

L.A. County Unemployment Hits 64-Year High

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L.A. County's jobless rate soared to 11.4 percent in March, the highest level since the end of World War II, according to state figures released Friday morning.

The state Employment Development Department reported that 565,000 Los Angeles County residents had filed claims last month, a jump of more than 250,000 from a year ago, when the rate was 6.4 percent. The figures were up slightly from 10.8 percent in February.

The job losses were widespread as the recession continued to hammer almost every aspect of the local economy. The biggest declines occurred in retail, professional services, manufacturing, construction and leisure and hospitality.

These losses pushed the county's unemployment rate well past the peaks reached in the recessions of the early 1990s and early 1980s.

Statewide, the unemployment rate skyrocketed to 11.2 percent from 10.6 percent in February and 6.4 percent a year ago. The national unemployment rate was 8.5 percent in March.

Several communities in Los Angeles County had unemployment rates at or near 20 percent, meaning that nearly one in five residents eligible to work was looking for a job. Those include the City of Commerce (20 percent), Compton (19 percent), and Bell Gardens and Lynwood, both at 18 percent.

The city of Los Angeles was at 12.5 percent, with nearly a quarter million people on the unemployment rolls. Long Beach was right behind at 12.4 percent.

Meanwhile, in the year-over-year payroll jobs figures, Los Angeles County shed nearly 150,000 jobs over the last year to reach 3,955,700 jobs, a drop of 3.6 percent. Professional and business services, which until recently had propped up the local economy, lost 32,000 jobs, followed closely by manufacturing (31,000 jobs), construction (23,500 jobs) and retail trade (18,000).

The only bright spots were health services, where jobs rose by 6,000, and government, where 3,000 jobs were added.

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