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## Builders hurt by strike start layoffs

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One of Oahu's largest developers has laid off dozens of construction workers since strikes at the state's two top concrete providers began more than two weeks ago, and more layoffs are expected soon from other companies.

The strikes are also causing construction projects to backlog, which will delay some home closings this spring, executives say.

Some buyers who were scheduled to move into their newly built homes over the next two months may have to wait weeks until developers catch up with work lost during the strikes.

"The real losers in this whole thing are the homebuyers," said Bob Kayser, Gentry Homes vice president and director of construction. "We've got homebuyers who are expecting to move in April ... and we're not able to do that because they're (the homes) not going to be ready."

Gentry Homes, which is behind schedule on about 30 homes so far, has already laid off more than 55 workers at its Ewa site, according to Kayser.

He said he'll have to continue laying off some of his 200 workers until the strikes are resolved. Kayser said that beginning Monday, he expects to lay off about five workers a day.

"We can only prep so many houses," he said. "Right now, we've probably got 20 lots ready to pour."

Federally mediated negotiations between Hawaiian Cement and Local 996 of the Teamsters and Allied Workers, the union for the concrete company's 67 striking workers, are set to resume at 5 p.m. Monday.

Talks broke off Feb. 13, eight days after Hawaiian Cement workers went out on strike. Some 144

concrete workers at Ameron Hawaii began walking their own picket lines Feb. 8.

No new negotiations have been scheduled between Ameron and the Teamsters, which represents concrete workers for both companies, and the two sides last met Feb. 7.



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Workers picket the Hawaiian Cement plant in Halawa Valley last week. As the strike by Hawaiian Cement and Ameron Hawaii employees continues, some construction companies have started to lay off workers.

Gentry Homes subcontractor Neil Du Vall, vice president and owner of JDH Construction Ltd., said he's had to lay off about 20 workers since the strikes began.

"Within three weeks, all my guys will be laid off," he said. "It's actually very devastating for everybody."

At Ewa by Gentry, where 430 homes were completed last year, workers were building an average of one home a day before the strikes. Taylor Duprau, a carpenter and foreman with JDH Construction, said work at the site could stop by next month.

"People don't realize how fragile this industry is," he said. "Some of the guys, a fair amount, are the only providers for their family. None of them are single. They're all married."

Ron Taketa, Hawaii Carpenters Union financial secretary and business representative, has said he expects to see "massive layoffs" beginning next week, with as many as 1,000 of the state's 5,500 active carpenters losing their jobs.

Home builders, including Castle & Cooke Hawaii, Schuler Homes Hawaii and Stanford Carr

Development, say they are experiencing costly lags at their construction sites, and most are pushing back schedules for handing homes over to buyers.

The developers also said yesterday that layoffs could become imminent as soon as next week, but didn't have information on whether their subcontractors have already laid off workers.

"Right now, (the strikes are) starting to hold up housing production," said Schuler Homes Hawaii Division President Mike Jones.

He said he knows of about 15 homes that will go to their owners weeks later than originally planned.

"Every day that you can't close a home, it costs the company money," he said.

Jones estimated that Castle & Cooke would have to pay about \$2,000 a month in holding costs for a home to sit idle.

Patrick O'Neill, director of sales and marketing at Stanford Carr Development, said workers on the company's projects in Hawaii Kai could start being laid off if the strikes last "much longer."

"We're remaining optimistic that the strike should end by next week," he said, adding that at least 10 of his homes need only small concrete pours for driveways or gutters.

But the homes can't be turned over to buyers until they're completed. And O'Neill said Stanford Carr's holding costs for each home total about \$166 a day, which translates to more than \$4,900 a month.

"Once the strike reaches over three weeks, we'll start seeing delays in delivery," O'Neill said. "The developer's nightmare is what we call 'standing inventory' -- when the home's complete and you cannot deliver to a homeowner."