The Horror Continues: California's Big "Nuclear Verdicts" Just Keep Coming!

California Employment Law Update on **March 13, 2026**

California—where the sun shines, the waves crash, and juries keep dishing out verdicts so large they should come with their own seismic scale. Since our Special Halloween Edition on California's "scariest" employment law verdicts, the trend toward "nuclear" and even "thermonuclear" jury awards (exceeding $100 million) has not only continued—it's accelerated. And if employers thought this was just a seasonal horror story, think again:

EXTRA-LARGE CA VERDICTS (UPDATED EDITION)!

These verdicts aren't isolated anomalies—they reflect a systemic shift in California employment litigation, where juries are increasingly comfortable awarding huge dollar amounts for purported "physical pain/mental suffering" (past and future) as well as punitive damages when an employer's conduct is cast as particularly "malicious" or "oppressive." Although such outsized awards are strictly capped under federal law (ranging between $50,000 and $300,000, depending on the size of the employer), there are (predictably) few if any limitations under California state law.

If employers thought that implementing robust compliance programs and traditional defense strategies were enough to sleep well at night, think again. The current environment demands proactive risk mitigation, including robust arbitration agreements, regular audits, and updated training modules. Clearly, California employment litigation is no longer just about defending claims. It's about navigating an era of historic jury verdicts that can upend traditional risk models for employers. Stay tuned—if recent trends are any indication, this story is far from over.

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