

Fresno City Council cuts electrical workers' wages

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The Fresno City Council on Thursday took the rare step of forcing wage cuts on electrical workers, a move that could become increasingly common as the city seeks to shore up its troubled finances.

City negotiators and electrician representatives have been in negotiations since April of last year but have failed to agree on a new contract.

The council broke the stalemate Thursday afternoon with a unanimous decision to impose a contract on the local chapter of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. The new contract commands 3% salary cuts and more restrictive terms for weekend overtime pay.

"This is uncalled for in my opinion," said Kevin Cole, business manager of the local electricians group. "Instead of asking us what we can do, instead of asking us for our help, they said this is what you guys are going to do."

Although only about 38 employees are affected -- mostly electricians but also plumbers and painters -- the contract imposition was seen as a harbinger of what might come for other city workers.

A handful of representatives from other labor unions watched closely, many of them also in contract talks with the city and fearful of a similar fate.

City leaders acknowledged Thursday that they have to be more aggressive with labor groups as they face declining revenues.

"We would never plan on doing an imposition," said City Manager Mark Scott, who oversees the labor deals. "But I think we're in a day and age that these things will happen more often because there are bottom lines that you can't exceed."

This week's contract imposition is the first in at least 15 years, city officials said.

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