

# Oregon job market gets worse; unemployment skyrockets



SALEM (AP) — Oregon's unemployment rate increased sharply last month, rising half a percentage point to 6.4 percent, the state Employment Division said Wednesday.

The seasonally adjusted rate translated to 86,400 Oregonians on the jobless rolls. That was the highest October level since 1986, when 96,800 people applied for unemployment benefits, the agency said.

Division analyst Graham Slater called the news disturbing but said there's no cause for alarm at this point.

The month-to-month increase "is just not that good of an indicator," Slater said.

"If the rate stays at the 6.4 percent level or higher for the next few months, then it would be clear that Oregon's

economy has taken a turn for the worse," he said.

With the holidays approaching, he said, economists will be closely watching key areas such as the retail trades to see if there's been a downturn in Oregon's economy.

Despite the increase, Oregon's unemployment rate still was lower than the nation's, which crept upward to 6.8 percent in October.

Still, the increase in the state's jobless rate came as a surprise because of its size and because the rate has been "remarkably stable" through most of 1991, the Employment Division said.

Forest fires or the threat of fires resulted in a sharp decline in logging employment last month, the division said.

The number of Oregonians working in logging plunged to 9,300 in October, a drop of 2,200 from the previous month

and the lowest October level on record, the agency said.

Other parts of the timber industry, including sawmills and veneer and plywood, lost smaller numbers of workers as cutbacks and layoffs continued in the industry, it said.

The food processing industry experienced a seasonal loss of 2,400 jobs, while services employment grew by 2,100 jobs when a loss could have been expected, the division said.

Employment in most manufacturing industries, construction and trade appeared to be "reasonably strong" in October. But transportation employment fell as the decline in logging activity resulted in a lessened demand for log trucks, the agency said.

State economists have been saying for months that Oregon, with its continuing

influx of new residents, has largely been able to escape the effects of the recession gripping much of the rest of the nation.

Slater said division analysts don't know if the October rise in unemployment signals a major change.

"The worst case would be that Oregon is finally being seriously affected by the national downturn, but that's by no means clear at this point," he said.

The increase in Oregon's jobless rate drew a warning from U.S. Rep. Les AuCoin, D-Ore., that President Bush and the Congress "must get off the dime on economic recovery."

AuCoin, who is giving up his House seat to run for the Senate, urged Bush to sign a bill to extend unemployment benefits. He also said Congress and Bush need to work together on an overall economic recovery plan.

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