

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

County's EMS Corps Creates a Clear Path Into Public Safety Careers

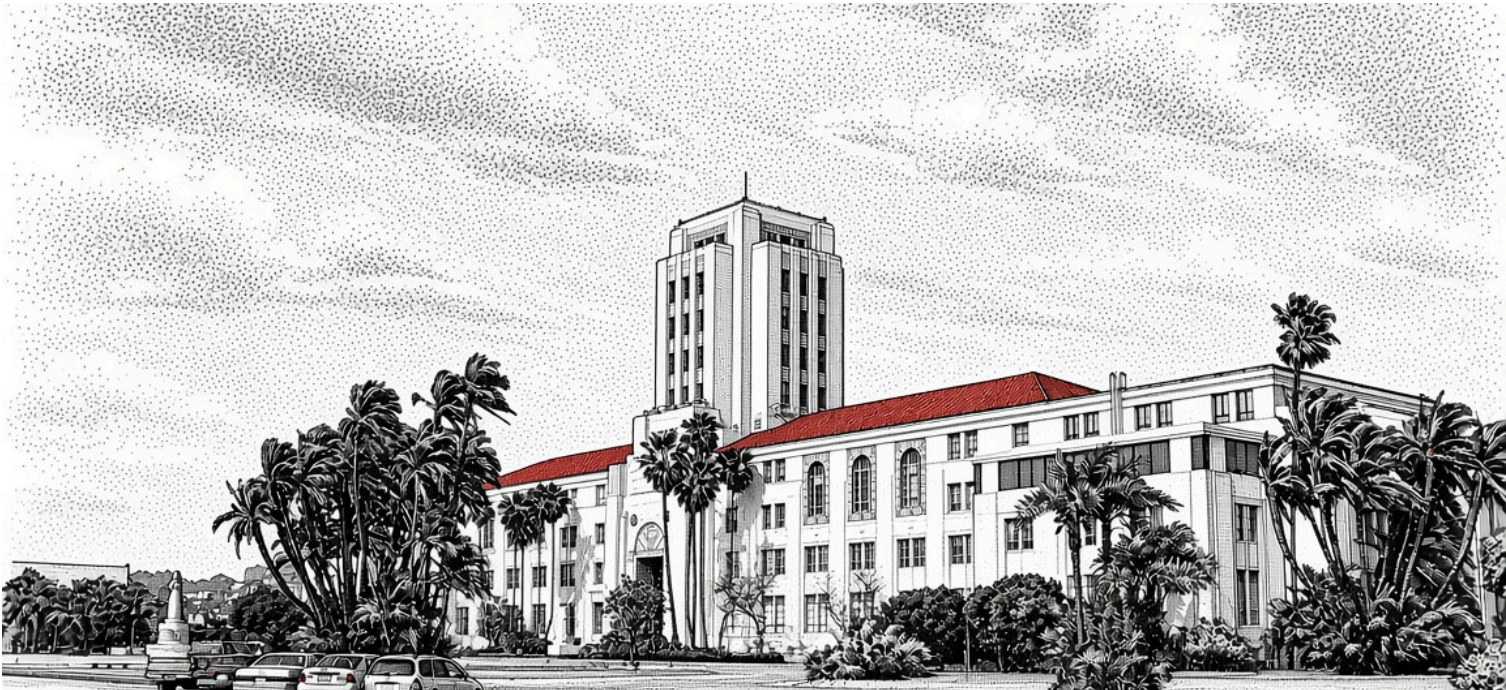


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San Diego County's Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Corps is partnering with Southwestern College's Fire Academy to expand opportunities for young adults. It helps motivated participants move into stable, long-term careers in the fire service.

"We have the same goals in mind, what we're trying to do is open the door and give access to everybody," said Fire Academy Chief Lorraine Hutchinson. "I hope we can get more from the EMS Corps."

The County's EMS Corps program launched in July 2025 at Southwestern College as a 20-week training program. It is 400+ hours of combined classroom learning with hands-on fieldwork and mentorship. Each participant works directly with an EMS professional and completes 20 hours of field time with ambulance agency partners. The program supports youth who may be involved in the foster care system, juvenile justice system, or who face other barriers to becoming Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs).

"The EMS Corps program gives young people real skills and a clear path into public safety careers, and at the same time it helps us fill a critical workforce need in the fire service. When participants complete this program, they come to the academy prepared, focused, and ready to succeed. This partnership strengthens our community and builds a stronger, more reliable pipeline of future firefighters and emergency responders," said

Tony Mecham, San Diego County Fire Chief and CAL FIRE San Diego Unit Chief.

Christopher Vega, 21, became the first EMS Corps graduate to enter the Fire Academy in January 2026 — and now he has graduated from it. With this accomplishment, he is one step closer to employment in the fire service.

Support from the EMS Corps program teachers, staff, and other students made a big difference for Vega.

"I had a lot of support and encouragement, and (teachers) made it clear it was a great opportunity," he said. "I knew this is what I wanted. I'm all for it. When teachers talked to me, they said, 'We're going to help you get in.'"

EMS Corps participants can earn admission into the Fire Academy by completing a set of required steps:

Passing the National Registry EMT exam (NREMT)

Passing the Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT)

Passing the State Firefighter written exam (FCTC)

Completing an interview with the Southwestern College Fire Academy chief

This coordinated approach makes it easier for EMS Corps participants to move from training into real career opportunities.

Vega also recognizes that EMS Corps helps people explore different public safety careers. "Everyone is different. Not everyone wants to be in a fire academy —

some want to do EMT or nursing programs."

The program continues to grow. Four EMS Corps graduates have already been accepted into the August 2026 Fire Academy, expanding the pathway and helping more young adults reach their goals.

The EMS Corps application portal is currently closed but will open again soon.

Through strong partnerships, clear steps, and hands-on support, the County's EMS Corps is giving young people the chance to start meaningful careers.

County of San Diego news release · Jul 27, 2026

COUNTY

Postcards Sent to San Diego County Voters for November Election

The San Diego County Registrar of Voters office has mailed more than two million postcards to registered voters across the county.

The postcards explain the different ways voters can cast their ballots in the Nov. 3 Gubernatorial General Election . Ballots will arrive the week of Oct. 5. Voters will have nearly a month to return their ballots before voting ends on Nov. 3.

Every registered voter will get a ballot by mail and can return it in one of three ways:

At an official ballot drop box. Drop boxes open Oct. 6 and remain available through Election Day, Nov. 3.

In-person voting starts Monday, Oct. 5, at the Registrar of Voters office in Kearny Mesa at 5600 Overland Ave., San Diego. The office is open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Vote centers will be open from Oct. 24 through Nov. 3. A list of locations will

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DOWNTOWN, CITY & COUNTY

Courts · Transit · Public safety

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Postcards Sent to San Diego County Voters for November Election

be available on sdvote.com in September.

Oct. 24 : Select vote centers will open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Oct. 31 : All vote centers will open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Nov. 3 (final day to vote): All vote centers, official ballot drop boxes and the Registrar’s office will be open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

County of San Diego news release · Jul 28, 2026

COUNTY

Heat Continues in the Region — Quick Ways to Stay Safe

San Diego County is heading into its fourth straight week of extreme heat, and the safety reminders remain just as important as temperatures stay high.

Here are fast, simple ways to protect yourself and those around you.

Drink water all day : Stay ahead of dehydration by

drinking water consistently, not just when you’re thirsty.

Know early signs of heat illness : Headaches, dizziness, nausea, heavy sweating and cramps in the abdomen and legs — from losing electrolytes through excessive sweating — are warning signs. Move to a cool place right away if symptoms start.

Avoid the hottest hours : Late morning through early evening remains the danger zone. Stay inside where it’s air-conditioned; shift outdoor plans if you need to be outside to earlier or later in the day.

Use Cool Zones : The County Cool Zones program that includes the County’s 33 branch libraries offers 80 safe, air-conditioned spaces if your home gets too warm. Check the nearest location before heading out.

Check on vulnerable neighbors : Older adults, young children and people with health conditions are especially at risk during extended heat.

Never leave anyone in a vehicle : Temperatures inside cars rise quickly, even with

windows cracked. Bring children, older adults and pets inside with you every time.

Make small daily changes to lower temps : Close blinds, use fans or air conditioning, wear lightweight clothing and take breaks in shade. Small actions help over long heat stretches.

Protect your pets from the heat too : Yes, our pets can suffer in the heat like we do. Keep them inside where it’s cooler if possible. If not, make sure they have shade ALL DAY to protect them.

The Heat Is On All Around the County — Here’s How to Stay Safe https://www.countynewscenter.com/the-heat-is-on-all-around-the-county-heres-how-to-stay-safe/

Extreme Heat Forecasted — Here Are Tips to Stay Safe https://www.countynewscenter.com/extreme-heat-forecasted-here-are-tips-to-stay-safe/

County of San Diego news release · Jul 29, 2026

COUNTY

Support a Safe, Healthy School Year: Get Vaccinated Before School Begins

County health officials urge parents and caregivers to make vaccines part of back-to-school preparations.

California requires several vaccines for students in transitional kindergarten (TK) through 12th grade. These include DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis/whooping cough), Hepatitis B, MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella), chickenpox, polio, and more. You can see a full list of vaccines by grade on the County’s website .

The first week of August marks California HPV Vaccine Week. The HPV vaccine is not required for school, but health officials strongly recommend it for boys and girls ages 9 and older. This vaccine helps protect against six different types of cancer later in life.

“This vaccine is capable of preventing 90% of future cancers caused by HPV,” said Dr. Kelly Motadel, County Chief

Pediatric Officer. “When families stay up to date on recommended vaccines, they protect their children and those who are immunocompromised. Higher vaccination rates make outbreaks less likely and help keep communities healthy.”

Parents and caregivers should contact their health care provider to receive vaccines. Getting vaccinated at least two weeks before school stated allows time for full protection. For more information about vaccine-preventable diseases and the shots that protect against them, visit the County’s Immunization Branch online or call (866) 358-2966.

County Public Health Services protects and improves the health of all San Diego County residents by preventing disease, promoting wellness, and advancing health equity. Through community partnerships, education, and data driven programs, the department works to create safer, healthier communities for all.

County of San Diego news release · Jul 29, 2026

BUSINESS

San Diego commerce & the regional economy



Illustration from a photo by Antony-22 · Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0

BUSINESS

Chula Vista Charter Measure Sent Back for Further Review

A proposed ballot initiative to reform the City of Chula Vista’s Charter was stalled by the City Council on Tuesday.

During the Council’s meeting, there was extensive debate regarding the measure, notably on the nearly 70% pay raise it would have granted the mayor, councilmembers, and city attorney. Members of the public and Mayor McCann expressed strong opposition to such provisions. After much discussion, councilmembers

voted to make considerable changes, removing all salary increase related amendments.

In a second motion, the council also voted to refer the initiative to the city’s Charter Review Commission for feedback before it is brought back to council for a vote on the remaining provisions, such as term limit extensions and new governance rules. With a deadline to submit initiatives on August 7, the measure is unlikely to make it to the November ballot. The Chamber will continue to monitor its progress through future consideration.

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Jul 23, 2026

BUSINESS

Chamber Opposes Prop 44: Here’s Why

14 statewide measures have officially qualified for the 2026 General Election ballot. The Chamber has taken a

position on two of these measures: we support a “No” vote on Proposition 44, and a “Yes” vote on Proposition 45.

Proposition 44 is a political ploy by one special interest group to target community health centers.

Community health centers are a cornerstone of our state’s healthcare system and economy, serving millions of Californians regardless of insurance status. Prop 44 would require clinics to spend 90% of their revenue on “direct patient services”. While this sounds reasonable, the definition of “direct patient services” excludes core, mission critical services that these clinics provide, including enrollment, translation services, case management, transportation, and even paying rent and utilities! The measure would directly threaten the economic stability of clinics and lead to clinic closures, sending ripple

effects throughout the state and regional healthcare system. The Chamber is therefore opposed to this measure.

Stay tuned for the next Policy Update for a breakdown of Proposition 45!

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Jul 23, 2026

BUSINESS

City of San Diego Rental Fees Policy

Chamber staff spoke in opposition to the proposed Rental Fees Ordinance being brought forward to San Diego City Council by Councilmember Sean Elo-Rivera.

The Ordinance was presented to the Council last month for an informational workshop ahead of an expected adoption vote this Fall. While the ordinance contains some commonsense transparency requirements, it also includes a number of onerous new mandates for

rental housing providers that threaten their ability to operate. These include long late fee extensions, allowing applicants to provide their own screening reports, holding deposit caps, and overall fee caps that do not account for needed operating expenses.

Councilmembers expressed concerns with many of these provisions, noting the large new regulatory burden they would create as well as the fact they could disincentivize housing production in the region and potentially increase base rents for tenants. Additionally, the proposed ordinance goes far beyond what has been adopted in any other US municipality.

The Chamber will monitor any changes or developments with the ordinance and continue to oppose it if it moves forward in this current burdensome form.

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Jul 23, 2026

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AROUND CALIFORNIA

Statewide news

CALIFORNIA

Law Enforcement, Business Leaders Warn AB 2108 Would Undo Prop 36, Raise Crime Costs

Opponents say the measure creates broad pretrial diversion for theft offenses without disqualifying those with prior convictions, potentially adding billions in annual public safety expenses if crime rates return to pre-Proposition 36 levels.

California lawmakers are considering a bill that critics say would reverse key gains from last year’s voter-approved Proposition 36 and drive up expenses for taxpayers already facing a massive state budget gap.

Voters passed Proposition 36 in November 2024 by a 68 percent margin that carried all 58 counties. The measure restored felony penalties for repeat theft and drug crimes after years of rising offenses linked to Proposition 47.

Assembly Bill 2108, authored by Assemblywoman LaShae Sharp-Collins, would create a pretrial diversion program for retail theft, shoplifting, forgery and

vandalism. Successful completion would allow the offender’s record to be wiped, according to opponents.

Top law enforcement officials, business owners, crime victims and community leaders spoke out against the legislation at a press conference Tuesday. They argued the bill conflicts with the intent of Proposition 36 by not disqualifying individuals with prior theft convictions.

The measure “creates a sweeping and overly broad diversion eligibility scheme for theft-related offenses, including petty theft, shoplifting, grand theft, receiving stolen property, and vandalism, while conspicuously failing to disqualify individuals with prior theft convictions,” opponents stated.

El Dorado County District Attorney Vern Pierson, a past president and spokesman for the California District Attorneys Association, questioned whether the voice of California voters still matters. Pierson noted that the legislation completely undermines voter-approved Proposition 36.

San Diego District Attorney

Summer Stephan said AB 2108 will dismantle Proposition 36. Prosecutors contend the bill would return conditions that prompted stores to lock up merchandise and created difficulties for retailers that Proposition 36 aimed to fix.

Successful diversion produces no conviction, so it does not create the prior convictions that trigger Proposition 36’s felony treatment for later thefts, according to the critics. This approach reopens pathways for repeat offenders to avoid escalating penalties.

Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco said repeat theft was the central problem without meaningful consequences until Proposition 36 passed. Under the proposed bill, a case gets dismissed after an offender finishes the diversion program, allowing repeated theft with little accountability.

A business owner who operates two shopping centers told the gathering that crime was severe before Proposition 36. She said nobody could open a retail store in California at that time, but the new law changed the

situation. The owner added that the bill encourages criminals to keep stealing and that business operators are the victims.

Dr. Raymond Kim, a professor of finance, estimated that passage of AB 2108 would cost the state \$9.3 billion each year if crime rates climb back to levels seen before Proposition 36. He said cities and counties would need to hire more police, requiring 29 percent more spending on law enforcement.

California faces a \$35 billion annual structural budget deficit along with large unfunded pension obligations, making such added costs unsustainable for taxpayers, according to the analysis presented.

The bill amends existing diversion statutes and adds a new chapter covering specified theft offenses when the charge is not a felony, involves no violence and meets other listed conditions. Courts could order programs including workforce training, with successful completion leading to dismissal of charges.

AB 2108 passed the

Assembly in May by a 41-22 vote along party lines. It cleared the Senate Public Safety Committee and is scheduled for hearing in Senate Appropriations in early August.

Sharp-Collins said voters passed Proposition 36 to address chronic and organized offenders. She added that the measure did not establish a tailored approach for people accused of less serious, non-recurrent shoplifting. The assemblywoman stated the bill fills that gap by ensuring the justice system can identify who would be better served by early intervention and targeted programming.

The legislation is sponsored by Californians for Safety and Justice. Opponents noted the group receives funding from the Tides Center and has ties to organizations that backed Proposition 47.

Law enforcement leaders emphasized that the proposal would weaken the accountability elements voters endorsed in Proposition 36.

San Diego Newsline · Based on reporting by California Globe · Jul 28, 2026

THE NEWSLINE CARTOON

Opinion



Your tax dollars, now in convenient postcard form

THE NEWSLINE CARTOON

COMMENTARY

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

COMMENTARY

Marc Joffe Calls for Bold Reforms as LAUSD Faces Looming Insolvency

Visiting fellow at the California Policy Center argues that Los Angeles Unified's financial troubles stem from its own decisions despite rising per-pupil funding and urges major structural changes to avoid state intervention.

A recent communication from Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools Debra Duardo has raised serious concerns about the future stability of the Los Angeles Unified School District.

In a letter dated July 2, Duardo informed the district that it satisfies the legal requirements for a "Lack of Going Concern" label. This designation signals that LAUSD might not fulfill its financial commitments during the 2027-28 and 2028-29 fiscal years.

The district's internal forecasts indicate that its operating cash reserves could plunge \$231 million into deficit by November 2027. As Duardo noted in the correspondence, any school system unable to sustain a positive cash position will struggle to cover payroll.

County officials have dispatched a financial specialist to assist LAUSD and have cautioned that additional measures could be imposed if the district does not achieve lasting fiscal health. The organization has until the middle of August to submit a revised version of its \$20.6 billion

spending plan, or it could face an outside overseer with authority to supersede choices made by the elected school board and the superintendent.

Superintendent Andrés Chait offered reassuring statements regarding teamwork and uninterrupted school activities. However, board member Tanya Ortiz Franklin described the predicament more directly as one that was preventable.

This assessment is accurate. Only a short time before receiving the warning, the board had greenlit a spending document that exceeds incoming revenues and endorsed fresh collective bargaining deals. The county explicitly pointed to the expenses from these agreements as a key factor pushing the district toward insolvency.

This latest alert was not unexpected. Through a request under the Public Records Act, Oleada LAUSD Parents secured previous messages from the Los Angeles County Office of Education that district leaders had referenced casually but never made public.

LAUSD should not be encountering these difficulties, given two significant patterns affecting it: shrinking student numbers and substantially higher support from the state, according to Marc Joffe, a visiting fellow at the California Policy Center.

Enrollment in the district reached its highest point of 746,831 pupils in 2002 and has decreased steadily ever since. In more recent times, the

student count fell from 566,600 during the 2012-13 academic year to an anticipated 375,890 in 2026-2027. That represents a 34 percent reduction in under 15 years.

Contributing elements include reduced birth rates, expensive housing, and families choosing charter schools or neighboring districts. The Legislative Analyst's Office anticipates that California's population of school-age children will continue to contract due to a birth rate decline that started almost 20 years ago.

State education funding has followed a sharply different trajectory. Following the Great Recession, the Proposition 98 guarantee for schools and community colleges totaled about \$47 billion in 2011-12. The approved state budget for 2026-27 sets this guarantee at \$128.1 billion. This reflects an approximate 173 percent rise across 15 years when overall inflation increased by around 45 percent.

The Local Control Funding Formula, enacted in 2013 and completely phased in by 2018-19, channeled additional resources to systems like LAUSD that serve many low-income pupils, English language learners, and children in foster care.

The combination of falling enrollment and growing revenues has produced unusually high funding levels for each student. The district's total budget expanded from \$11.3 billion in 2012-13, equaling \$19,944 per pupil, to the current \$20.6 billion, or \$54,785 per student. These

per-pupil calculations incorporate capital projects, debt payments, and other non-instructional items, making them larger than typical education cost metrics.

Despite the increased resources, student performance remains disappointing. During the 2024-25 school year, roughly 54 percent of LAUSD students tested below state standards in English language arts, 63 percent fell short in math, and 73 percent did not meet expectations in science.

Restoring financial balance will demand three significant policy shifts, according to Joffe. He first recommends that the district proceed with school consolidations instead of setting aside the closure strategies prepared by the consulting firm Ernst & Young.

Operating more than 1,000 campuses for a student population that is about half its former size results in expenses for vacant classrooms, duplicated administrative roles, and inefficient buildings. Michael Fine, who leads the state's Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team, observed that "an organization built for 500,000 students that serves only 400,000 is too large."

Joffe's second suggestion is that cuts to non-teaching personnel must extend beyond the 657 central administrative jobs the board removed in May. Over the 11 years concluding in 2023-24, the district reduced its teaching workforce by 22 percent while boosting counselors by 69 percent and other support

roles, such as bus drivers and cafeteria employees, by 19 percent.

Third, Joffe calls for overhauling the pay structure that prioritizes years of service rather than performance. This is especially urgent since county reviewers have identified the recent labor contracts as endangering solvency.

Under the current scale, a beginning teacher holding only a bachelor's degree earns \$77,000, whereas veteran instructors with advanced coursework receive more than twice that amount for identical responsibilities. Joffe proposes narrowing this differential by limiting automatic progression and seniority-based raises to moderate growth in the district's primary expense.

Duardo's message serves as a critical alert requiring fundamental adjustments, according to Joffe. Instead of superficial tweaks to the budget that could merely postpone county oversight for another year, the school board must redirect the district toward genuine long-term viability.

San Diego Newsline · Based on commentary published by the California Policy Center · Jul 24, 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

Quick Action by CAL FIRE Helicopter Crew Rescues Trapped Ramona Residents

A fast-moving CAL FIRE San Diego helicopter crew rescued two Ramona residents after the rapidly growing Creelman Fire cut off their escape route on July 22. The pair were airlifted out without injuries as the fire increased to nearly 350 acres within hours.

Unit and Fire Chief Tony Mechum said the rescue highlights the versatility of CAL

FIRE's aviation program and the skill of its Helitack crews. He noted firefighters shifted within minutes from wildfire suppression to a life-saving operation before returning immediately to the frontlines.

This was CAL FIRE's second rescue of the month. On July 17, a CAL FIRE ambulance paramedic team evacuated two people from the Thorn Fire in Boulevard.

The Creelman Fire ignited around 2:50 p.m. in brush near the 300 block of Creelman Lane and quickly grew, prompting the Sheriff's Office to issue Evacuation

Orders and Warnings for nearly 1,500 residents.

Within 20 minutes, two people unable to evacuate called 9-1-1. A Helitack reloading water heard the emergency call, diverted, and found the residents in a remote area with flames threatening their vehicle. The crew dropped its water load to create a landing zone, touched down, and pulled both residents to safety. They were then evacuated by ambulance personnel and reunited with family.

After the rescue, the helicopter crew returned to the

fire and completed 50 water drops over 4 hours. Roughly 300 firefighters from multiple agencies supported the response. The Creelman fire was contained the evening of July 24 with no significant damage or major injuries reported.

This incident also demonstrated the expanded capabilities of the modernized Ramona Air Attack Base. During the initial attack, the base's new retardant mix-plant loaded approximately 59,000 gallons of fire retardant for 16 aircraft, including air tankers, attack platforms

and helicopters, two of which operated overnight.

The Creelman Fire is a reminder that wildfires can escalate quickly and residents must be prepared to evacuate.

Download a free personal evacuation plan template at AlertSanDiego.org, and sign up for mobile alerts through AlertSanDiego system, the AlertSanDiego app and the Genasys Protect app .

County of San Diego news release · Jul 28, 2026

SAN DIEGO NEWSLINE

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