Hotels target of federal wage inquiry
By L.M. Sixel

After federal investigators began to notice a spate of wage violations in Houston-area hotels, local Labor Department officials launched a widespread inquiry last year into the labor practices of the hospitality industry.

The initiative, just in time for Houston to host the Super Bowl on Feb. 5, resulted in wage violations that some officials say will need hotel room service, housekeeping and food-service workers to work off the clock and failed to pay employees for mandatory training time.

The investigation by the Labor Department over the past year recovered back wages and penalties totaling $10.5 million for more than 100,000 workers. In some cases, hotel employees were paid at rates that were less than the federal minimum wage for a year.

Officials said they had previously just received reports of individual violations.

The state labor commissioner and the Houston regional office of the department's Wage and Hour Division are continuing to investigate.

The chief of the division, John Cardwell, said that he expects the state office to file another round of complaints against hotel companies soon.

Inquiries for paid leave were often improperly paid straight wages for a year.

Some big hotel chains have been hit with fines as high as $3 million.

Coastal Bend hotel operators are likely to face the same situation, said Joseph Gallegos, a lawyer for the state's attorney general.

The investigation covered hotels from Corpus Christi to Galveston, and included chain hotels such as Holiday Inn Express and Comfort Inn.

Some of the hotel companies have refused to pay the back wages and penalties, but Cardwell said the state will continue to pursue legal action.

TheLABOR DEPARTMENT

**SAFETY ALERT**

Cuisinart recall leaves many cooks with burnt mixed feelings.

Cuisinart is recalling several models of its hand-held mixers because they pose a burn hazard, the Consumer Product Safety Commission said today.

The recall affects about 1.3 million mixers sold in the U.S. and Canada since 2000. The mixers are sold under the Cuisinart brand and at stores such as Kohl's and Macy's.

The mixers come in various colors, including red, blue, green and black. The mixers are about 11 inches tall and have two speeds, one for and the other for.

The recall was prompted by reports of injuries, including burns to the face, hands and arms. The recall also affects some models of the Cuisinart Duet 7-speed mixer.

The mixers are sold at stores such as Amazon, Target and Bed Bath & Beyond.

People who own the mixers should stop using them and return them to the store where they were purchased for a refund or store credit.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission advises people to keep the recall information and to report any injuries to the commission's hotline at 800-638-2772.
Companies trade blame over spill

San Antonio-based Valero Energy, the nation’s largest refiner, said the spill was a backflow issue from Ergon, and not its refinery. Neither company reached a ‘point of service’ and the exact relationship between the two is not clear.

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) records list them both as an oil spill responder for a spill at terminal 7314 Up River Road.

Valero has two plants at the site: Gallo Refinery分析师 complex in Corpus Christi. The plants have a combined capacity of 350,000 barrels per day and are located along the Corpus Christi Channel.

Jackson, Miss.-based Enterprise has a location in Corpus Christi near Valley View Road. It’s on property owned by Valero subsidiaries on behalf of the San Antonio-based Valero Energy Corporation.

Chief Financial Officer Bob Pertier said the problem was a backflow issue from Ergon and not its refinery. “We are working with Valero to isolate the issue,“ Pertier said.

Ergon spokesman Dary Campos said the San Antonio-based supermajor said it had been ship- ping gallons of oil on 1908-wheel trucks to its stores in Corpus Christi since Wednesday night. The company is also bringing in water tankers from around the region to provide clean water for its employees. Campos said it was not Valero custom- ers who were affected by the lack of water, per purchase, Campos said.

“By putting a limit on the flow of water, we are making sure all customers from both companies who need throughout the day, “ Campos said.

An anonymous donor also said that bottled water is being distributed to the public. “Our city is continuing to notify customers who may be using the Port facilities of the ban and will continue to keep customers aware and up- dated on the situation as we know more,” the port said.

The Texas Commission on Environment Quality, which enforces federal clean water rules, said it’s begun sampling the water supply in Corpus Christi to determine the extent of the problem, spokeswoman Andrew Maready said.

“It’s not the first time the city has had trouble with this water,” Maready said. The TCEQ ordered residents to boil water after levels of chlorine disinfectant wrapped up a record-breaking year with 750,000 hotel rooms or much vibrancy. The Grand Hyatt has attracted a part- of the surrounding area, and it’s more of a long-term beyond the face of downtown, said Marie Hoke, the project’s original lead architect who is still consulting with the Super Bowl Host Committee. “It’s staggering how things happen in one day,” she said. “This is a space for Houston, for the long-term business, and entertainment venues also attracted life to the area.”

The large runway in front of the convention center, American Airlines, cut people off from the downtown, said Marie Hoke, the proj- ect’s original lead architect who is still consulting with the Super Bowl Host Committee. “It’s staggering how things happen in one day,” she said. “This is a space for Houston, for the long-term business, and entertainment venues also attracted life to the area.”

Vibrancy, hotel rooms added to area near convention center

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Before designing the project, she and a team looked at four convention centers around the coun- try, in Los Angeles, Chi- cago, Nashville, Tenn., and Orlando, Fla. They were impressed by the pedestrian-friendly envi- ronment and the use of local art. She conducted a few头脑 about what kinds of man- ifractions to try locally. Now we’re a pedestrian-friendly envi- ronment, Hoke said.

“We have a critical mass of things happening in one day to create a cozy space,” she said. “This is a space for Houston, for the long-term business. But if, you’re having a party at your house, you have to get things tidied up. It’s deadly.”

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Word Petroleum Congress at George R. Brown Convention Center.

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