

Economy
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12,000 seek work as county jobless rate climbs

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The jobless rate in Santa Cruz County climbed higher in December to 8.7 percent, leaving an estimated 12,000 people unemployed and looking for work, state Employment Development Department figures show.

That compares to December

1990, when unemployment was at 8.5 percent, affecting about 11,400 people.

It was higher, too, than state and national figures, which were 7.4 percent and 6.8 percent, respectively, before being adjusted for the season.

As is usual for Santa Cruz County, the rise in unemployment was

partly because more people entered the work force, which could be a sign of both new residents, or current residents who hadn't been looking for work falling on hard times and starting to look. The labor pool increased to an estimated 138,000, compared to 133,400 the year before.

But less normal for Santa Cruz

County is a drop in the number of jobs here, as was the case in December, the EDD estimated.

There were about 93,900 "wage and salary" jobs, compared to 94,700 the year before. As has been the case for the last several months, a large loss was in durable goods manufacturing, down to 7,300 jobs from 8,000. Officials have

said that decrease could be related to the layoffs at Seagate Technology last summer.

Retail trade in its busiest season of the year was also down 200 jobs to 19,700 compared to the year before. Food processing and construction were also slightly down. Government stayed the same and the services category continued its

upward trend to 23,200 jobs, up from 22,500 the year before.

Tad Kimoto, the manager of the Watsonville EDD office, said in December, 3,735 new claims for unemployment insurance were filed in Watsonville, a 20 percent increase over December 1990.

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The number of total weeks claimed during the month rose by 9 percent over the previous year.

Although unemployment rates for January are not yet in, Kimoto said the EDD does know that only 1,838 new claims for unemployment insurance were filed in Watsonville. That may be far lower than in December, but the number of weeks claimed overall was only slightly lower — suggesting that the same people were unemployed

for longer.

Compared to the year before, however, January offered a glimmer of hope: The number of new claims filed in Watsonville was down 18 percent and the number of weeks claimed overall was down 17 percent.

Kimoto said all of the EDD estimates on unemployment are hard to pinpoint, and are criticized for not taking into account the people who are underemployed or who are jobless but who aren't looking for work. It's also hard to tell when people aren't filing for unemployment insurance because they've run out.

"(The estimates) don't tell about people's economic plight," he said. But, Kimoto added, the current figures do indicate that the recession is hitting Santa Cruz County.

"Even after the earthquake, unemployment was just at 6.6 percent," he said.

REFERENCE

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