

# OPERATING ENGINEERS TRUST FUNDS

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100 EAST CORSON STREET • PASADENA, CALIFORNIA 91103 • (626) 356-1000

P.O. BOX 7063, PASADENA, CALIFORNIA 91109

WEBSITE: [www.oefunds.org](http://www.oefunds.org)



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## OPERATING ENGINEERS PENSION PLAN NOTICE OF CRITICAL STATUS

OCTOBER 26, 2014

TO: PARTICIPANTS, BENEFICIARIES, CONTRIBUTING EMPLOYERS AND LOCAL UNION(S)

FROM: BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE OPERATING ENGINEERS PENSION PLAN

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CSLA/PUBLIC 113

This is to inform you that on September 26, 2014, the actuary for the Operating Engineers Pension Plan (the "Plan") certified to the U.S. Department of the Treasury, and to the Board of Trustees that the Plan continues to be in critical status (the "red zone") for the Plan Year beginning July 1, 2014. Federal law requires that you receive this notice.

### BACKGROUND

Beginning with the 2008-2009 plan year, using funding criteria set forth in the Internal Revenue Code, the Pension Protection Act of 2006 ("PPA") required multiemployer defined benefit pension plans to be certified by their actuaries as being in one of three funded status zones:

- Neither Endangered nor Critical (unofficially called the "Green Zone")
- Endangered (unofficially called the "Yellow Zone")
- Critical (unofficially called the "Red Zone")

While trustees of Green Zone plans must continue to exercise diligence to protect the funded position of their plans, the law does not require them to take any specific actions or adopt particular programs to maintain or improve plan funding. On the other hand, trustees of plans that are not in the Green Zone must take specific actions spelled out in the law, including the adoption of a "Funding Improvement Plan" for plans in endangered status or a "Rehabilitation Plan" for plans in critical status that are designed to restore the plans to Green Zone status over a period of time. For example, a plan in critical status may reduce or eliminate adjustable benefits, collect an employer surcharge, or require the bargaining parties to negotiate for additional employer contributions.

### CRITICAL STATUS

The Plan is considered to be in critical status because it has funding problems. More specifically, the Plan's Actuary has determined that the Plan is in critical status based on the following failure:

The Plan is projected to have an accumulated funding deficiency within four years (disregarding any amortization extension).

### REHABILITATION PLAN

In October 2010, you received a notice advising you that the Plan was in critical status for the 2010-2011 Plan Year. Federal law requires pension plans in critical status to adopt a rehabilitation plan aimed at restoring the financial health of the plan. In December 2010, the Trustees adopted Amendment 14 to the 2002 Restatement of the Pension Plan. This amendment makes the Rehabilitation Plan an Appendix to the Plan Document. In October 2010, you were sent a copy of the Rehabilitation Plan.

The Rehabilitation Plan offers the bargaining parties a choice between a default schedule, under which all adjustable benefits are eliminated, and two alternate schedules. The first two alternate schedules provide that no benefits will be reduced or eliminated (except the Level Income Option).

The law permits pension plans to reduce or even eliminate benefits called “adjustable benefits” as part of a rehabilitation plan. As explained above, *all* adjustable benefits are eliminated under the default schedule, and you have already received a notice explaining the reductions that are imposed under the default schedule.

If the Trustees of the Plan determine that benefit reductions are necessary in the alternate schedules, you will receive a separate notice in the future identifying and explaining the effect of those reductions. Any reduction of adjustable benefits (other than a repeal of a recent benefit increase) will not reduce the level of a participant’s basic benefit payable at normal retirement age. Also, such reductions in adjustable benefits can only apply to benefits that are payable for calendar months following the mailing, by the Fund Office, of a notice explaining what reductions, if any, will be made.

Plans in critical status are not permitted to pay lump sum benefits greater than \$5,000 or any other payment in excess of the monthly amount paid under a single life annuity. The Operating Engineers Plan does not pay lump sums over \$5,000. However, the Plan’s Level Income Option does provide accelerated payments (greater than a single life annuity) in the initial years of retirement. Therefore, the Level Income Option continues to be unavailable to new retirees while the Plan is in critical status. This restriction applies whether or not the Plan reduces adjustable benefits in the future.

### **ADJUSTABLE BENEFITS**

The Plan offers the following adjustable benefits that may be reduced or eliminated as part of any rehabilitation plan the Trustees may adopt:

- Subsidies for Early Retirement Pensions and Service Pensions;
- Future benefit accrual in excess of 1% of the hourly master contribution rate as of July 1, 2010;
- Disability Pensions not already in pay status as of October 28, 2010;
- The Plan’s 120-month guarantee on the single life form of payment;
- All pre-retirement death benefits for non-spouse beneficiaries;
- For surviving spouses in the event of pre-retirement death, all death benefits other than a qualified pre-retirement survivor annuity equal to 50% of the unsubsidized amount that would have been payable to the participant under the Husband and Wife Pension;
- Subsidies in the Plan’s adjustment factors for Joint and Survivor forms of payment; and
- The Lump Sum at Retirement.

As noted above in the discussion of the Rehabilitation Plan, the Plan approved by the Trustees offers the bargaining parties a choice between a default schedule, under which *all* adjustable benefits are eliminated, and two alternate schedules. The first two alternate schedules provide that no benefits will be reduced or eliminated except the Level Income Option.

### **EMPLOYER SURCHARGE**

The law requires that all contributing employers pay to the Plan a surcharge to help correct the Plan’s financial situation. The surcharge begins 30 days after the contributing employers are notified that the Plan is in critical status. The surcharge ends when a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) consistent with one of the schedules in the rehabilitation plan takes effect.

The surcharge—determined as a percentage of an employer’s negotiated contribution rate—is 5% for the remainder of the first Plan Year for which the Plan is in critical status, increasing to 10% for each subsequent Plan Year in which the Plan is in critical status and a new CBA reflecting the rehabilitation plan has not yet taken effect.

The 2010-2011 Plan Year is considered the first Plan Year that the Plan was in Critical Status and the current Plan Year—the 2014-2015 Plan Year—is the fifth Plan Year that the Plan is in Critical Status.

### **WHAT'S NEXT**

We understand that legally required notices like this one can create concern about the Trust's future. Be assured that the Board of Trustees takes very seriously its obligation to preserve the financial viability of the Trust. With the assistance of the Trust's actuary, legal counsel and other professionals, and working with the contributing employers and the Union, the Trustees have developed a rehabilitation plan that addresses these issues. You should know that both contribution increases and benefit reductions may be necessary to improve the Trust's serious financial condition. As a final note, since the Pension Trust is influenced by economic and financial variables beyond our control (such as market volatility and changes in employment and/or the number of contributing employers), unexpected developments can affect the Trust's status and any future corrective actions needed. Each year the Board of Trustees will be reviewing the Trust's progress with its professional advisors, which may lead to future changes in the recommended contribution and benefit schedules.

### **WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION**

For more information about this notice or the Trust, contact the Administration Office at the address or phone listed at the top of this letter.

Sincerely,

Board of Trustees

*As required by law, this notice is being provided to the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC) and the Department of Labor.*