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Susan Shelley: Clean-air agency rakes in high fees and higher salaries

By [Susan Shelley](#), LA Daily News

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California lost 32,000 manufacturing jobs between 2009 and 2013, and Los Angeles County lost another 4,700 over the last year.

The occupations projected to have the greatest job growth in California by 2022, according to the Employment Development Department, are personal care service provider, home care aide, food preparation worker or server and office administrative support employee.

Enjoy those student loan payments.

The good-paying jobs that left California are only part of the story. No one can know how many jobs never came to this state at all because of high taxes, high energy costs, abusive lawsuits and regulatory agencies that have become unreasonably costly and burdensome.

One such agency that's mentioned often — by people who are afraid to have their names used — is the [South Coast Air Quality Management District](#).

The story you are about to read is partially true.

It was a chilly day in prehistoric California, and a cave man was rubbing his hands together to keep them warm.

This gave him an idea. He picked up two rocks and rubbed them together energetically. A tiny spark of light flew off the rocks' surface. He picked up two heavy twigs and tried rubbing them against each other and against the rocks.

He worked for an hour, trying different combinations, until an amazing thing happened. Heat and light radiated from the bits of wood on the cold dirt. The cave man found more twigs and threw them on the fire, and then he used rocks to build a low wall encircling the flames.

That's when a man in a suit came running up to him, flashing a shiny leaf. "I'm from the South Caves Air Quality Management District," he said. "[Wood-burning fireplaces are not allowed in newly constructed homes.](#)" (This is an actual SCAQMD regulation.)

"Aggggh," the cave man said.

"And you have installed an unpermitted charbroiler," the man said. "The SCAQMD's permit fee is \$3,835.06 plus the Administrative Permit Revision Fee of \$997.27, a total of \$4,832.33." (This is the actual application fee for an SCAQMD permit for a charbroiler.)

"And because you failed to obtain a permit before installation, you owe 50 percent of the permit fee as a penalty, another \$1,917.53." (This is the SCAQMD's actual policy.) "You owe us \$6,749.86. We take cash or checks."

"Oof," the cave man said.

"If you plan to heat water over that fire you need a permit for a boiler," the regulator continued. "That's another \$4,832.33 and you'd be wise to pay it now, before you incur another penalty."

"Ug ERF guhtuk," the cave man suggested.

The man looked hurt. "We have bills to pay too, you know. Why, [just the salaries in our agency add up to over \\$70 million a year.](#) Our Executive Officer is paid over \$305,000, plus \$131,000 in retirement and health benefits. (Barry R. Wallerstein's actual 2013 compensation, in pay and benefits, was \$436,285.) And our Deputy Executive Officer for Engineering and Compliance — he's the one you'll meet if you don't get this charbroiler permitted — is paid close to \$200,000 a year. (Mohsen Nazemi's actual 2013 compensation, in pay and benefits, was \$292,873.)

"Erf," the cave man said.

"Have you maintained the proper records for this equipment?" the man asked. "I need copies of all your inspection reports."

"Ugggggggh," the cave man said.

"On another subject," the man continued cheerfully, "the SCAQMD's [annual awards luncheon at the Biltmore](#) is coming up, maybe you'd like to buy a table. Also, the Governor's Appointee to the Board is having the annual fundraiser for his nonprofit organization. I'm told there are still a few openings for Bronze Age sponsors. It's a wonderful opportunity. You get an ad in the program, four tickets for dinner, recognition from the podium...."

"Aggggh," the cave man said.

"Or the Platinum sponsorship," the man winked. "That includes the VIP reception."

"Ugggggh," the cave man said.

(The SCAQMD actually did have an annual awards luncheon at the Millennium Biltmore Hotel on Oct. 2. And the Governor's Appointee to the SCAQMD Board, environmental justice advocate [Joseph K. Lyou](#), has been paid \$100,000 a year as the president and CEO of the [Coalition for Clean Air](#), a nonprofit advocacy group that actually does hold an annual fundraiser sponsored by SCAQMD-regulated businesses.)

Sadly, the cave man, his family and the entire cave community died of exposure and starvation after the SCAQMD mandated new equipment that extinguished the fire. Thereafter, the human race evolved from a sexual harassment incident at the Biltmore.

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