

## Local, state job bleeding tapering off

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The bleeding may have started to abate for the wounded employment market in the state and East Bay, according to a new report released Friday — but economists warned that the pain is far from over for job seekers.

East Bay employers shed 900 jobs during April, the state's Employment Development Department reported. California lost nearly 64,000 jobs, pushing the statewide rate slightly down from 11.2 percent to 11 percent. The numbers for both areas were adjusted for seasonal changes.

The 900 jobs lost in the East Bay marked the 17th straight month of employment declines for the slumping region — but that's also a lot better than what's been happening for the last year. Over the last 12 months, job losses in the East Bay averaged 3,600 a month.

"We are no longer accelerating on the way down to the bottom," said Christopher Thornberg, a partner and economist with Beacon Economics. "Things are stabilizing. But we will continue to see job losses."

The tiny improvement in the unemployment rate shouldn't be seen as a rebound, said Steve Levy, director of the Palo Alto-based Center for Continuing Study of the California Economy.

"The decline is a false signal that economic

recovery is under way," Levy said. "The California economy plunged deeper into recession in April."

A weak job market engulfed every region of the Bay Area during April, according to two reports issued separately Friday. The San Mateo and San Joaquin numbers were issued by the EDD. The South Bay, Sonoma and Napa numbers were produced by Beacon. The numbers were adjusted for seasonal changes:

San Mateo-San Francisco-Marin lost 2,200 jobs.

San Joaquin County's job totals were unchanged.

Solano County lost 1,100 jobs.

Santa Clara County lost 4,500 jobs.

Sonoma County lost 300 jobs.

Napa County lost 1,200 jobs.

Several job seekers said Friday they have seen virtually no improvement in the reeling job market.

"It's a lot more difficult than what it was last year," said Blair Harden, a Hayward resident, who said she is seeking work in the clerical field. "I had interviews rolling in like crazy last year. But now you can apply for 20 jobs and get called back for one interview. If you're lucky."

Elizabeth Ilog, a Martinez resident, said she's been hired three times, but in each instance, the job fell through at the last minute. One time, the nursing anesthetist said, the employer had given her a letter of intent, complete with salary and benefits. Another time she was hired for a teaching job, but the employer never sent her a contract. A third time, she was hired for the Census Bureau, but didn't get the job because the agency had brought on too many

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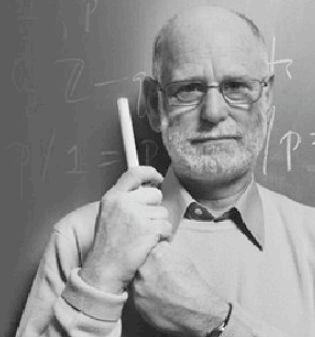


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"It's been a horrible experience," Ilog said. "It's hard to find work, even in health care."

Danville resident Kevin Rymer is looking for work in residential carpentry. He's working at a warehouse in Union City to tide him over until he can get back in the housing market.

"It's not been good at all," Rymer said. "A year ago, I had three or four different contractors I could work for at the same time. Now it's down to zero."

During the one-year period that ended in April, the East Bay's five weakest industries were construction, which lost 8,800 jobs; retail, down 5,900 jobs; manufacturing, down 5,200; employment services, which declined by 4,300; and finance and insurance, down 4,200 jobs.

Over the last 12 months, the five strongest industries were health care, up 900 jobs; utilities, up 400; motion picture and sound recording, up 300; software, up 100; and computer systems services, up 100.

The jobless rate in the East Bay was above 10 percent for the second month, in a row and is double what it was a year ago. During the last 12 months, the East Bay has lost just over 43,000 jobs. California lost 707,000 jobs. Another possible bright spot: over the last year, the East Bay has lost jobs at a slightly slower pace than California.

"We are seeing improvements in consumer spending and the housing market," Thornberg said. "We are near the bottom, but we will be there for a long time. The job market will be flat through all of 2010."

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