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First-time South Florida unemployment claims up again in June

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Job stability remains elusive in South Florida, with first-time unemployment claims increasing for the fourth straight month in June.

The new figures from Florida's labor agency show no big change for South Florida's hiring landscape. It's much better than a year ago, but still pretty grim. A combined 19,400 people in Broward and Miami-Dade counties filed their first applications for unemployment checks last month. That's up almost 8 percent from May, but down 28 percent from June 2010.

It's the latest so-so status report on what's probably the worst hiring landscape ever for South Florida. Unemployment returned to a record 13.4 percent rate in May, and job growth hasn't been enough to accommodate a rising number of job seekers.

For those in the top rungs of the employment ladder, the rebound is well underway, according to a top corporate recruiter in Miami.

"Generally speaking, if you talk to the CEOs and ask them how their business is doing and what they see for the future, you'll hear some pretty positive, rosy and robust projections," said John Mestepey, managing director of Diversified Search's Miami office.

The eight-employee outfit recently signed for an extra 1,000 square feet at Southeast Financial Center to accommodate more business, though Mestepey said the trend isn't entirely encouraging. While the executive recruitment industry generally rebounds six months before the overall labor market, this recession has defied that rule of thumb by at least a year — and counting.

A new nationwide survey of announced job cuts showed Florida down 2,345 jobs in June. That's better than May's showing of 3,171 cut positions in Challenger Gray and Christmas' monthly survey. The firm said 2011 so far shows a slow pace of layoffs, though June saw some pickup. First-time unemployment claims in Broward rose 9 percent in June to 8,157 and they increased 7 percent in Miami-Dade to 11,250.

With school out and vacationers staying away, June usually brings a peak for unemployment claims. So it's too early to tell if the June numbers reflect a true setback for hiring in South Florida.

The May job reports showed only small upticks in the unemployment rate: up from 13.1 percent in Miami-Dade, and from 8.9 to 9 percent for Broward.