

# County fires 100 employees to trim budget

By PAT MURPHY  
STAFF WRITER

County employees have begun to feel Oakland's much-publicized budget crunch.

The first of more than 100 scheduled notices started going out Friday telling employees their jobs are being eliminated. "These aren't layoffs, they're job eliminations," emphasized Robert Dastman, press secretary for County Executive L. Brooks Patterson. "I can't say how many notices were sent, or who they went to. But they definitely started going out Friday."

"Department heads will be notifying individual employees and notifying them of their bumping rights."

Cutting the county's 4,100-member work force to one of the measures Patterson has initiated to deal with an \$8 million budget deficit this year and a projected \$21 million shortfall in 1994.

In a related development, commissioners on the county board's personnel committee rejected a three-year labor contract with the Oakland County Sheriff's Command Officers Association.

"It was just too expensive," said commissioner Marilyn E. Gosling, R-Bloomfield Hills, who is chairwoman of the committee. She was referring to provisions of the proposed agreement calling for a 3 percent pay hike and changes in the formula for determining retirement pension.

"We certainly aren't going to give some employees a raise while others face possible layoffs," said Gosling. "We

## OAKLAND

didn't negotiate the agreement. We were just offered the opportunity to say yes or no. We said no."

The command officer's association includes about 80 sergeants, lieutenants and captains. Negotiators are expected to go back to the bargaining table.

"This budget crunch is real," said Gosling. "This ought to convince anybody who thought otherwise."

Steven Schell, president of the Oakland County Employees Union, doesn't doubt the deficit is real. But he insists Patterson and commissioners are taking the wrong approach in trying to deal with it.

"They ought to eliminate waste and mismanagement first," said Schell, whose union is the largest within the county with about 570 members. "Getting rid of workers is a quick fix approach that will backfire in the long run."

"Remember, every time workers are laid off, that means services will be reduced," Schell said.

Schnell and other labor representatives insist the county should eliminate travel by department heads and elected officials as well as deferring optional expenses.

"The executive spent \$100,000 to remodel his new offices," Schnell said. "Last month commissioners went to Mackinac Island for a conference. That cost about \$200 each per day."

# DNR dilemma

## Debate rages over underground storage tanks

By TIM RICHARD  
STAFF WRITER

Taxpayers, through their legislators, must decide how badly they want to clean up leaking underground storage tanks.

"The costs of the program are pretty tremendous," said state House Conservation Committee co-chair Tom Alley, D-West Branch, after hearing governmental, industrial and environmental groups argue for 90 minutes last week. "A lot of groups are saying 'we need some more money.' I don't know where you're going to get it."

"The dilemma is: Will funding be adequate?" said James Hill, a member of the state Natural Resources Commission, the appointive group which oversees the Department of Natural Resources. "Put a money figure behind the program, and either fund it or scale back the responsibilities."

"The Sierra Club opposes the DNR cleanup standard proposals that are currently before the subcommittee," said Allison Horton, spokesman for the politically active naturalists. Sierra Club wants DNR to require double walls for underground storage tanks and other relatively costly steps to protect land and groundwater from leaks.

### Clean vs. safe

Here's the crux of the argument:

DNR's proposal shifts emphasis from protecting resources to human exposure control. As Skip

Pruss, an assistant attorney general, put it, "DNR prefers cleanups that don't clean up groundwater. It just wants to protect the public from exposure. The goal is to make cleanups cheaper."

Pruss said his department, "a co-trustee of our natural resources" with DNR, is concerned about the constitutionality of DNR's proposed rules and their conflict with other laws.

Commented Alley: "DNR wants to contain, and the attorney general wants to take it all out."

Michigan service stations and business users have some 40,000 "active" underground storage tanks, mostly for petroleum products, said Lt. Arthur Nash of the State Police fire marshal division. About 10,000 are relatively new, and 1,600 have double walls.

"The average cost increase of a double-walled tank is \$32,000 to \$35,000. Some 30,000 tanks need to be removed or upgraded by 1998. It will be a great cost to owners — substantial cost to smaller dealers and 'mom and pop' operations. We don't want to discourage people from upgrading tanks," Nash said.

Nash was cool to requiring double-walled tanks statewide. He said they can be pierced by stakes driven into the ground and thus aren't totally safe.

Trying to steer a middle course was Bill Rustem of the Michigan Economic and Environmental Roundtable, a group of industrial,

union and environmental interests formed in 1992.

"The state's environment and economy are inextricably linked and must therefore be considered together if successful strategies for continued development and environmental quality to emerge," said Rustem.

Top principle, he said, is redeveloping urban land rather than developing greenfields. A general criticism of Michigan's current "polluters pay" law is that it leads developers to seek new sites and abandon older cities where cleanups may be necessary.

The roundtable includes business interests such as Consumers Power, Farm Bureau, Dow Chemical, AAA Michigan, and chambers of commerce; unions such as the AFL-CIO federation and Steelworkers; and environmental groups such as Michigan United Conservation Clubs and Michigan Environmental Council — but not Sierra.

### Law in works

Meanwhile, lawmakers are trying to iron out differences in a package of bills to fund the cleanup of leaking underground storage tanks (LUSTs).

Gov. John Engler's budget director said last fall that the current fund, based on a tax of 0.875 cents a gallon on petroleum products, will be \$350 million in the red by 1995.

Lawmakers are working to update a 1984 law requiring registration of underground storage tanks by setting up a state authority to deal with cleanups.

The Senate version of the bills visualizes more "Type C" cleanups — which assume the property will never be used for residences and future uses must be controlled.

Refer to Senate Bills 644 and 645 and House Bills and 4875 when writing to your legislator in the State Capitol, Lansing 48913.

## Chamber hosts a.m. seminar on leasing your employees

An Oakland County Chamber of Commerce seminar called "How to Generate More Profit By Leasing Your Employees" will occur 8 a.m. Wednesday at the Main Event restaurant in the Pontiac Silverdome.

The speaker will be Franklin Elias, president of Key Employee Leasing, a Southfield firm specializing in full-service employee leasing of office and light manufacturing workers.

The cost of the breakfast meeting is \$10 for chamber members, \$15 for other people. Call 458-8600 for reservations.

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