

Jobless rate jumps

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SANTA CRUZ — A growing number of local residents may be home for the holidays when they would rather be working, employment figures released this week indicate.

Unemployment in Santa Cruz County jumped a full percentage point in October to hit 9.2 percent, highest for the month in at least 10 years, according to the state Employment Development Department. It was the highest monthly rate since April's 9.2 percent.

The county's rate in October 1992 was 8.1 percent, the previous high for the month since the EDD began publishing an unemployment rate in 1983.

The year-to-year increase contrasts with a decline nationally of more than half a percentage point to 6.8 percent in October. California's seasonally adjusted rate was 9.8 percent, the same

as a year ago.

The picture was bleaker in Watsonville where the jobless rate hit 18.6 percent in October, up from 16.8 percent in September and 5.5 percent higher than a year ago.

November will be worse.

"The last week or so, our lobby is plumb full," said Tad Kimoto, EDD office manager in Watsonville. The line of job seekers applying for benefits stretches out the door soon after the office opens, he said.

Agriculture, the biggest employer in the Pajaro Valley, has shut down with the rain last weekend and the rain and frost earlier in October, Kimoto said. The Green Giant plant is expected to close in January, putting more people on the jobless rolls.

"As agriculture goes so goes the rest of the town because they are the ones spending money," Kimoto said.

In the city of Santa Cruz, unemployment was about 8 percent in October, Santa Cruz EDD manager Barbara Babcock said.

Despite some encouraging signs, a temporary employment agency predicts sluggish hiring in early 1994.

"Although things are picking up, companies are still hesitant to make the regular full-time commitment," said Lisa Holcombe, manager of Manpower Inc.'s Capitola office.

The temporary employment business has boomed this year at Manpower and other local agencies as companies bring on temporary help to get the work done. Holcombe has seen an upsurge at her office in the past three months.

But a survey the agency conducts of local employers indicates that 90 percent plan to keep levels the same or decrease employment in January, February and March.