

San Diego Newsline

Downtown San Diego news — the budget, public safety, business, and the civic life of America's Finest City

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COUNTY

Harrowing Rescue During Thorn Fire

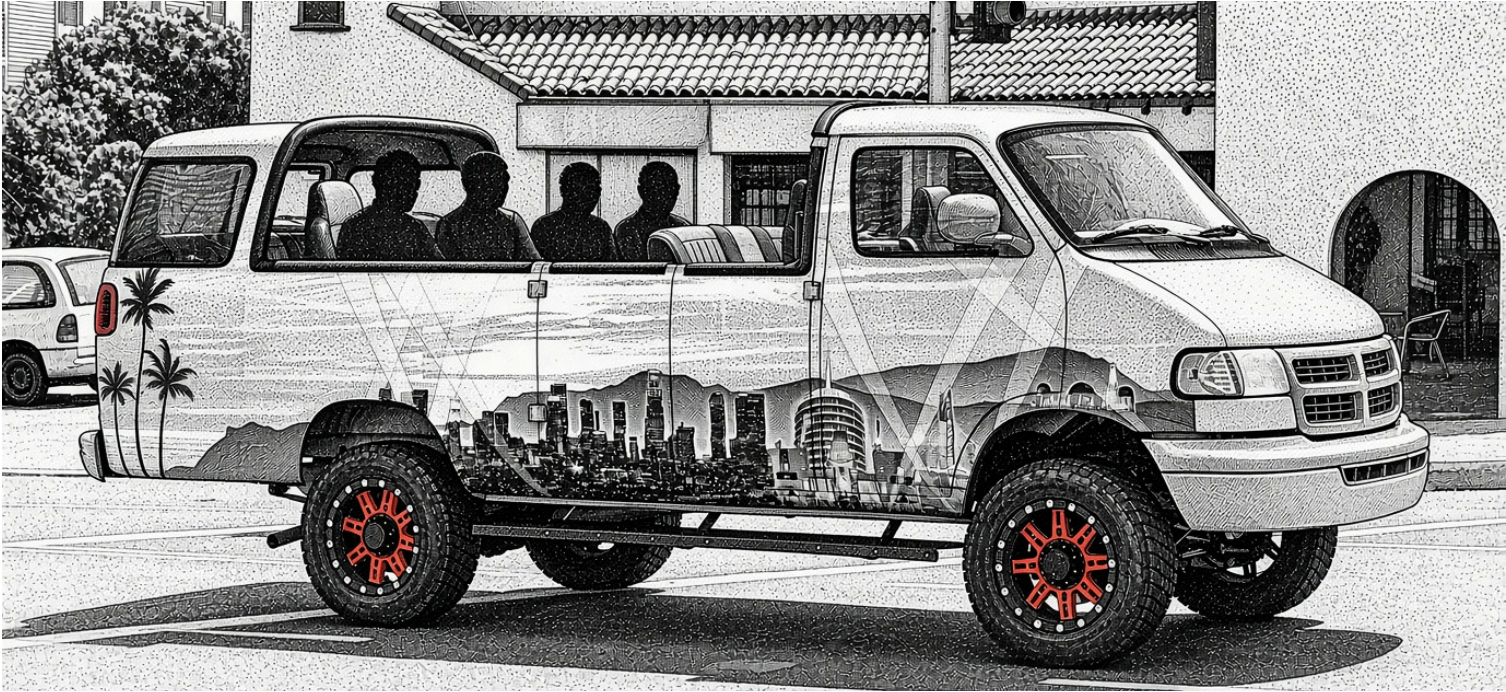


Illustration from a photo by Dietmar Rabich · Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0

A Boulevard couple is safe today thanks to the quick actions of CAL FIRE/San Diego County Fire firefighter paramedics and a Sheriff’s deputy who helped them escape the fast-moving Thorn Fire Wednesday evening.

Initially, Patti Fisher, 74, and her partner Dan Shanahan, 70, watched the fire move away from their Tierra Heights home—until minutes later, it suddenly shifted direction. Flames nearly 20 feet high reached their backyard as helicopters dropped water overhead.

Sheriff’s Deputy John Ferris had checked on the couple earlier in the afternoon. At first, they were unsure if they wanted to evacuate. Ferris encouraged them to get ready, then continued warning neighbors. About 35 minutes later, he returned and found the couple struggling to get Fisher into her wheelchair. Smoke was beginning to surround the home.

“I was incredibly concerned,” Ferris said. “It was very close.”

Ferris immediately called for an ambulance. Firefighter Paramedics Fredric Miltimore and Lee Woods were rerouted from the fire line to help get Fisher safely out. As they left, the couple saw black smoke swallow up the home and feared it would be destroyed.

“That was pretty traumatic because we were taking off at the last minute and that was really scary,” Fisher said.

“We were staring at 20-foot flames for sure,” Miltimore said, describing the remote property surrounded by burning brush and narrow dirt roads.

Woods added, “We basically peeled out of there. It was stressful. Glad we were able to help.”

Additional fire crews arrived right after the ambulance left and continued fighting the fire through the night. Their efforts saved the couple’s home.

Fisher and Shanahan were taken to a Red Cross Shelter, where they stayed for 24 hours until it was safe to return. Fisher expressed deep gratitude for the firefighters, Deputy Ferris, and County Office of Emergency Services staff member Carina Martinez.

“These guys do such a good job. I’m sure it’s because they care,” Fisher said.

“I’m glad they’re happy and I’m glad they’re safe,” Deputy Ferris said.

This incident is a reminder that wildfires can change direction quickly. Residents should always be prepared to evacuate with little notice.

The County’s Office of Emergency Services offers free Personal Disaster Plan templates , including versions for people who may need assistance, available in 12 languages. Residents are encouraged to create an evacuation plan, build an emergency kit, sign up for AlertSanDiego notifications , and download the Genasys Protect app to stay informed.

County Fire, OES and Sheriff’s work together to protect lives and property through rapid emergency response and coordinated disaster operations. Taking steps to get prepared today can help keep you and your loved ones safe.

County of San Diego news release · Jul 17, 2026



Illustration from a photo by Ruff tuff cream puff · Wikimedia Commons, CC0

COUNTY

New Air Purifier Applications Address Tijuana River Valley Pollution

More air purifiers are now being made available to help South Bay residents cope with hydrogen sulfide emissions from polluted water in the Tijuana River Valley, thanks to a \$4 million investment approved by the County Board of Supervisors.

The Air Improvement Relief Effort (AIRE) program is being administered by the San Diego Air Pollution Control District (SDAPCD). It builds on an earlier air filter distribution the district started in January 2025.

Applications for the program are available on the SDAPCD website and will also be shared by County community health workers serving the South Bay. Eligible households new to the program can receive up to three air purifiers and replacement filters, while supplies last. Returning participants can request up to two additional purifiers.

Details of the expanded air purifier program were announced Wednesday during a press conference organized by District 1 Supervisor Paloma Aguirre, who proposed the funding in January. Aguirre was joined by SDAPCD representatives, community members and researchers who have been investigating the pollution.

The air purifier program expansion marks the third recent development

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DOWNTOWN, CITY & COUNTY

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New Air Purifier Applications Address Tijuana River Valley Pollution

aimed at addressing Tijuana River Valley pollution impacts. In early June, the State Water Resources Control Board opened applications for a \$46 million water quality grant program and the California Coastal Commission approved a County proposal to invest \$2 million to improve the Saturn Boulevard outflow channel.

A collaborative partnership that includes the U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), California Department of Public Health , San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board), SDAPCD and the County of San Diego has been working together since 2024 on the Tijuana River Valley sewage treatment issues, progress updates and health concern guidelines.

The County also continues to coordinate with the Tijuana River Coalition , area school districts, healthcare providers and community organizations to support affected residents.

More information about the pollution in the Tijuana River Valley and South County beach water is available from the SDAPCD, IBWC and the County’s dedicated Tijuana River Valley & Beach Water Sewage Crisis webpage

County of San Diego news release · Jul 22, 2026

COUNTY

Ramona Air Attack Base Reopens with New Aircraft to Strengthen Wildfire Response

San Diego County Fire, CAL FIRE, County leaders and hundreds of community members gathered Monday at the Ramona Airport to celebrate the grand reopening of the Ramona Air Attack Base. The event highlighted airport improvements and the addition of new aircraft to protect communities across San Diego County.

CAL FIRE San Diego Unit Chief Tony Mecham explained how the upgrades make aerial firefighting more effective. A Firehawk night-flying helicopter has been added to the base along with a C-130 Hercules large air-tanker capable of carrying 4,000 gallons of fire retardant.

The base upgrades also include new tanks for mixing retardant and a system that quickly delivers the retardant mixture directly to aircraft on the flight line.

Residents should always be prepared for emergencies. Register to receive AlertSanDiego emergency alerts to your cell phone and download the Genasys Protect app to say informed. The County’s Office of Emergency Services also offers free Personal Disaster Plan templates including versions for people who may need assistance, and it is available in 12 languages.

CAL FIRE/San Diego County Fire work closely to keep residents safe, reduce wildfire risk, and ensure rapid, professional emergency response across the region.

County of San Diego news release · Jul 21, 2026

COUNTY

Remembering Former Supervisor Bill Horn

The County lost long-serving former Supervisor Bill Horn, who died Friday in Escondido at age 83. Horn served on the Board of Supervisors for 24 years, leaving a legacy of public service, leadership and dedication to the community.

“Our thoughts go out to his loved ones and friends at this difficult time,” said Chief Administrative Officer Ebony Shelton. “Bill was committed to the public, as a leader on the Board of Supervisors and as a veteran who served the nation in the military. We honor his memory and the impact he made.”

Horn was a native San Diegan. His long career of public service began after he graduated from San Diego State University. He joined the U.S. Marine Corps, serving five years on active duty and seven years in reserve duty. He earned numerous distinctions, including the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star Medal with Combat V, designating valor for acts of heroism.

Horn was a Valley Center ranch owner, and it was his passion for property rights that prompted him to run for the Board of Supervisors. He represented the County’s Fifth Supervisorial District, including much of North County, from 1995 through early 2019. He also championed agricultural and veterans issues.

Horn expanded County services for the region’s large population of veterans and their families, including those struggling with homelessness. He declared 2015

the Year of the Veteran and hosted an annual conference to celebrate veterans and highlight their needs.

In addition, Horn supported major investments in wildfire and disaster preparedness and helped bring new library branches to Valley Center, San Marcos, Vista, 4-S Ranch, Fallbrook and Borrego Springs.

Learn more about Horn – including his sense of humor – in this video from his 2015 State of the County address .

County of San Diego news release · Jul 20, 2026

COUNTY

Did You Buy a Desert Willow Plant From Costco? Check It for Invasive Pests

If you purchased a Desert Willow plant from Costco between June 24 and July 3, 2026, it may contain two invasive agricultural pests: the Broad-headed Sharpshooter and the Glassy-winged Sharpshooter. Please check and let us know if you find them.

The affected plants came from a nursery in Texas and were distributed to Costco warehouses throughout California, including seven locations in San Diego County.

Preventing these pests is critical to protecting the state’s agriculture, environment, and economy.

Both can cause Pierce’s disease which has caused millions of dollars in losses to the state’s wine grape industry. Introducing the Broad-headed Sharpshooter species, currently not in California, could increase the risk of spreading destructive plant diseases to vineyards, orchards, nurseries, landscapes, and home gardens.

Courts · Transit · Public safety

The Glassy-winged Sharpshooter is already present in the county and California has established programs to manage this pest.

Contact County Agriculture, Weights and Measures for guidance—even if Costco has not contacted you.

Double-bag the plant (one trash bag inside the other), seal both bags, and place them in your regular trash.

Do not place it in green waste, return it to the store, transport or relocate it.

County agricultural inspectors will come to inspect the plant for any life stages of the broad-headed sharpshooter and advise the next steps.

County agricultural officials have inspected plants at the local Costco warehouses, but about 200 plants sold in San Diego County are still unaccounted for. Costco is notifying customers who purchased the plants, and the County has already fielded several customer inquiries.

The County is working closely with the California Department of Food and Agriculture and Costco to identify affected plants, respond to customer inquiries, and prevent the Broad-headed Sharpshooter from becoming established in San Diego County.

If you purchased a desert willow plant from Costco between June 24 and July 3 , 2026, please contact the County of San Diego Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures at 760-752-4700 or sdcawm@sdcounty.ca.gov for assistance.

County of San Diego news release · Jul 20, 2026

BUSINESS

San Diego commerce & the regional economy



Illustration from a photo by Dietmar Rabich · Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0

BUSINESS

Member Spotlight: Sailing RTW

Sailing RTW , led by Captain Jim Manos, Owner-Operator, and Bernice Holguin, Operations Manager, is a premier provider of luxury yacht charters on San Diego Bay.

As a locally operated business, Sailing RTW joins the Chamber excited to connect with fellow business leaders, build meaningful partnerships, and contribute to the continued growth and vibrancy of the San Diego community.

Sailing RTW specializes in personalized, on-the-water experiences for a wide range of occasions—from corporate events and client appreciation outings to bachelor and bachelorette parties, weddings, engagements, and private family gatherings, along with its popular anchor-and-swim charters. Each event is thoughtfully curated with both elegance and ease in mind, whether it’s an energetic celebration or a peaceful sail along the coast.

Sailing RTW also offers ash scattering ceremonies and full-body eco burials at sea, carried out with the utmost care, professionalism, and respect—providing families with a meaningful and serene way to honor their loved ones. A video offering a glimpse into a beautifully conducted full-body eco burial at sea can be viewed here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5KOYegxKIo

Through its extended fleet and trusted partnerships, Sailing RTW offers flexibility in both vessel options and group size, accommodating intimate outings as well as larger events of up to 200 guests.

Sailing RTW looks forward to welcoming the San Diego

community aboard for moments that are both memorable and meaningful.

For a closer look at the yacht and the experiences offered, visit Sailing RTW’s YouTube channel for charter highlights and virtual tours: https://www.youtube.com/@SailingRTW

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Jul 13, 2026

BUSINESS

Member Spotlight: Maritime Museum of San Diego

The San Diego community and civic leaders are invited to experience this new secret speakeasy experience along the downtown waterfront aboard the iconic Star of India , the world’s oldest

active sailing ship and centerpiece vessel nested among the Maritime Museum of San Diego fleet. Star of India celebrates her centennial anniversary homeported in San Diego next year when the Maritime Museum of San Diego next sails the historic vessel and honors her 164th birthday since launching in the Isle of Man in 1863. SAY San Diego is a nonprofit organization that has provided essential services to children, youth, and families in San Diego County for over 50 years.

According to Christina Connett Brophy, Ph.D., President & CEO for the Maritime Museum of San Diego, “This fun San Diego downtown waterfront event

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BUSINESS (CONTINUED)

San Diego commerce & the regional economy

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Member Spotlight: Maritime Museum of San Diego

launches a co-beneficiary fundraiser youth fashion

show planned for Spring of 2027.”

Guests can step aboard the legendary Star of India Thursday, July 16 for this after-hours special event

featuring cocktails, live music, sunset nibbles, hidden clues, harbor views, and access to a secret lower-deck speakeasy.

Check-in at 6:30 p.m. with

speakeasy experience 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. \$60 per person, 21 and up only.

✉ Tickets can be purchased at sdmaritime.org .

Proceeds from the event

will be shared by the Maritime Museum of San Diego and SAY San Diego.

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Jul 10, 2026

AROUND CALIFORNIA

Statewide news

CALIFORNIA

Attorney General Bonta Changes Voter ID Measure Title Months Before Election

Critics say the revised ballot language for Proposition 39 violates state rules requiring impartial wording and could sway voters against the initiative that qualified with more than a million signatures.

California Attorney General Rob Bonta stands accused of altering the official ballot title for a voter identification and citizenship verification initiative just months ahead of the November 2026 election.

The measure, known as Proposition 39, collected signatures from more than a million Californians across party lines after circulating for over a year with previously approved neutral language.

Opponents claim the last-minute rewrite frames the proposal in negative terms that may prejudice voters, in what they call a violation of

state law that demands a true and impartial statement of the measure's purpose.

California law requires the attorney general, in providing the ballot title and summary, to give "a true and impartial statement of the purpose of the measure in such language that the ballot title and summary is neither an argument, nor likely to create prejudice, for or against the proposed measure."

The original approved title read: "ESTABLISHES ADDITIONAL VOTER IDENTIFICATION AND CITIZENSHIP VERIFICATION REQUIREMENTS. INITIATIVE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT."

That version described requirements for government-issued photo identification at polling places, an option to provide the last four digits for mail ballots, issuance of free voter ID cards, and annual county reports verifying citizenship of registered voters.

Bonta's replacement language is: "PROHIBITS CITIZENS FROM VOTING UNLESS THEY PRESENT

GOVERNMENT-ISSUED IDENTIFICATION. INITIATIVE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT."

Assemblyman David Tangipa, a Republican, first publicized the change Tuesday evening. He called it "blatant manipulation and rigging right in the middle of the election season."

Tangipa pointed out that the initiative provides for free identification cards while still requiring verification, warning that the new wording could mislead the public.

Reform California Chairman and Assemblymember Carl DeMaio labeled the revision an attempt to "RIG ELECTION!" He posted side-by-side comparisons of the old and new titles and urged supporters to push back.

U.S. Rep. Ken Calvert, a Republican, added his criticism, stating that it occurred "on the same day a Democrat governor admits hundreds of non-citizens illegally voted in elections."

Calvert stated: "On the same day a Democrat governor admits hundreds of non-citizens illegally voted in elections, California Attorney General Rob Bonta tries to rig the election on our California Voter ID initiative by changing the ballot title he previously signed off on."

The initiative seeks to make California the 37th state with voter ID laws and to restore confidence in elections at a time when public trust remains low.

It is spearheaded by figures including DeMaio and state Sen. Tony Strickland.

Critics say Bonta has long opposed stricter identification requirements. In 2024 his office successfully sued the city of Huntington Beach to block a local charter amendment that would have required valid state ID to vote beginning in 2026.

Bonta had called that measure "blatantly and flatly illegal," arguing it conflicted with state law and placed undue burdens on some voters. The California Supreme Court ultimately declined to

review an appellate ruling against the Huntington Beach law.

Critics tie the latest title change to a broader pattern of resistance to election-integrity and taxpayer-protection measures, including a 2024 state high court decision that kept another initiative off the ballot.

Bonta's office has not released any statement explaining the revision of Proposition 39's ballot language.

Opponents cite behavioral research showing that negatively framed ballot titles can reduce support by 5-15 percentage points in some cases among undecided voters who spend limited time reviewing measures.

Supporters of the initiative are calling for public pressure and volunteer efforts to challenge the change and defend the measure's path to the November ballot.

San Diego Newsline · Based on reporting by California Globe · Jul 21, 2026

THE NEWSLINE CARTOON

Opinion



Quick rescue saves lives

THE NEWSLINE CARTOON

COMMENTARY

Opinion — the views of the writers named, not news reporting

COMMENTARY

Why Participatory Budgeting Fails to Fix California’s Municipal Overreach

Mark Moses contends that the popular reform merely provides new political cover for governments whose missions have grown dangerously unbounded.

Marin County recently began its latest round of participatory budgeting, asking residents to allocate an additional \$2.5 million in taxpayer dollars. This initiative reflects a broader trend across the state, where local governments increasingly turn to such programs as a supposed innovative solution.

Mark Moses, a senior fellow with the California Policy Center, argues that while the concept appeals to many who believe greater involvement will yield improved governance, participatory budgeting actually functions as a mechanism to legitimize further government expansion rather than a genuine budgeting reform.

Moses writes that California municipalities do not lack public engagement;

instead, they grapple with vague and expansive mission statements that pledge to improve quality of life, promote sustainability, foster equity and expand services. Once these become official purposes, virtually any initiative can be defended as a valid governmental role.

Unlike private organizations, cities face no external signals to halt growth, Moses explains. They simply amass responsibilities, turning every budget cycle into a debate over the extent of government activity instead of questioning its appropriateness.

No procedural tweak can alter this fundamental pattern, according to Moses. Participatory budgeting stands out as especially harmful because it cloaks spending increases in the language of “democracy” and “community,” rendering those increases far harder to oppose.

Moses points to Vallejo as a prime example. Fresh from bankruptcy in 2011, the city approved a one-cent sales tax increase. Within two years, it directed \$3.2 million—30 percent of the new revenue—into the first citywide participatory budgeting effort in the

nation.

Moses notes that a municipality recently shown unable to live within its resources promptly created another avenue for approving expenditures, funded by a tax based on the vague notion of “quality of life.” The program’s objectives, he adds, were similarly limitless: to “transform democracy” and “engage the community.”

Residents chose to support projects ranging from street fixes and community gardens to nutrition classes, college scholarships and a Boys & Girls Club gym restoration. Moses emphasizes that the value of these initiatives is not the issue; rather, Vallejo retained its inflated view of government’s proper sphere even after financial collapse.

By establishing an officially recognized group—such as Vallejo’s 21-member steering committee—with its own stake in public resources, the city introduced a parallel source of legitimacy alongside elected officials, Moses contends. This shift dilutes the council’s accountability for setting overall priorities.

Advocates highlight increased resident

involvement, outreach to marginalized groups and greater trust as evidence of success. Moses counters that these are merely indicators of process, not proof that cities have become safer, economies stronger, infrastructure sounder or funds spent more effectively.

Reports from programs in Los Angeles and Sacramento, he observes, focus on ballots cast, zones reached and implementation rates rather than measurable improvements in public safety, prosperity or fiscal responsibility. “The announcements read like audits of the process, not evaluations of the results,” Moses writes.

Even widespread participation cannot legitimize treating public funds as an unrestricted pool for whatever gains majority support, according to Moses. The core difficulty lies not in who participates but in the absence of any boundary defining legitimate government functions.

Moses argues that municipalities require a rights-based standard that limits government to protecting residents from force and fraud. Such a framework remains constrained because it answers

to an external principle, in contrast to open-ended goals like “enhancing quality of life” that can never be fully satisfied.

Moses concludes that when cities invite residents to “decide how to spend” public money, the decisive question is what they are prohibited from funding. If the answer is nothing, the real problem is not budgeting technique but the lack of any restraint on government power.

Moses warns that without first answering what government is for, every new procedural reform—including participatory budgeting—will simply open another route for unchecked expansion.

San Diego Newsline · Based on commentary published by the California Policy Center · Jul 17, 2026

ABOUT THIS PAPER

San Diego Newsline covers downtown San Diego first — City Hall, the Gaslamp Quarter, East Village, Little Italy, Barrio Logan and the waterfront — and the county around it. Every item names its source; read the originals and our standards at sandiegonewsline.com.

MORE NEWS

Downtown, City & County

COUNTY

County Monitoring Shows No Local Cyclosporiasis Outbreaks, Food Safety Recommended

The intestinal illness, cyclosporiasis, is in the news nationwide, but County monitoring reports no local increase in cases. State health officials have also not seen an increase.

Nationally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is reporting 1,645 confirmed cases across 34 states, with more than 5,100 additional cases still under investigation. Data is as of July, 15, 2026. The CDC has not identified a source yet.

While there is not a local outbreak, the County has logged eight cases so far in 2026. The County sees 15 to 20 cyclosporiasis cases per year, most frequently are associated with international travel. County Public Health Services released a health alert to healthcare

professionals this week.

If you think you are sickened by cyclosporiasis, go to your doctor. Cases are confirmed by lab testing of stool samples through your medical providers. Positive results are reported to the County.

Cyclosporiasis, caused by the parasite Cyclospora cayetanensis, typically spreads through contaminated food or water, particularly fresh produce. Case counts typically trend up May through August each year. Once produce is contaminated, the parasite can only be eliminated by cooking.

Cyclosporiasis is an intestinal illness marked by prolonged watery diarrhea, loss of appetite, weight loss, bloating, nausea, fatigue, and sometimes low-grade fever.

Symptoms typically manifest 2–14 days after exposure and may persist for weeks if untreated.

Severe cases, generally in young children, older adults, and immunocompromised

people, can lead to dehydration and require hospitalization. Nationwide, about 9% of reported cases have resulted in hospitalization.

In general, contaminated fresh produce is a common source of stomach illnesses. Safe food handling is essential. The CDC recommends these prevention steps:

Wash hands Use soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after handling fresh produce.

Rinse all produce Wash fruits and vegetables under running water, even if it is labeled as “prewashed,” and scrub firm fruits like melons and cucumbers.

Cut out spoiled sections Remove bruised or damaged parts before preparing or eating.

Refrigerate promptly Store cut, peeled, or cooked produce within two hours.

Cook when possible Cooking food to at least 158 °F helps eliminate the parasite.

County of San Diego news release · Jul 16, 2026

COUNTY

Probation on the Move: New Mobile Service Centers Help Clients Succeed

County of San Diego Probation now delivers essential resources and support directly to its adult and youth clients, and to people in the community. The Mobile Probation Service Centers (MPSCs), large vehicles operating as offices on wheels, allow Probation officers to provide services critical for clients with transportation challenges or limited awareness of available services.

Partner agencies join to provide services not usually available in the field, connecting with clients in their neighborhoods and making a significant impact.

Probation Chief Tamika Nelson said the department is “raising the bar in service” to clients and the community.

The mobile centers offer screenings and connect clients to providers for housing, Medi-Cal, substance use treatment, mental health care, education, employment, and court-related programs. Staff conduct on-site assessments to match residents with the services they need.

Officers and staff distribute food, hygiene kits, and clothing to anyone in need.

By bringing resources directly into neighborhoods, the service centers make it easier for adults and youth to get support and reduce stress, cost and travel barriers. A Board of State Community Corrections grant funded the mobile service centers.

These mobile centers support the Probation Department’s mission to protect public safety by supporting clients as they restore their lives, families and communities.

County of San Diego news release · Jul 21, 2026

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