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Closing Out the Year with a Bang: Two Nuclear California Employment Verdicts Employers Won't Soon Forget

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As 2025 winds down, many employers are focused on year-end reviews, budget planning, and compliance checklists for the year ahead. But before turning the page on another year in California employment law, two recent jury verdicts serve as a sobering reminder of the continuing trend of nuclear verdicts as we have previously reported here, here, here, and here. Consider this your post-Halloween employment law scare alert: from age bias to failure to accommodate, California juries are proving again that they're not afraid to send employers home with verdicts that rival lottery jackpots.

Verdict No. 1: $103 Million Thermonuclear Award in Age Bias Case: A Los Angeles jury has awarded a former longtime employee $103 million in damages after finding that the company discriminated against and harassed her based on her age, an amount the plaintiff's lawyers say is among the largest age discrimination verdicts in history. As is often the case, the punitive damages awarded dwarf the compensatory damages. In this case, the jury awarded $83 million in punitive damages compared to the $20 million in noneconomic compensatory damages.

Verdict No. 2: $32.3 Million Nuclear Award in Accommodation Case: Also making waves is a $32.3 million verdict in a California case involving allegations of disability discrimination, retaliation, failure to accommodate, and failure to engage in the interactive process. The jury delivered a $32.3 million verdict, $24 million of which were punitive damages.

These recent examples, one truly "nuclear" and one solidly "thermonuclear," underscore the increasingly common eye-popping single-plaintiff jury awards that continue to define employment litigation in California—to which the antidote is an enforceable arbitration agreement.

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