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'Involuntary furlough' for county workers eyed to save money

By BOB SMITH APR 19 1993
STAFF WRITER

Most, if not all, of Santa Cruz County's employees may be forced to take an involuntary furlough each week to help solve the county's fiscal troubles.

The County Administrative Office is reportedly studying a proposal to shut down county offices Friday afternoons and reduce the work week of most county employees by four hours each week.

Attempts to reach County Administrative Officer Susan Mauriello for comment this morning were unsuccessful.

County Auditor-Controller Gary Knutson said this morning that the county's revenues are \$2-4 million less than expected.

Knutson said he believes that the CAO is looking at cutting the work week from 40 hours to 37½.

Bill Murphy, the county tax collector and treasurer, said he believes the cuts will total a half-day, "but we really don't know."

"This CAO (Mauriello)," he added, "hasn't had a department head meeting for I don't know when. She doesn't confide in us. We are totally out in the cold."

Sheriff Al Noren said he is also out of the loop. "What's being done is being held close to the vest without consulting the department heads," Noren said this morning.

How that cutback would be implemented is unknown right now, Knutson said. A couple of possibilities include shutting down the county offices for the entire length of time once a week, or reducing the workday.

In all, it would total a six percent reduction, he said.

There has been no proposal made to the Board of Supervisors yet, said Board Chairman Ray Belgard.

Initial reports indicated that the

furlough proposal might be made at tomorrow's Board of Supervisors' meeting. But indications now are that it will be delayed until the supervisors' April 27 meeting.

"I assume that there will be some good-sized shortfalls," Belgard said this morning, "but I haven't heard about any furloughs."

The county has already been talking with the unions that represent employees about some cuts.

Tim McCormick, general manager of the Service Employees International Union Local 415, which represents about 1,600 county employees, said he met with Mauriello and County Personnel Director Mary Lou Alexander last Thursday.

At that time, he said, he was assured that the county was only exploring its options and was not ready to begin cutting work hours.

But on Friday, some employees received memos from department heads alerting them to the possibility of a shorter work week.

McCormick indicated this morning that the union would go to court to stop any furlough plan.

If the county has a budget crisis, McCormick said, the current agreement with the union calls for layoffs — first of all temporary employees and then in a reverse pecking order with the newest employees being the first to be laid off.

"If they have to deal with budget constraints," said McCormick, "they need to use the layoff process."

Knutson said the layoff process is a lengthy one, and it would be difficult — if not impossible — to achieve budget savings this fiscal year.

Cutting the work week would show immediate results, he said.