

ATLANTIC CITY — The New Jersey Casino Control Commission notified 115 gaming inspectors Wednesday that they will lose their jobs as the result of a sweeping regulatory overhaul of the Atlantic City casino industry.

The layoff notices came just one day after Gov. Chris Christie signed legislation that eases New Jersey's casino regulations. They are

expected to be the first wave of wholesale job cuts affecting government workers and casino employees in the new regulatory structure.

Gaming inspectors became vulnerable because the legislation abolished the state requirement for them to be present on the casino floor on a 24-hour basis.

Daniel Heneghan, a commission spokesman, said the layoffs will occur March 25.

"We have sent out notices to 115 inspectors indicating that because of those legislative changes, their positions are being eliminated," he said.

Major changes are in store for the entire Casino Control Commission, which has served as the gaming industry's chief regulatory body in Atlantic City's 33-year history of casino gambling. During the next 90 days, most of the commission's regulatory duties will be taken over by another state agency, the Division of Gaming Enforcement.

The commission has a total of 260 employees, including 144 gaming inspectors. Heneghan said 29 supervisory and principal inspectors did not receive layoff notices Wednesday because they will assist in the transition of power to the Division of Gaming Enforcement. However, they are expected to lose their jobs later on.

"By virtue of the changes to the Casino Control Act, those positions will be eliminated," Heneghan said.

Written by Administrator

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Job cuts are expected to go even deeper into the commission staff because of the loss of much of the agency's regulatory functions. In its new role, the commission will be limited to overseeing casino licenses.

"Once those transitions are complete, there clearly will be additional adjustments to our staffing levels," Heneghan said. "I can't say precisely how many there will be."

Regulatory changes were proposed by Christie after the casinos complained for years that New Jersey's gaming laws were too strict and expensive. New Jersey's regulatory structure will now be similar to the looser standards for the Nevada casinos.

In addition to ending the 24-hour requirement for gaming inspectors, the legislation also repealed the state's minimum staffing levels for casino security officers, surveillance personnel and table games supervisors such as pit bosses.

Even before the regulatory reforms were signed into law, the casinos had compiled a "wish list" of items they had wanted the commission to approve, including the elimination of pit bosses for an annual savings of \$28 million to \$35 million. The document proposed other cutbacks in table games staffing requirements for an annual savings of \$18 million to \$20 million.

"Casinos have already told us they want to get rid of pit bosses to save millions of dollars over and above the regulatory changes," Linda M. Kassekert, the commission's chair, said in a December interview.

The casino wish list, dated March 26, 2009, was obtained by The Press of Atlantic City through an Open Public Records Act request with the commission. It was written by the Casino Association of New Jersey, the trade group representing Atlantic City's gaming industry.

Bob Griffin, president of the casino association, characterized the wish list as outdated because it was written before the rival Pennsylvania casinos added table games last summer, giving Atlantic City even more competition for gambling customers.

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Griffin said the casinos will carefully weigh their options before deciding whether to make any job reductions. He noted that none of the casino association members made any mention of job cuts during their board meeting Tuesday night.

“We’re still a regulated industry, so we have to move slowly and cautiously,” he said.

Griffin, who also serves as chief executive officer of Trump Entertainment Resorts Inc., stressed that the three Trump casinos have no plans to cut back on their security and surveillance staff. He said security and surveillance officers are crucial for making tourists feel safe.

Regulatory reform is one of the centerpieces of the governor’s plan to revitalize Atlantic City, now mired in a four-year casino revenue slump. The legislation Christie signed into law Tuesday also creates a state-run Tourism District to oversee the city’s casino zone, Boardwalk and beaches.

“The future of Atlantic City is much brighter today than it was last week,” Griffin said of the benefits that are expected in the legislative package.

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