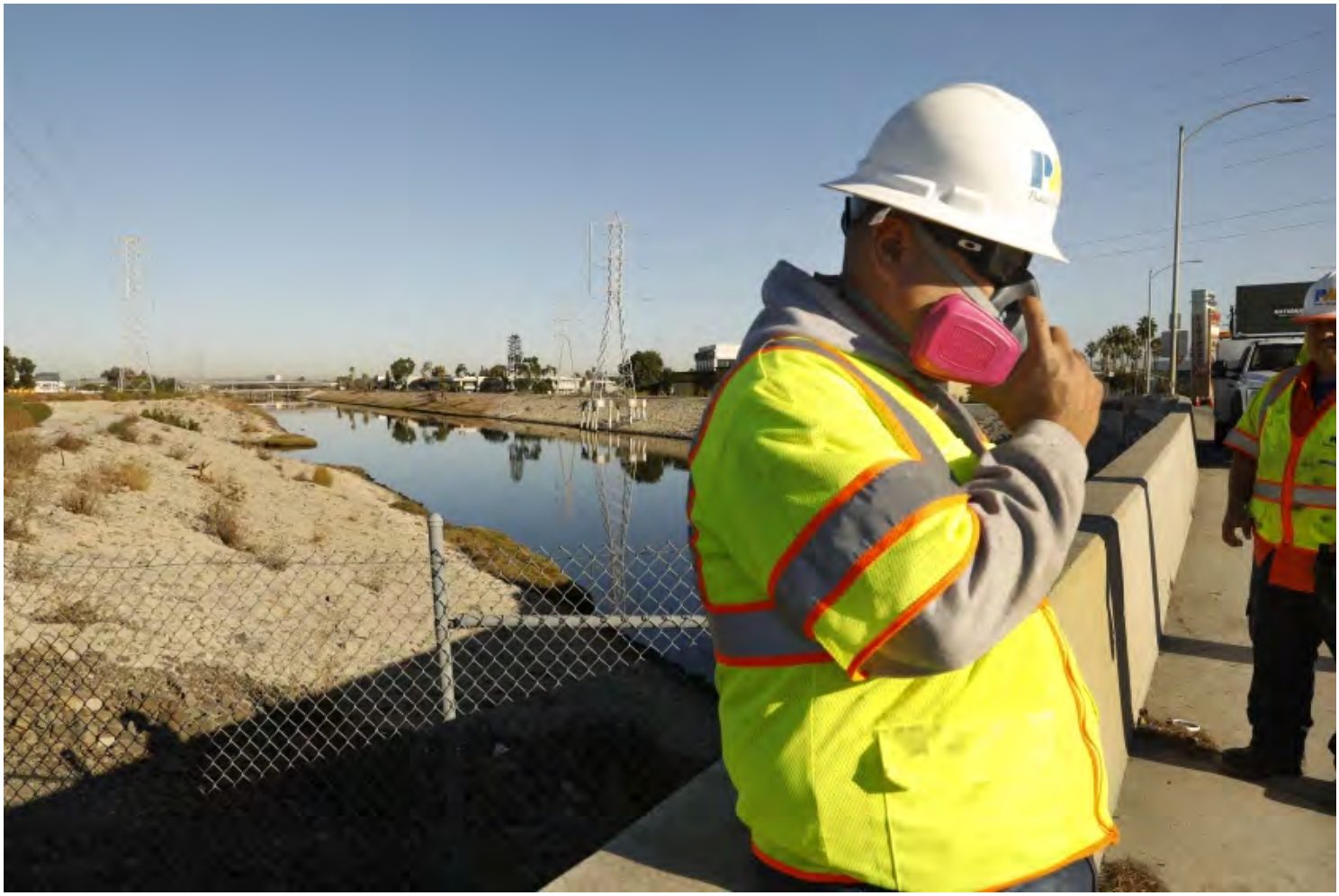
The stink has been the butt of plenty of online jokes: “If you can’t smell the air in Carson you DEFINITELY have COVID,” one Twitter user quipped. Others have suggested filling the Goodyear Blimp, which has a base in the city, with Febreze, or a water-dropping helicopter with Lysol.

Outside City Hall, a protester this week held a sign reading: “What the funk?”

Even as residents like Marquez, who has had headaches and burning eyes, try to keep a sense of humor, they are outraged by the odor and the slow response by government officials.

Los Angeles County officials say the smell is caused by hydrogen sulfide — a flammable, colorless gas known as “sewer gas” — coming from decaying vegetation in the channel that has built up because of the drought.

It took nearly two weeks for county crews to begin spraying with a biodegradable odor neutralizer called Epoleon that will convert the hydrogen sulfide to a salt.



A crew from the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works prepares to work on the smelly situation at Dominguez Channel in Carson. (Carolyn Cole / Los Angeles Times)

The spraying began Friday, and workers will soon pump oxygen into the water, since hydrogen sulfide is produced in unoxygenated environments.

The odor is expected to dissipate within five days, said L.A. County Public Works Director Mark Pestrella.

County and city officials say they had to wait for investigators and scientists to determine the cause of the odor before they could act.

But questions remain over whether communication breakdowns among different agencies led to the delay.

The smell was first reported Oct. 3 to the South Coast Air Quality Management District, which has now received more than 2,000 complaints.

But air quality officials did not notify the L.A. County Department of Public Works, which manages the channel, until Oct. 7, said Kerjon Lee, a department spokesman.



The water in a side channel of the Dominguez Channel is heavily polluted. (Carolyn Cole / Los Angeles Times)

Public works crews began inspecting the channel that day, Lee said.

By that Friday, the onsite investigation included L.A. County hazmat, sanitation and public works, the South Coast air quality district and petroleum industry officials.

One petroleum industry investigator was overcome by the smell and became lightheaded, Lee said.

The Carson City Council did not declare the smell a public nuisance until Oct. 11 — eight days after it was officially reported.

The noxious fumes can cause headaches and nausea, but officials say the levels in the air are too low to cause long-term health effects.



CALIFORNIA

Noxious odors in Carson declared a public nuisance

Oct. 11, 2021

Earlier this week, county officials announced that residents can be reimbursed for air purifiers and hotels.

The city followed with its own reimbursement program, which will also include medical expenses and will come out of $100,000 in emergency funds.

But people have already been suffering from the odor, and it could take weeks to get the reimbursements.

Birds could also be at risk because they eat bugs that may have ingested toxic substances.

“We are behind, and I think as a city government we should just admit our mistake,” Carson Mayor Pro Tem Jim Dear said during a special meeting Thursday night. “We should have acted immediately.”



Wildlife that swim and fish in the Dominguez Channel in Carson are subject to the pollution along with residents. Residents report headaches and nausea and have had to keep their doors and windows closed. (Carolyn Cole / Los Angeles Times)

The highest levels of hydrogen sulfide in the air have been detected near the channel’s intersection with Avalon Boulevard near the 405 Freeway, officials said. A nearby shopping district includes the South Bay Pavilion and an Ikea.

This section of the channel is a protected estuary with natural vegetation and wildlife, officials said. Saltwater from the harbor mixes with fresh water and urban runoff.

On an afternoon this week, water in the channel sparkled in the sun, and there were no visible clusters of vegetation. But garbage — including plastic bottles, food wrappers and disposable masks — could be seen in the water in places.

In a normal year, storm water would have washed away more of the underwater vegetation. This year, the drought caused additional buildup.

Beneath the surface, the vegetation was decaying — and the process may have been sped up by pallets and cardboard dumped upstream, which provided food for the bacteria, according to the public works department.

County agencies are investigating whether a fire at a pallet yard led to the dumping.

Hydrogen sulfide is produced by decaying organic matter such as dead animals or dying plants.

Humans can detect the smell at very low levels, which helps us notice when food is rotten, said Barbara Belmont, a chemistry lecturer at Cal State Dominguez Hills in Carson.

Belmont compared the Dominguez Channel to a human intestine and the hydrogen sulfide to flatulence.



A worker wears a mask to keep out the noxious smell wafting out of the Dominguez. (Carolyn Cole / Los Angeles Times)

“Normally, when things in the channel are flowing properly, and there’s plenty of oxygen, and the water is moving, the good bacteria are thriving,” she said. “Most of the time, there’s good bacteria, and the emissions are generally odorless.”

But now, bacteria that thrive without oxygen are flourishing in the slower-flowing water, and their hydrogen sulfide emissions stink, as when people pass smelly gas after eating something foul, she said.

The levels of hydrogen sulfide measured in the area are “well below what’s actually hazardous and what would lead to an emergency where everyone needs to get out,” Dr. Muntu Davis, the county’s health officer, said in an interview.

If people have persistent, worrisome symptoms, they should leave the area until the smell is gone, Davis said.

But with the current hydrogen sulfide levels, he is not worried about long-term health effects.

Many residents are not reassured.

“How can anyone say it’s safe?” asked Stephanie De La Rosa, 52, who lives half a mile from the Dominguez Channel. “People are getting sick, and it’s difficult to breathe.”

De La Rosa, who initially thought the smell was coming from nearby refineries, has had headaches and a sore throat. Her 21-year-old daughter, Samantha De La Rosa, who is five months pregnant, has also had headaches, along with itchy eyes.

“It’s already affecting me now,” Samantha De La Rosa said. “How will I know it won’t affect my baby?”

Carson City Councilman Jawane Hilton said in an interview that the city decided to offer money to residents because many could not afford to pay for hotel rooms and air purifiers while waiting to be reimbursed by the county.

Carson is 37% Latino, 27% Asian, 24% Black and 7% white.

Hilton, who is Black, said the smell is the latest example of communities of color being more exposed to pollution.

Several refineries operate in or near Carson, which many people initially thought were the source of the smell, he said.

Hilton, who cited the county’s response to a massive sewage discharge at the Hyperion Water Reclamation Plant in upscale Playa del Rey this summer, said it’s unacceptable that the people of Carson have been living with the smell for weeks.

“People believe that if they were in a different area, if this was Beverly Hills or Manhattan Beach or Hermosa Beach, that aid would have already come, but that they’re blowing it over for our community,” Hilton said. “We’re told, ‘It’s

just a little gas, don't worry about it.'"

Hilton said he has had severe headaches at City Hall in recent days, and he is not allowing his three young children to play outside.

Beverly Jackson has resumed wearing a mask outdoors when she power-walks at a local park.

She likened the odor to "old diapers" and has had watery eyes and mild headaches at times.

"Let's be real. The city failed us," Jackson, 72, a retired accountant, said Friday. "This has been going on for almost two weeks, and where are the solutions?"

Jackson, who is Black, questioned whether it would have taken so long to fix the problem if it had happened in Beverly Hills, Malibu or Culver City, all of which are mostly white.

She said she would probably purchase an air filter and claim reimbursement from the county. She has air conditioning, but she worries about her neighbors who don't and wishes the hotel reimbursement had been offered sooner.

Though Marquez jokes about the stench and her ever-present Febreze, the situation has been miserable, she said.

She lives with her parents and teenage sister near a refinery on Wilmington Avenue. They don't have air conditioning, and it has been stuffy with the windows closed to keep out the smell.

Marquez, who works near the channel, has gotten panicky when she struggles to breathe and her eyes burn.

"Our work is here, school is here, our home is in Carson," she said.

"We all have no other option but to settle for it. To live under these conditions? It's frustrating."

CALIFORNIA



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NEWS [/NEWS]

Hacked Records Reveal Hundreds Of Oath Keepers Across New Jersey

BY GEORGE JOSEPH [/STAFF/GEORGE-JOSEPH] , MATT KATZ, WNYC [/STAFF/MATT-KATZ] , MICAH LOEWINGER [/STAFF/MICAH-LOEWINGER] AND JOSEPH GEDEON [/STAFF/JOSEPH-GEDEON]

OCT 13, 9:32 PM •

59 COMMENTS [/NEWS/HACKED-RECORDS-REVEAL-HUNDREDS-OATH-KEEPERS-ACROSS-NEW-JERSEY#COMMENTS]



A man wearing a vest with the Oath Keepers logo, protesting the George election results, November 2020
NATHAN POSNER/SHUTTERSTOCK

Over the last decade, dozens of current and former law enforcement officers, military personnel, and government officials in New Jersey joined a far-right, anti-government militia called the Oath Keepers, according to a WNYC/Gothamist

analysis of what appear to be membership rolls obtained by an anonymous hacker.

In response, the state's Attorney General's office said it was troubled by the findings, and that it would evaluate "what reforms are necessary to root out extremism among law enforcement ranks." That push comes after WNYC/Gothamist reported last month (https://gothamist.com/news/hack-oath-keepers-militia-group-includes-names-active-nypd-officers-de-blasio-launches-investigation) that the same hacked information, which lists names and other personal information of alleged members, indicated some NYPD officers had also joined the group. NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio ordered an investigation into the associations.

Members of the Oath Keepers have become a focus for federal prosecutors investigating the storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6th. Video footage of the melee showed (https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/case-multi-defendant/file/1369076/download) a team of people wearing Oath Keepers insignia, clad in camouflage as they charged up the Capitol steps in military formation. Eighteen (https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/florida-oath-keepers-member-pleads-guilty-jan-6-capitol-riot-charges-2021-09-15/) members of the group have been indicted for conspiracy and at least five have pleaded guilty to charges stemming from the event.

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Currently, New Jersey has no state law forbidding law enforcement or other public officials from being involved with the Oath Keepers or other similar organizations like the Proud Boys or Three Percenters, groups with white supremacist ties that have also been linked to the attack on the Capitol.

However, the state Attorney General's office said police departments and other local agencies have the authority to establish rules that ensure employees' personal associations and conduct do not conflict with their duties to the public, as long as those rules don't inappropriately infringe on officers' First Amendment rights. The office said it was working to determine what changes are needed to prevent extremist groups from infiltrating law enforcement organizations in the state.

"To build and maintain the trust of the communities they serve—especially vulnerable communities that have been targeted by hate groups in the past—it is imperative the ranks of our law enforcement be free of bias and hate," said Steven Barnes, a spokesperson for Acting New Jersey Attorney General Andrew Bruck.

The founder of the Oath Keepers, Stewart Rhodes, has long sought to recruit current and former members of the military and law enforcement to its ranks as part of a long-term strategy to challenge the authority of the federal government, according to researchers who monitor hate groups. The militia has claimed (https://archive.is/4jfvB) to have more than 30,000 dues-paying members and has been labeled as an extremist group by the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League.

The hacked Oath Keepers membership data, which were given to a non-profit journalism organization called Distributed Denial of Secrets (https://ddosecrets.com/wiki/Distributed_Denial_of_Secrets) (DDoS) and posted online, have been used by media outlets across the country to identify alleged members of the militia group, although the logs do not indicate the extent of an individual's involvement.

The records show that members were encouraged to list skills and experience that could be beneficial to the militia. Among the more than 500 people with New Jersey addresses listed in the data, many described a range of skills learned from years of service in law enforcement, the U.S. military, and other public sector positions.

"I would be willing to help people to the best of my ability with my knowledge of computers and networking," one entry read.

"I have security reaction force training (Navy SWAT)," said another.

WNYC/Gothamist's review of the records also identified numerous current and former corrections officers, firefighters, EMTs, and other public servants across the Garden State.

In response to the findings, Alexandra Altman, a spokesperson for New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy, noted that extremist groups like the Oath Keepers "endanger the fabric of our democracy."

"Governor Murphy has zero tolerance for those who willingly participate in acts of domestic terrorism and those who do so will be held accountable to the fullest extent of the law," Altman said.

For more than a decade, federal law enforcement officials (https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/fbi-white-supremacists-in-law-enforcement) have been concerned about the possible infiltration of police agencies by far-right groups, which they fear could undermine active investigations and the ability of elected officials to carry out democratic mandates.

New Jersey Senator Cory Booker said he was alarmed that officers' names and personal information were in the membership data.

"The Oath Keepers are an anti-government militia whose stated mission is to disobey orders they disagree with—which is in complete conflict with the real oath police take to protect and serve and dutifully enforce the law," Booker said in an email. "It is particularly concerning that there might be members who are currently police officers, especially given the group's nativist views and involvement with the January 6th insurrection, and I know that there are law enforcement officials who share my concerns."

Hundreds of Oath Keepers Across New Jersey

The Oath Keepers' name is a reference to the oath that members of the military take to defend the Constitution. Since its founding (https://web.archive.org/web/20090710214219/http://oathkeepers.org/oath/2009/03/03/declar of-orders-we-will-not-obey/) in 2009, the group has espoused a far-right interpretation of that oath, and it views the federal government as a tyrannical force that must be reined in.

Sam Jackson, a University of Albany professor who wrote a book on the Oath Keepers, said the group specifically targets police and military personnel because they're on the front lines of enforcing measures that violate its militant, libertarian ideology, such as gun control measures or Covid-19 emergency restrictions, and can therefore disrupt their implementation.

"If you can get to those populations beforehand and convince them that such an act would be unconstitutional and un-American, then maybe you can prevent the people from carrying out those orders in the first place," Jackson said.

To confirm the identities of people who had signed up with the Oath Keepers, WNYC/Gothamist cross-referenced hundreds of names, email addresses, and home addresses on the hacked list against those found in news articles, social media, and public databases of state and federal government employees, salaries, and pension information. The results suggest the militant group has recruited a significant number of current and former law enforcement and military personnel in New Jersey over several years.

Roughly 20 people in the records matched the names, phone area codes, and address locations of police and corrections officers who were listed as active within the last two years. These included officers in two of the state's largest and most diverse cities, Jersey City and Paterson, along with a swath of rural and suburban communities.

WNYC/Gothamist attempted to contact all active and former law enforcement officers who could be identified in the membership data. Most did not respond to phone calls, text messages and emails requesting comment. The few who did said they were no longer or had never been active with the group.

The investigation also identified another 15 people who claimed to have or could be identified as having military experience. Three other people appear in a payroll database of federal government employees from 2020, including one listed with the Department of Homeland Security.

Another 17 members either self-identified as, or matched the names of current and former firefighters, emergency medical technicians, and other first responders in New Jersey.

Mike German, a former FBI agent who's investigated far-right extremists, warned that the presence of Oath Keepers within the ranks of emergency responders could undermine public confidence in such agencies.

"The public depends on them coming out into the community and doing their job in a fair and equal manner to any potential victim," he said. "So if they are bringing biases or interpreting the Constitution in a way that inappropriately excludes some part of the community, that's problematic."

One corrections officer, currently employed by the Passaic County Sheriff's Office, is listed in the group's records as having paid for an annual membership in 2014. The same officer was found to be a member of seven extremist and anti-Muslim groups on Facebook, according to a 2019 investigation (https://revealnews.org/article/these-police-officers-were-members-of-extremist-groups-on-facebook/) by the public radio program *Reveal*. The officer was also part of an alt-right page called "Crusades Against Degeneracy," according to NJ.com (https://www.nj.com/news/2019/07/nj-corrections-officer-exposed-by-racism-report-now-hes-apologizing-for-anti-muslim-comments.html). He did not respond to requests for comment via phone, email and text message.

Another New Jersey law enforcement officer who appeared in the logs was Craig Iacouzzi, a detective currently serving in the Hudson County Prosecutor's Office in Jersey City. In a brief phone call, the officer confirmed he'd entered his information into an Oath Keepers' form online, but claimed he only did so years ago for an "email

subscription" to receive "current events and a different take on mainstream media perspective" and that he "never met anybody or spoke to anybody" from the organization.

Jennifer Morrill, a spokeswoman for the Hudson County Prosecutor's Office, said that her agency was investigating the officer's ties to Oath Keepers and would seek guidance from the Attorney General's Office. Any information would be turned over to the FBI, she said.

"There are obvious concerns about any member of law enforcement participating in a group such as this," Morrill said in an email.

"Challenge To Our Democracy"

In his testimony (https://oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/Grewal%20Testimony.p to Congress earlier this year, then-New Jersey Attorney General Gurbir Grewal warned that extremist militias were a threat in the state.

"New Jersey law enforcement agencies have recognized the risk that militia extremism will infiltrate their ranks," Grewal said at a subcommittee hearing on violent white supremacy, citing a 2013 revelation that members of the Three Percenters were working within the Jersey City Police Department.

But it's unclear how far local officials will go to confront such risks. Neither the Jersey City mayor's office, the Paterson mayor's office, or the Passaic County Sheriff's Office responded to questions about whether their employees' apparent affiliations with extremist groups violate their personnel policies or merit further investigation.

German, the former FBI agent, said public trust in police departments and other frontline agencies will depend on thorough investigations that closely examine an officer or other public employee's links with the Oath Keepers and similar organizations, including any civil rights lawsuits or civilian complaints filed against them that may serve as additional warning signs.

But he urged public officials to be cautious. Some people who signed up for the group, German argued, may have misunderstood its ideology or had little participation. Others, he said, should be taken out of people-facing roles or removed from the force.

“It's not an all-or-nothing thing,” German said. “There may be some people who didn't really understand what this organization was about, or before January 6th didn't realize how far that kind of idea could get people into trouble.”

Still, while public officials should be afforded due process, authorities must have the courage to take the threat of extremism seriously and carry out intensive investigations, said Jon Lewis, a research fellow at George Washington University’s Program on Extremism.

“A large swath of the American public and elected officials are complacent to this threat, and I think that’s a fundamental challenge to our democracy,” Lewis said. “Groups like the Oath Keepers and other extreme anti-government groups really do seek to collapse this democratic system from within.”

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Deputy assaulted during Pioneer Days disturbance

Oct 16, 2021 2:30 PM

TWENTYNINE PALMS — One juvenile, 14, was arrested and a sheriff's deputy was injured in a large disturbance at the Pioneer Days Carnival at Luckie Park Friday, Oct. 15.

The disturbance drew patrol deputies and California Highway Patrol officers from across the Morongo Basin.

Deputies patrolling the carnival at about 8:44 p.m. reported trying to separate several large groups that were fighting at the center of the carnival.

Deputies were quickly surrounded by large crowds of people fighting and trying to assault them. Deputies reported that responding officers were surrounded by crowds of more than 200 people.

While apprehending a possible suspect, a deputy was assaulted by a male juvenile and sustained an injury to his leg. He was transported by ambulance to a local hospital, treated and released.

The juvenile was arrested for assault on a peace officer and was later cited and released to his parents.

Anyone with information regarding this incident is urged to contact Deputy J. Lopez of the Morongo Basin Station (760) 366-4175.

Callers wishing to remain anonymous are urged to call the We-Tip Hotline at 1800-78-CRIME (27463), or leave information on the We-Tip

DAILY PRESS

NEWS

4-year-old Apple Valley girl struck, killed by car in parking lot of Victorville Vons

Charlie McGee Victorville Daily Press

Published 1:34 p.m. PT Oct. 17, 2021

A four-year-old Apple Valley girl has died after being run over by a car that was backing up in a Victorville parking lot, police say.

Victorville Police Department officers and city fire personnel responded shortly before 3:30 p.m. Saturday to the accident in the parking lot of a strip mall that centers around a Vons supermarket off Hesperia Road, police said in a press release. When they found the girl, who has not been publicly identified, she was "unresponsive with major injuries."

"Despite life-saving measures," the department said, "the female juvenile was pronounced deceased at Desert Valley Hospital."

The driver and numerous witnesses remained on the scene when officers arrived. "For reasons still unknown, the vehicle backed over the child in the parking lot," according to police, who say they closed off a large area of the parking lot to investigate.

It is unclear if any arrests or charges have resulted or will result from the fatal incident. Victorville Police listed "none" in its release for the category of "suspect(s)" connected to the incident.

Ninety people under the age of 15 were killed or injured in traffic incidents in San Bernardino County in 2019, according to the most recent county data. That was a 12.5% increase from the prior year and the highest single-year total since 2015.

Charlie McGee covers the city of Barstow and its surrounding communities for the Daily Press. He is also a Report for America corps member with the GroundTruth Project, an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization dedicated to supporting the next generation of journalists in the U.S. and around the world. McGee may be reached at 760-955-5341 or cmcgee@gannett.com. Follow him on Twitter @bycharliemcgee.

DAILY PRESS

NEWS

Barstow Police identify suspect in the killing of 28-year-old Tevin Tharpe

Charlie McGee Victorville Daily Press

Published 3:39 p.m. PT Oct. 17, 2021

Police are seeking to arrest 30-year-old Barstow resident Carl Frederick Tate III in connection with the recent killing of a local man.

Tevin Tharpe, 28, died after authorities say he was shot near an apartment complex at the intersection of East Rimrock Road and Borrego Drive on the night of Oct. 7. While "detectives and evidence (technicians) were able to collect multiple items of evidence from the shooting scene," according to Barstow Police Department, no suspect had been identified as of last Tuesday.

Now, Barstow Police detectives Matthew Helms and Tom Lewis have named Tate as the suspected shooter.

Barstow Police said Friday that they have a warrant to arrest Tate on a charge of murder. Yet, the department said it still had not found Tate as of Sunday, and continued encouraging anyone to contact the department if they see him or have information on his location. They said Tate should be "considered armed and dangerous."

Tate has an extensive record of felony-related charges in the High Desert, according to San Bernardino County Superior Court's electronic records database. He has faced 10 cases in the criminal courts of Victorville and Rancho Cucamonga over the last nine years.

Tate has faced three counts of assault with a firearm, five counts of robbery, one count of burglary and one count of threatening a crime. The county sought to enhance the punishment for each felony, alleging he committed them in connection with "gang activity" and used a firearm in each case.

All except for one of the charges in that case went on to be dismissed along with all of the county's requested enhancements. Tate waived his right to a jury trial and agreed to plead

guilty to one robbery count in February 2013, the records show, and went on to face a few months in jail followed by a probation period.

He plead guilty to a misdemeanor battery charge later that year. He then faced felony charges of burglary in 2014 and of violating probation in 2016, both of which were dismissed.

Among other later cases, Tate went on to plead guilty in 2018 to one felony count of attempted possessing, manufacturing or selling of a dangerous weapon. He served less than a year in state prison in that case, according to the records.

Charlie McGee covers the city of Barstow and its surrounding communities for the Daily Press. He is also a Report for America corps member with the GroundTruth Project, an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization dedicated to supporting the next generation of journalists in the U.S. and around the world. McGee may be reached at 760-955-5341 or cmcgee@gannett.com. Follow him on Twitter @bycharliemcgee.

Man dies after shooting near 210 Freeway in San Bernardino

By CAITLIN ANTONIOS | cantonios@scng.com |
PUBLISHED: October 16, 2021 at 10:06 p.m. | UPDATED: October 17, 2021 at 5:25 p.m.

A man died after suffering from gunshot wounds at 2900 North Mountain Avenue in San Bernardino just after 3 a.m. on Friday, Oct. 15, officials said.

Dave Sanchez, 29, a resident of San Bernardino, was found on the street near the 210 Freeway by officers before he succumbed to his injuries, the San Bernardino Police Department said in a Saturday night statement.

Detectives were attempting to identify a suspect. Officials did not immediately release information on the the circumstances of the shooting or a possible motive.

Anyone with information regarding the incident was asked to contact Detective J. Alvarez at Alvarez_Jo@sbcity.org or Sergeant E. Campos at campos_er@sbcity.org / (909) 384-5613.

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Tags: homicide, shooting, Top Stories Sun

Caitlin Antonios | Reporter

Caitlin Antonios is a California native and has spent most of her life living in Orange County. After graduating from the University of California, Irvine with a literary journalism and English degree, she attended Columbia University for the Toni Stabile Investigative Journalism program. She spent a year freelancing investigative stories covering education, health and the COVID-19 pandemic.

San Bernardino shooting victim found in marijuana dispensary parking lot

By RUBY GONZALES | rugonzales@scng.com | San Gabriel Valley Tribune
PUBLISHED: October 16, 2021 at 1:51 p.m. | UPDATED: October 16, 2021 at 9:44 p.m.

A man was found fatally shot in a parking lot behind a marijuana dispensary in San Bernardino early Saturday morning, Oct. 16.

Police on Saturday night identified the victim as Mark Burton, 40, of Moreno Valley. Police believe the shooting is related to a marijuana dispensary that was open at the time, San Bernardino police Lt. Michele Mahan said. It was the only business open then, she added.

Detectives did not immediately release details on what led them to that conclusion.

She said a sergeant patrolling in the downtown area around 3:52 a.m. heard gunshots. He and other patrol officers searched and determined there had been a shooting at the rear of a marijuana dispensary at 570 W. 4th Street.

The officers found a man who had been shot in the parking lot behind the dispensary, Mahan said. The victim was taken to a local hospital where he died, she said.

“Although this location is near (a) movie theater and shares a public parking lot in common, this shooting did not take place at the theater and was unrelated to the theater in any way,” Mahan said, adding that the theater had been closed for several hours before the shooting occurred.

Police don’t yet know the motive behind the shooting and don’t have a suspect description.

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