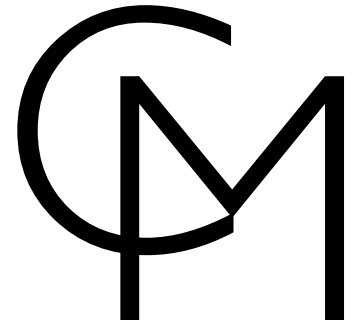


# The California Merchant

*News for the California Merchant Safety Association*



*May-June 2025  
Vol. 37, No. 3*

## **Productivity: Rethinking how we work and play**

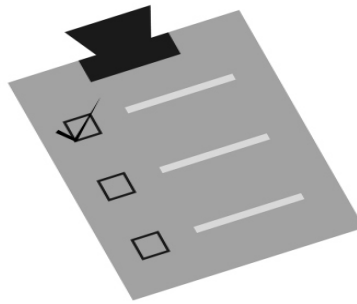
**P**roductivity in the workplace isn't just about working harder—it's about working smarter. Small, consistent adjustments in how we approach the workday can lead to improved efficiency, reduced stress, and greater job satisfaction.

Start with clear goal-setting. Each day, define your top three priorities. A targeted to-do list creates structure and helps you focus on high-impact tasks rather than getting lost in busywork. Group similar tasks together—known as task batching—to reduce cognitive load and increase efficiency.

Time management techniques like time-blocking or the Pomodoro method (25 minutes of focused work followed by a short break) can help prevent burnout and maintain momentum throughout the day. It's also helpful to schedule complex or creative tasks during your peak energy hours, whether that's first thing in the morning or later in the afternoon.

Environmental factors can have a significant impact on productivity as well. A clean, organized, and well-lit workspace reduces distractions and supports better focus. Personal touches like plants, calming colors, or ergonomic furniture can also enhance comfort and well-being.

Communication is another key area. Encourage efficient and respectful collaboration by using shared tools like project management platforms or digital calendars. Avoid unnecessary meetings when an email or shared document will suffice, and establish team norms for response times to reduce digital



overwhelm.

Equally important is building in recovery. Encourage walking breaks, access to healthy snacks, and opportunities for employees to decompress. A well-rested, supported employee is a productive one.

Managers can further boost team productivity by modeling these habits, recognizing achievements, and ensuring workloads are fair and realistic. Supporting professional development and offering flexibility when possible also increases engagement and long-term output.

### **At-Home Productivity: Thriving as a Remote Worker**

For those working from home, productivity can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, you save time on commuting and have more control over your schedule. On the other, household distractions, lack of structure, and blurred boundaries between work and

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## **In This Issue**

*Education options for uncertain times*

*When it's hot out, hydration matters!*

*New technology: Ease office tasks and tackle email bloat*

*Prevent, treat and understand the danger of burns*

**... and more**

## Working: Maintain a consistent daily routine

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home life can be major obstacles.

Creating a dedicated workspace is crucial. Even if you don't have a separate room, designate a specific area for work that is organized, comfortable, and free from distractions. This helps mentally separate your professional tasks from your personal life.

Maintaining a consistent routine is another pillar of productivity. Start your day at the same time, get dressed for work (even if casually), and set daily goals just as you would in an office. Ending your workday with a shutdown

ritual—like tidying your desk or reviewing tomorrow's priorities—helps signal to your brain that the workday is over.

Setting boundaries is especially important for remote workers. Let household members know your working hours and minimize interruptions during those times. Use calendar tools to block off time for focused work, and make sure to take real breaks away from your screen to reset.

Combat isolation and stay motivated by regularly connecting with colleagues through virtual check-ins or collaborative work sessions. Social

interaction, even through a screen, can provide a sense of belonging and help maintain professional momentum.

Don't forget the basics: get enough sleep, stay hydrated, and take time to move your body during the day. These simple habits are foundational to sustaining energy and attention.

Finally, flexibility is one of the greatest advantages of remote work—use it wisely. Experiment with your schedule to identify when you're most focused and align your tasks accordingly. When done right, working from home can be both highly productive and personally fulfilling.

## Online education: A modern economic safety net

In an economy that continues to evolve through automation, remote work, and shifting labor demands, online education has emerged as one of America's most powerful economic safety nets.

"People are still losing or changing jobs every day," notes education investor and advocate Dr. Michael K. Clifford, whose firm, SignificantFederation, LLC, was the lead investor in Grand Canyon Education (NASDAQ: LOPE), one of the few education companies to go public in the last economic downturn. "Today, just like in past recessions, people are turning to online education to refresh their skills or prepare for entirely new careers."

Dr. Clifford was an early champion of online learning and remains a strong proponent. "With financial aid options, short-term credentials, and flexible delivery models, online education allows adult learners to improve their skillsets while managing



other life responsibilities," he said. "In today's uncertain labor market, being enrolled in school gives job seekers a competitive edge and boosts self-confidence. It says: 'I am improving myself. I am ready to contribute to your company.'"

Clifford compares the role of digital education today to the public works programs of the Great Depression. "Where we once built roads and bridges, now we're building minds and digital skills," he says. "The internet has become the infrastructure of the modern economy, and education is its most critical component."

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, online education has undergone a major transformation. Many respected universities and colleges now offer fully online or hybrid degree programs, while platforms like Coursera ([www.coursera.org](http://www.coursera.org)), edX ([www.edx.org](http://www.edx.org)), LinkedIn Learning ([www.linkedin.com/learning](http://www.linkedin.com/learning)), and Udacity ([www.udacity.com](http://www.udacity.com)) offer affordable, flexible courses in fields like data science, IT, business, and healthcare. Meanwhile, industry-specific bootcamps and certificate programs are enabling learners to gain in-demand skills in a matter of weeks or months.

Thanks to oversight from the U.S. Department of Education and accreditors, many online programs now meet rigorous academic standards. Resources such as College Scorecard ([collegescorecard.ed.gov](http://collegescorecard.ed.gov)) and the Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs ([ope.ed.gov/dapip/#/home](http://ope.ed.gov/dapip/#/home)) help learners verify program quality and accreditation.

What makes online learning especially valuable in today's world is its accessibility. For working adults, caregivers, military members, and rural residents, online programs provide a rare level of flexibility and affordability. And in a time of economic upheaval and fast-changing technology, lifelong learning is increasingly a necessity, not a luxury.

"Online education is not just a convenience," Clifford says. "It may be the single most important tool we have for empowering individuals and strengthening our workforce."

To learn more about how online learning can improve your career prospects, visit CareerOneStop ([www.careeronestop.org](http://www.careeronestop.org)), or explore an overview of online degree benefits at Coursera's blog article: "10 Benefits of Earning an Online Degree" (<https://www.coursera.org/articles/benefits-of-an-online-degree>).

# As the temp goes up, hydration matters!

As temperatures rise, so does the risk of dehydration—especially in the workplace. Whether you're working at a desk, in a warehouse, or outdoors in the sun, staying properly hydrated is essential not just for your health, but for your safety and performance on the job.

## Why Hydration Is Important for Health and Safety

Water makes up a significant portion of the human body and is essential for virtually every function, including temperature regulation, joint lubrication, and energy production. When we don't drink enough fluids, especially in warm weather, we can quickly become dehydrated. This can lead to symptoms like fatigue, dizziness, headaches, muscle cramps, and even confusion.

In the workplace, dehydration isn't just uncomfortable—it can be dangerous. It reduces concentration, slows reaction times, and impairs judgment, increasing the risk of accidents, especially in jobs that involve machinery, physical labor, or safety-sensitive tasks. Even mild dehydration can negatively impact productivity and mood.

For those already managing health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, or kidney problems, staying hydrated is even more critical, as dehydration can exacerbate symptoms or lead to complications.

## How to Stay Hydrated Throughout the Workday

Fortunately, staying hydrated is simple if made a regular part of your routine. Here are several strategies workers can use to ensure they're drinking enough water during the day:

- **Start Early:** Begin your day with a glass of water before coffee or breakfast. This helps replenish fluids lost overnight.



- **Keep Water Accessible:** Whether at a desk or job site, have a reusable water bottle within reach and refill it regularly.

- **Set Reminders:** Use your phone or a hydration tracking app to prompt you to drink water at regular intervals.

- **Monitor Your Intake:** A general guideline is to drink eight 8-ounce glasses per day, but more may be needed depending on heat levels and physical exertion.

- **Eat Hydrating Foods:** Fruits and vegetables like cucumbers, watermelon, and oranges contain a high water content and can supplement your fluid intake.

- **Limit Dehydrators:** Be mindful of caffeine and alcohol, which can contribute to dehydration if not balanced with water.

## Hydration for Outdoor and Hot Work Environments

Working outdoors or in hot, humid environments significantly increases the body's water needs. In these conditions, sweat loss can be substantial, leading to rapid dehydration and even heat-related illnesses like heat exhaustion or heat

stroke.

For workers in these environments:

- **Drink More Often:** Aim to drink small amounts of water every 15–20 minutes rather than waiting until you're thirsty.

- **Pre-Hydrate and Rehydrate:** Drink water before, during, and after your shift to maintain adequate hydration levels.

- **Electrolyte Balance:** In high heat or strenuous work, water alone might not be enough. Consider beverages with electrolytes (like sports drinks or electrolyte tablets) to replace salts lost through sweat.

- **Provide Shade and Cooling Breaks:** Employers should offer shaded or air-conditioned rest areas and ensure employees take regular cooling breaks.

- **Wear Breathable Clothing:** Light-colored, moisture-wicking clothing can help regulate body temperature and reduce sweat loss.

## What Employers Can Do

Employers play a critical role in promoting hydration. They should provide easy access to clean drinking water, especially in hot or physically demanding work environments. Posting signs that remind workers to drink water and offering education on heat safety and hydration can make a big difference. Where appropriate, rotating job duties and allowing frequent breaks in cooler areas can reduce heat-related risks.

Hydration is not just a summer wellness tip—it's a key component of workplace safety and performance. As the weather warms up, both workers and employers should prioritize hydration to stay healthy, alert, and productive. By making simple changes and staying aware of the signs of dehydration, we can all stay safer and perform better throughout the workday.

# Tech to the rescue! Ease your office tasks

In the modern workplace, employees are expected to juggle an increasing number of tasks—emails, meetings, reports, scheduling, follow-ups, and more. But thankfully, new technology is stepping up to ease the burden. Smart tools and AI-powered assistants are no longer just futuristic concepts—they’re rapidly becoming essential partners in productivity.

From streamlining repetitive tasks to making complex decisions faster, these tools help employees focus on what matters most: creative thinking, collaboration, and meaningful work.

## AI Assistants: Your Digital Coworker

AI assistants have evolved well beyond voice commands or setting reminders. Tools like ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, and Google Duet AI are now capable of drafting emails, summarizing long documents, creating presentations, writing code, and even offering insights based on data analysis.

Here’s how office workers are using AI to reduce workload and increase efficiency:

- **Drafting and Editing:** Need to write a report, policy, or client communication? AI tools can generate drafts in seconds, offering a starting point you can refine rather than starting from scratch.
- **Summarizing Information:** Instead of reading through a 20-page document or an email thread, AI can summarize key points in a concise paragraph.
- **Data Crunching:** AI tools can sort through large datasets, generate charts, and identify trends, saving hours of manual spreadsheet work.
- **Task Management:** AI-integrated calendars and to-do lists (like Notion AI or Reclaim.ai) automatically prioritize tasks based on deadlines, habits, and workload.

These tools don’t replace workers—

they help reduce “busy work,” freeing up time for strategy, innovation, and decision-making.

## Smarter Scheduling and Communication

Time management tools powered by AI and automation can reduce the hassle of scheduling and coordination. Apps like Calendly, x.ai, or Clockwise can coordinate meetings based on everyone’s availability and automatically reschedule when conflicts arise.

Meanwhile, collaboration platforms like Slack, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom now offer built-in AI tools that can:

- Transcribe meetings in real-time
- Generate action items from conversations
- Answer questions or find files without needing to dig through folders

These tools help reduce miscommunication, speed up follow-through, and keep everyone aligned.

## Automation of Repetitive Processes

Repetitive, rule-based tasks like entering data, generating reports, or updating records can now be automated using tools like Zapier, Make, or Microsoft Power Automate. These tools connect different apps (email, spreadsheets, databases) and automate multi-step processes with minimal input.

For example:

- Automatically saving email attachments to cloud storage
- Notifying team members when a task is completed
- Updating a CRM when a form is submitted

These automations minimize human

error and free workers from low-value tasks.

## Knowledge and Workflow Management

Modern workplaces generate an overwhelming amount of information. AI-powered knowledge bases like Notion, Guru, or Confluence help teams organize information intuitively and make it easily searchable.

You can ask questions like, “What’s our PTO policy?” or “Where’s the Q3 presentation?” and get instant answers—no more hunting through folders or old emails.

Similarly, project management tools like Asana, Trello, or Monday.com help teams visualize workflows, assign tasks, and track progress in real-time, keeping everyone aligned and reducing the need for status-check meetings.

## Making It All Work: A Thoughtful Approach

Adopting new tech doesn’t mean you need to overhaul everything overnight. Start small: identify one time-consuming task and look for a tool or automation to help with it. Train staff gradually and be open to experimentation—some tools may work better for certain teams or roles.

And remember: tech works best when paired with human judgment. AI can summarize, suggest, and organize—but critical thinking, empathy, and relationship-building remain distinctly human strengths.

Whether it’s through AI writing assistants, smarter calendars, or task automation, technology offers countless ways to lighten the workload and focus on meaningful, impactful work.

Embracing these innovations now means less stress, more clarity, and a workplace where people—and not paperwork—take center stage.

# Inbox overload: The modern email problem

In today's fast-paced, digital workplace, email remains a primary mode of communication—but for many employees, it's become a burden. Overflowing inboxes, constant notifications, and an ever-growing volume of messages can lead to important emails being overlooked, slow response times, and increased stress. If it feels like your inbox is running your day instead of the other way around, you're not alone.

Fortunately, with a few proactive strategies and tools, you can take back control of your email and make it work for you—not against you.

## The Problem of Inbox Overload

Many professionals receive dozens, if not hundreds, of emails daily. Messages from coworkers, newsletters, promotions, and system notifications all compete for attention. Over time, unread messages pile up, and important items may go unnoticed. The result is missed deadlines, broken communication, and added workplace frustration.

Email overload also affects mental clarity. A cluttered inbox can lead to decision fatigue—having to constantly choose what to open, what to ignore, and what to respond to first eats up valuable time and energy.

## Modern Email Sorting Tools: Smarter Inboxes

Email platforms have responded to the problem of overload with built-in features that can help users sort, prioritize, and organize their inboxes more effectively.

- **Gmail (Google):** Gmail's tabbed inbox automatically separates emails into categories like Primary, Social, Promotions, and Updates. Users can also set up filters and labels to route incoming emails based on sender, subject, or keywords. The "Priority Inbox" and "Important" markers highlight messages Gmail predicts are most relevant to you.



- **Apple Mail (iOS/macOS):** Apple Mail offers VIP contacts, allowing users to highlight and receive special notifications from select senders. Smart Mailboxes can automatically gather related emails (e.g., all messages from your manager) into one view. With iOS's Focus mode, you can silence email notifications during non-work hours or deep work time.

- **Outlook (Microsoft):** Outlook's Focused Inbox separates your most important emails from the rest, learning from your behavior over time. Rules and Categories allow you to sort messages into folders automatically. Flagging and color coding help you keep track of what needs action versus what's informational.

Take advantage of these tools to make your inbox work with your priorities, not against them.

## How to Prioritize and Keep Up with Emails

To keep your inbox manageable, try these practical strategies:

- **Schedule Email Time:** Instead of checking your inbox constantly, set aside specific times during the day (e.g., mid-morning, after lunch, end of day) to check and respond to messages.

- **Use the "Two-Minute Rule":** If it takes less than two minutes to read and respond, do it immediately. Otherwise,

flag it and return to it during your scheduled email time.

- **Mark for Action:** Use flags, stars, or labels to distinguish between emails that need a reply, ones that are just informational, and those that can be deleted or archived.

- **Unsubscribe Ruthlessly:** Take a few minutes each week to unsubscribe from mailing lists, newsletters, or alerts that you no longer read. Fewer incoming messages make it easier to focus on the important ones.

- **Archive, Don't Hoard:** Keep your inbox clean by archiving old messages. You can always search for them later, and it keeps your inbox from becoming overwhelming.

## Dealing with Junk and Finding the Important Stuff

Spam and junk emails are more than just a nuisance—they bury important messages. Here's how to minimize their impact:

- **Report Spam:** Always mark junk emails as spam. Your email provider uses this data to improve filtering.

- **Whitelist Key Contacts:** Add important senders (e.g., clients, managers, HR) to your contacts to ensure their messages don't end up in a spam folder.

- **Check Filters and Folders:** Occasionally review your junk/spam and promotions folders to ensure important emails aren't being misrouted.

- **Use Search and Filters Effectively:** Learn how to use advanced search functions (e.g., by sender, date, subject) to locate lost or buried emails quickly.

Email overload doesn't have to be a permanent part of your workday. With smarter tools, a bit of organization, and a proactive mindset, you can reduce inbox stress and become more responsive and productive.

# Finding time to move in a busy workday

We all know that regular exercise is vital for maintaining good health, reducing stress, and improving focus—but between long workdays, meetings, commutes, and family responsibilities, it can feel nearly impossible to fit in a workout. The good news? You don't need a two-hour gym session to reap the benefits of movement. With a bit of planning and some small adjustments to your daily routine, it's possible to incorporate fitness into even the busiest schedule.



## Morning: Start the Day Strong

Morning workouts are a great way to energize your day and check exercise off your to-do list before other responsibilities pile up. Even just 15–30 minutes of movement in the morning can help improve focus, mood, and metabolism.

Ideas for a morning routine:

- Quick at-home bodyweight circuit (e.g., squats, push-ups, lunges, jumping jacks)
- Yoga or stretching session to gently wake up your body
- Early walk or jog around your neighborhood before breakfast
- Online workout video or fitness app—many offer short, targeted routines

To make mornings easier, lay out your workout clothes the night before or go to bed a bit earlier to carve out the time.

## Lunch Break: Move Midday

Using part of your lunch break to exercise is a great way to boost your energy and avoid the afternoon slump. It also gives you a mental break from your screen and helps reset your focus for the second half of the day.

Ideas for midday movement:

- Walk outside, even just for 10–20 minutes
- Stair climbing in your building or a nearby location
- Mini desk workout or stretch session
- Drop-in class at a nearby gym or community center, if time allows

If your workplace has a wellness program or group fitness options, take advantage of them. Encouraging coworkers to join you can also help you stay consistent.

## Evening: Wind Down and Work Out

Evening workouts can help relieve stress and unwind from the day—especially if you struggle with early mornings. Just be mindful of timing, as intense exercise too close to bedtime can interfere with sleep.

Evening fitness options:

- Walk or bike ride with family after dinner
- Fitness class or gym session on the way home from work
- Stretching, yoga, or mobility work to relax your body and mind
- Active chores like gardening, vacuuming, or home improvement can

count, too!

If motivation is low after work, try preparing your workout clothes in advance or having a plan you can follow without much thought.

## Small Changes That Add Up at Work

Even if you can't fit in a dedicated workout, there are still plenty of ways to add movement throughout your workday:

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator
- Stand or stretch every 30–60 minutes
- Walk during calls or meetings if possible
- Use a standing or treadmill desk part of the day
- Park farther away or get off transit a stop early

These micro-movements not only improve circulation but can also boost mood and productivity.

## How Much Is Enough?

According to the World Health Organization and CDC, adults should aim for:

- At least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity (e.g., brisk walking) per week, or
- 75 minutes of vigorous activity (e.g., running), plus
- Two days a week of strength training

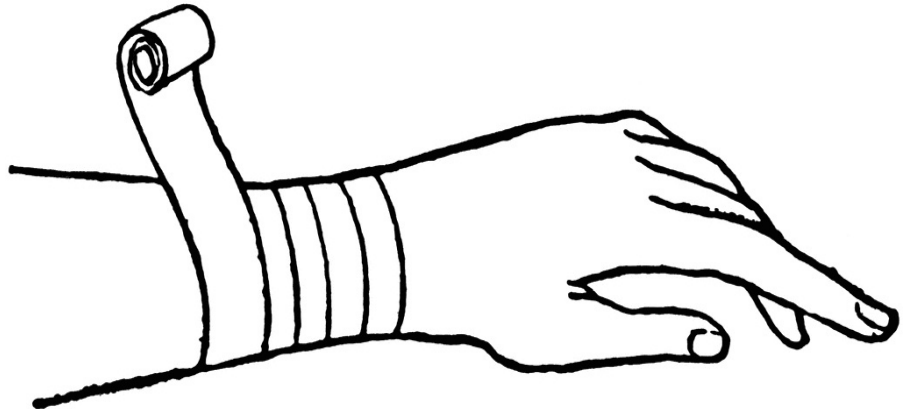
Breaking this down, that's just 20–30 minutes a day, and it doesn't all need to happen at once. Even 5- to 10-minute bursts of movement can contribute to your total and provide health benefits.

# SAFETY ... IT PAYS



## Understanding, preventing and treating burns

Burns are among the most common household and workplace injuries—and while many are minor, others can lead to serious complications if not treated properly. Whether from hot surfaces, scalding liquids, electrical currents, or chemicals, accidental burns can happen quickly and unexpectedly. Understanding the risks, prevention strategies, and proper response can go a long way in reducing injury and promoting healing.



### How to Avoid Burns

Prevention is always the best strategy when it comes to burn injuries. While some hazards are obvious, others may be part of your daily routine and easy to overlook.

#### In the home:

- Turn pot handles

inward on the stove to prevent accidental knocks.

- Keep hot beverages away from the edge of tables and counters.

- Use oven mitts or potholders when handling hot cookware.

- Unplug curling irons and straighteners immediately after use.

- Keep water heater settings below 120°F (49°C) to prevent scalding.

#### In the workplace:

- Follow all safety protocols when working near heat sources, chemicals, or electrical equipment.

- Wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), including gloves, sleeves, or face shields when necessary.

- Label hot equipment clearly and warn coworkers of potential hazards.

- Use caution around machinery that heats up, such as soldering tools or manufacturing presses.

Please see BURNS, page 8

## OSHA CORNER

Please visit the following address on the web to download helpful safety posters, guides and pamphlets for a safer workplace.

<https://www.osha.gov/publications>



# Burns: Acting quickly is key to first aid treatment

Continued from page 7

For everyone:

- Keep lighters and matches out of reach of children.
- Practice fire safety and maintain working smoke detectors in homes and workplaces.
- Avoid distractions when cooking or using hot tools—most burn injuries happen in a split second.



## First Aid for Burns

How you treat a burn depends on its severity, but acting quickly is key. Here are the general steps for managing a minor burn:

- 1 Cool the burn. Run cool (not cold) water over the burn for 10–15 minutes, or apply a clean, cool compress. This helps reduce pain and swelling.
- 2 Remove tight items. Take off rings, watches, or tight clothing near the burned area before swelling starts.
- 3 Protect the burn. Cover it with a sterile, non-stick bandage. Avoid using cotton balls or any materials that may stick to the wound.
- 4 Relieve pain. Over-the-counter medications like ibuprofen or acetaminophen can help manage discomfort.
- 5 Avoid home remedies. Do not apply butter, oils, or toothpaste to a burn—these can trap heat and make things worse.

For chemical or electrical burns, special care is needed. Chemical burns should be rinsed thoroughly with water (unless the chemical reacts with water), and electrical burns always require medical evaluation, as internal damage may not be immediately visible.

## When to Seek Medical Care

While many burns are minor, some require immediate medical attention. Seek care if the burn:

- Covers a large area, especially on the face, hands, feet, groin, or major joints
- Is deep, with white, charred, or leathery skin
- Was caused by chemicals or electricity
- Results in blisters larger than two inches or shows signs of

infection (pus, redness, increased pain or swelling)

- Affects a child, elderly adult, or someone with a compromised immune system

When in doubt, it's always safer to consult a healthcare provider to ensure proper healing and prevent complications.

## Burn Awareness Saves Lives

Burns are painful, sometimes life-altering injuries—but they're also largely preventable. By staying aware of your surroundings, using appropriate safety measures, and knowing how to respond if an accident occurs, you can protect yourself and others from serious harm. Whether at home or at work, a little caution and knowledge go a long way in avoiding these common and dangerous injuries.

"The CALIFORNIA MERCHANT" is a published bi-monthly newsletter of The California Merchant Safety Association. Annual subscription is available with membership in the California Merchant Safety Association. For membership information, call (562)446-0013.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to "California Merchant Safety Association" at 12501 Seal Beach Blvd. Suite 250, Seal Beach, CA 90740.