

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

San Diego County Officials Detail Wildfire Readiness as Fuel Conditions Deteriorate



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San Diego County fire, emergency and law enforcement leaders outlined sweeping investments and coordinated plans to confront a high-risk wildfire season, citing critically dry fuels, Santa Ana winds and rapid regional growth as the chief concerns. Officials said the county has expanded staffing, modernized equipment and strengthened cross-agency coordination to protect communities across one of California's most active wildfire regions.

Chief Tony Mecham of County Fire and CAL FIRE traced the region's modern wildfire strategy to the devastating 2003 and 2007 firestorms, which burned more than 750,000 acres and exposed gaps in preparedness. In 2008, the Board consolidated rural departments into San Diego County Fire, forming a unified service designed to plan, coordinate and invest at regional scale. "The greatest concern remains the alignment of critically dry fuels with the onset of Santa Ana wind events, when the potential for large, fast-moving wildfires will be at its highest," Mecham said.

Residents are protected by an increased CAL FIRE of more than one thousand firefighters in more than 40 fire stations, fire camps and aviation facilities. Arial firefighting has expanded with the County's Firehawk helicopter, capable of 1,000-gallon drops and nighttime response, and a CAL FIRE C-130 Hercules based at Ramona,

following upgrades that cement Ramona's role as a Southern California aviation hub.

Mecham emphasized the county's growing use of technology, Tablet Command for real-time unit tracking and tactical sharing, digital mapping of perimeters and evacuations, and the new AWARE California platform, which integrates UCSD wildfire cameras, satellite detections and weather feeds. "For residents, the public-facing application provides access to live camera imagery and incident information, allowing them to monitor conditions across the region and better understand wildfire activity," he said.

Mecham also highlighted pre-fire investments: the Vibrant Planet platform, to help identify potential fuel reduction project areas, validate existing projects, and support Community Wildfire Protection Plan development and Unit Fire Plan. County Fire uses Community Risk Reduction work to clear more than 800 lane miles of vegetation in 2025, create more than 200 acres of fuel breaks, and treat 45 lane miles of roadside vegetation with retardant. Crews also have completed more than 37 thousand defensible-space inspections, updated 10 Community Wildfire Protection Plans and supported 17 new Fire Safe Councils. Fire crews and partners also train dozens of Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), who volunteer to support our communities.

OES: Coordination Before, During and After

Daryl Arbuthnott, Director of the County Office of Emergency Services, said OES ties together county departments, cities, tribal governments, special districts, utilities and state and federal partners so the region responds and recovers as one coordinated system. "Simply put, our role is to ensure the entire region works together before, during, and after disasters," Arbuthnott said.

OES recently reorganized around the emergency management lifecycle, creating dedicated divisions for Community Engagement and Preparedness, Planning and Training, and Response and Coordination. Each Division will have a Recovery Coordinator assigned to it. Over the past year, OES conducted 70-plus community outreach events—including a regional Fire Weather Workshop—updated the Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan with new wildfire actions, revised the County Emergency Operations Plan (including the wildfire annex), strengthened training and exercises, and enhanced the AlertSanDiego.org website and mobile app, and Genasys Protect for public warnings and evacuations.

Sheriff's Office: Evacuations and Public Warning

Sergeant Michael Hanks said the Sheriff's Office manages mutual-aid planning and logistics

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DOWNTOWN, CITY & COUNTY

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San Diego County Officials Detail Wildfire Readiness as Fuel Conditions Deteriorate

for disasters, participates on the County’s Evacuation Committee and joined the statewide AwareCA portal working group in June 2026 to improve real-time alerts. The office partners on the Ag Pass program for farmers and ranchers and this year launched the Emergency Tribal Access Pass (ETAP) for qualifying tribal government members and employees to support zone stabilization efforts.

“During a wildfire, law enforcement’s role in Unified Command focuses on evacuating impacted communities, protecting rights of way, and safeguarding property,” Hanks said. “The decision to issue evacuation orders is not made lightly. It will depend entirely upon the nature, scope, and severity of the emergency, the number of people affected, and what actions are necessary to protect the public.” He added that deputies notify the public via multiple systems, including Wireless Emergency Alerts, Genasys Protect notifications, AlertSanDiego.org notifications, Hi-Lo audible warnings, and even deputies going door to door to reach people with emergency messaging.

Lieutenant Gavin Lanning described ASTREA, the Sheriff’s aerial support unit, as central to firefighting, patrol and search-and-rescue operations. In 2025, ASTREA responded to more than 5,500 missions, including 285 fire dispatches and 985 water drops. “Protecting San Diego County from the threat of wildfires requires a true team effort, it is a mission far bigger than any one agency,” Lanning said, citing co-location with County Fire and CAL FIRE and joint training that enables seamless emergency response.

ASTREA currently fields

one modern Bell 412 EPX and two aging Bell 205s. The Sheriff’s Office is pursuing funding for a second Bell 412 EPX to ensure year-round coverage with a safer, more capable twin-engine aircraft and to extend shift coverage into hours of darkness, bolstering nighttime suppression and early containment.

Officials said the county has invested more than a billion dollars in fire protection and preparedness over two decades, reshaping the region’s fire-response system. Future priorities include modern fire stations, fleet replenishment, staffing, regional training, brush management, and a second twin-engine 412 helicopter to sustain year-round coverage.

County of San Diego news release · Aug 19, 2026

COUNTY County Approves Affordable Housing and Health Facility in Logan Heights

The Board of Supervisors Tuesday approved the construction of 121 affordable homes and a health care facility on surplus County property in Logan Heights. For the first time in the County’s surplus-land housing program, the development includes replacing an aging health clinic on the site.

Seniors, families, those at risk of homelessness, veterans and former foster youth will call this development home.

All units will be reserved for people earning up to 60% of area median income per household.

The County conducted a robust community engagement campaign, including online activities on Engage San Diego County after declaring the land surplus. Residents emphasized the importance of maintaining uninterrupted access to health care onsite.

In response, the County issued a request for proposals in 2023 requiring a modern Federally Qualified Health Center along with the housing.

BRIDGE Housing Corporation was selected to develop the affordable housing. San Ysidro Health will operate the health care facility.

Homes will exceed state energy-efficiency standards and meet GreenPoint Silver certification. Planned community

amenities include a garden, barbecue area, and children’s play space.

Expanded Health Care Access for Underserved Residents

San Ysidro Health will build a 23,800 - square - foot health care facility with its own parking garage. The organization will continue serving patients on an adjacent parcel during construction.

The health facility will meet LEED Silver green building standards. The County will require the property to be used as a health care facility for the full 99 - year lease term.

The 99 - year lease requires the homes remain affordable for the entire term. The County will deposit initial rent payments into the Innovative Housing Trust Fund to support future affordable housing development.

This location is one of 12 surplus properties identified for affordable housing . Three developments are complete, one is under construction, seven are expected to break ground in the next three years and one is in the planning process.

Since 2017, the County has invested more than \$330 million in affordable housing through efforts such as using surplus County land and loans through the Innovative Housing Trust Fund. These investments have created over 3,900 new homes, with another nearly 2,200 in the pipeline.

Explore the County’s interactive dashboard for data on the County’s affordable housing inventory and visit the Housing for All Hub for services, resources, and property information through its Affordable Housing Map.

County of San Diego news release · Aug 18, 2026

COUNTY Back-to-School Routines Can Be Deadly in the Heat

As hot summer temperatures continue and back-to-school routines begin, parents and caregivers are urged to make car safety a priority. Nearly 40 children die each year in the United States after being left alone in hot cars. This year, there have already been 18 deaths nationally. It’s a tragedy that can happen to anyone.

According to the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration , more than half of pediatric heat-stroke deaths happen when a parent or caregiver unintentionally forgets a child in a vehicle. In many cases, this occurs when daily routines change.

A parked car can heat up extremely fast. Even with windows cracked, the interior temperature can reach 125 degrees within minutes. Children do not cool themselves as efficiently as adults, and their body temperature rises three to five times faster.

“There is no safe amount of time to leave a child alone in a vehicle—not even for a quick errand,” said Dr. Sayone Thihalolipavan, County Public Health Officer. “Not with a window down. Not in the shade. Not ever. Even on a mild day, your car can heat up like an oven.”

If you see a child alone in a car, take immediate action.

Ask people nearby for help finding the driver.

Remove the child from the vehicle if they are in danger. Break a window farthest from the child if needed.

Move the child to a cool place and begin cooling them with water or fanning.

Routine changes, lack of sleep, stress, fatigue and distractions affect every parent and are the leading factors behind children being unintentionally left in vehicles. Rear-facing car seats look the same to drivers whether a baby is in them or not, and sleeping babies are often silent passengers.

Place your child’s diaper bag in the front seat as a visual reminder.

Put something you need for the day in the back seat with your child like your purse, phone, briefcase, work badge or even your left shoe.

Check the child’s car seat every time you exit the vehicle, even if your child is not with you.

When you park your car, make it a habit to stop, look, and lock.

Ask your childcare provider to call you right away if your child hasn’t arrived as scheduled.

Keep your car locked at home so children do not climb inside.

Your pet is also at risk of hyperthermia, heat exhaustion and death if left alone in a hot car.

County of San Diego news release · Aug 13, 2026

COUNTY County Parks and Recreation Marks 80 Years of Community Impact

County Parks and Recreation is celebrating 80 years of service, meaning eight decades of preserving natural spaces, expanding recreational access and supporting community well-being.

Since its establishment in 1946, the department has

grown from a small collection of parks into a network of 159 parks, preserves and facilities across nearly 60,000 acres, with nearly 400 miles of trails open for residents and visitors.

To celebrate this milestone, the County is hosting a series of special events throughout 2026 including park festivals, guided nature hikes, educational workshops, volunteer opportunities and family-friendly celebrations.

“As we celebrate 80 years, all are invited to participate in a year filled with special events and activities and a chance to reflect on the rich history of our parks,” said Jason Hemmens, director, Parks and Recreation.

County Parks also maintains accreditation from the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA), placing it among only six agencies in California, and 221 nationwide to receive this distinction.

Anniversary activities kicked off with the “Happy 80th Birthday DPR!” social media contest and an Aug. 18 proclamation ceremony.

For more information on anniversary events, the history of County Parks and ways to get involved, visit the County Parks website and follow the department on social media for updates.

County of San Diego news release · Aug 19, 2026

COUNTY County Reaffirms Current Childhood Vaccine Schedule

San Diego County Public Health is reaffirming its support of the current childhood vaccine schedule recommend by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), West Coast Health Alliance and American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) .

“Spacing out vaccines or not getting all the recommended vaccines can increase the risk of serious illness for a child,” said County Public Health Officer Sayone Thihalolipavan, MD, MPH. “Decades of studies show existing childhood vaccines are safe and effective.”

Health officials note that the combined measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine is safe and effective in its combined form and not linked to autism.

Follow the AAP-recommended vaccination schedule, as endorsed by CDPH and San Diego County.

Complete vaccines on time rather than delaying or splitting appointments ensuring

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County Reaffirms Current Childhood Vaccine Schedule

full protection against measles, whooping cough, polio, and other diseases.

Speak with healthcare providers to address any concerns or unique health situations impacting vaccination timing.

Benefits of the Current Vaccine Schedule

Strong Safety Record : The current schedule is based on extensive scientific research and ongoing monitoring of vaccine safety and effectiveness .

Prevention of Dangerous Diseases : Following the current schedule helps prevent outbreaks and safeguards

public health.

High Confidence Among Peers : CDPH works with the West Coast Health Alliance and national medical groups to ensure a stable, science-based vaccination strategy.

County of San Diego news release · Aug 18, 2026

COUNTY

Ramona Salmonella Outbreak Grows

The County’s investigation of the Salmonella outbreak first linked to mayonnaise produced by a Ramona market has revealed that the product was made with raw eggs supplied by Happy Hens , a poultry farm that distributes eggs. Additional cases of the same Salmonella strain unrelated to the market are being investigated.

The outbreak now totals 21 cases, including seven hospitalizations, up from 13 cases and four hospitalizations when first reported on July 28.

The County is working closely with the California Department of Food and Agriculture and the California Department of Public Health on the outbreak. The County’s Department of Environmental Health and Quality has reached out to retail food facilities that may have received eggs from Happy Hens with reminders about proper egg storage, grading requirements and resales.

This is not related to the multi-state outbreak in the Midwest that has sickened 98

and led to a recall.

Cook eggs thoroughly. Proper cooking, until both yolk and white are firm, is essential to kill the Salmonella bacteria.

Discard suspicious eggs. Avoid using cracked or dirty eggs. Do not wash eggs that appear dirty, instead throw them out.

Practice safe handling. Always wash hands, utensils, prep surfaces, and containers with hot, soapy water after handling raw eggs to reduce the risk of cross-contamination.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture says that only eggs graded AA, A, or B may be sold for human consumption. Eggs below Grade B are prohibited due to safety and

quality concerns.

All shell eggs must be properly labeled with grade (AA, A, or B), size (medium, large, jumbo), “Keep Refrigerated” and other required information.

Eggs should be refrigerated at 45 °F or lower in people’s homes.

Anyone who experiences symptoms like diarrhea, fever, or abdominal cramps after eating undercooked eggs, should seek medical advice and report the illness to the County Department of Environmental Health and Quality at (858) 505 - 6814 or via the online form .

County of San Diego news release · Aug 17, 2026

BUSINESS

San Diego commerce & the regional economy



Illustration

BUSINESS

Member Spotlight: Red Door Escape Room & Game Show Experience

Red Door Escape Room & Game Show is a destination for one-of-a-kind group experiences that bring people together through immersive

entertainment, friendly competition, and shared problem-solving.

While best known for its award-winning escape rooms, Red Door has evolved into much more. Guests can choose from highly immersive escape room adventures or step into the live-hosted Game Show Studio, where teams compete in a fast-paced experience inspired by classic television game shows.

With locations across the United States, Red Door has

become a destination for corporate events, team-building programs, client entertainment, celebrations, schools, nonprofits, and community organizations looking for a memorable way to connect outside of their day-to-day routines.

Its San Diego location in Fashion Valley is one of the company’s top-performing locations nationwide, serving thousands of guests each year. The venue offers a unique combination of private escape room experiences

and a dedicated Game Show Studio, making it one of the most versatile group entertainment destinations in Southern California.

What sets Red Door apart is its commitment to hospitality and experience design. Every game, challenge, and event is intentionally built to encourage communication, collaboration, and engagement — whether a group is celebrating a milestone, strengthening workplace relationships, entertaining clients, or simply looking for something

different to do. The goal: create an experience worth talking about long after the event ends.

At its core, Red Door is about helping people step away from their screens, work together, and create lasting memories — providing experiences that bring people together in a meaningful and memorable way, at a time when genuine connection can be hard to find.

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Aug 17, 2026

THE NEWSLINE CARTOON

Opinion



Ready to spend, not to spray

THE NEWSLINE CARTOON

COMMENTARY

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

COMMENTARY

CalSTRS Reports 79% Funded After Strong Returns, But Analyst Questions the Measurement

Mark Moses argues that despite higher contributions and investment performance meeting targets, CalSTRS' unfunded obligation has grown from \$73.7 billion in 2013 to \$82 billion, with taxpayers ultimately at risk.

CalSTRS recently reported a 13.9 percent investment return for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2026, an improvement from 8.5 percent the prior year. The pension system called it a significant step toward full funding.

According to Mark Moses, however, a return measures the portfolio, not the obligation. In a commentary published by the California Policy Center, the senior fellow contends that investment returns reflect only the performance of the portfolio, not the size of the pension obligations that must ultimately be met.

Moses, who spent 30 years in local government finance,

writes that CalSTRS operates as a defined benefit plan in which the employer – and ultimately the taxpayer – promises a lifetime payment stream and bears whatever shortfall investments and contributions fail to cover.

He notes that contribution rates for school districts, teachers and the state were sharply increased under the 2014 CalSTRS Funding Plan. District rates rose from a long-frozen 8.25 percent of payroll to 19.1 percent, teacher contributions climbed from 8 percent to 10.25 percent, and the state's share increased from 3.041 percent to 8.328 percent.

Yet despite these higher payments and investment returns that have met or exceeded the 7 percent target over five-, 10-, 20- and 30-year periods, the gap between assets and obligations grew from \$73.7 billion in 2013 to \$82 billion.

The California Policy Center fellow attributes the worsening position to two main factors disclosed by CalSTRS itself. For eight years, contributions fell short of the level the system's own

actuary said was required merely to prevent the gap from expanding, adding roughly \$29 billion to the shortfall.

In addition, changes in the way the liability is measured have added about \$17.6 billion to the reported unfunded obligation, Moses writes. He explains that the 7 percent assumed rate of return is used both to forecast future earnings and to discount the present value of future pension payments.

Lowering the assumed return increases the calculated size of the liability. Moses cites CalSTRS' own 2017 disclosure showing that a reduction from 7.25 percent to 7 percent would have increased the unfunded gap by \$8.4 billion on the same day, with identical assets and obligations.

The funded ratio has been presented as climbing from 62.6 percent in 2017 to 79.3 percent. Moses argues that this improvement begins from an artificially low point created by the board's earlier policy changes. He writes that, measured on the assumptions later adopted, the

plan was closer to 62 percent funded in 2013 rather than the 66.5 percent figure used to design the 2014 rescue.

Moses points out that the Teachers' Retirement Board, which holds exclusive constitutional authority over assumptions, has repeatedly chosen rates its own actuary viewed as offering less than a 50 percent chance of being achieved. A 2024 review by Segal, a second actuarial firm, placed the confidence level of the current 7 percent assumption at just 53.2 percent over a 15-year horizon.

The funded ratio, he emphasizes, is not a probability of success. It simply states that, assuming the board's chosen figures hold, assets cover 79 percent of the calculated liability. When those assumptions fall short, Moses writes, CalSTRS has already signaled that contributions "would have to increase for the state, for employers and possibly for CalSTRS 2% at 62 members."

Even honest assumptions cannot eliminate the structural problem, according to Moses. In a defined benefit plan, the party setting the

estimates is not the one that pays when they prove wrong. A defined contribution plan, by contrast, ends the employer's obligation upon depositing the agreed contribution, eliminating guesses about returns, revisions to assumptions and inherited risk for future taxpayers.

Moses concludes that teachers already bear risk under the current system, as their contribution rates have risen without improved benefits and newer members may face further increases. He writes that the only way for taxpayers to win with a public employee defined benefit plan such as CalSTRS is not to play.

San Diego Newsline · Based on commentary published by the California Policy Center · Aug 14, 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

Protect Your County Benefits: Watch Out for Scams

EBT and Medi-Cal benefit identification card users should be on the lookout for new text and social media scams targeting their benefits. Scammers are trying to trick people into providing private information, including photos of EBT and/or BIC cards and full Social Security or PIN numbers.

Text messages and ads offering a "free government smartphone" may look legitimate, but they are not from the County of San Diego or Medi-Cal. The County will never send a text or advertise on social media requesting a reply with personal information. If someone contacts you requesting benefit information, it is a scam.

Never share photos of your EBT card or Medi-Cal benefit identification card

Never give out your PIN, card number or Social Security Number

Hang up immediately if a caller asks for personal

information

Delete suspicious text messages and do not respond

Do not reply to social media messages asking for benefit or personal details

If you think your benefits may have been stolen, call the County's Access Customer Service Call Center at 1-866-262-9881 Monday through Friday 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. or visit a local Family Resource Center.

Don't enter your PIN while others are watching

Never enter an EBT PIN on a downloaded smartphone app

For more information, please visit the County's EBT Fraud page .

Self Sufficiency Services supports more than 1.2 million San Diego County residents by providing access to essential public safety net programs. CalFresh , also known nationally as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) , helps low-income households buy food each month. These benefits supplement a

family's food budget, making it easier to afford healthy, nutritious options. Benefits are issued on an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card and can be used at participating grocery stores, online retailers and farmers markets. Eligibility and amounts depend on the household's size, income and expenses.

Medi-Cal is California's Medicaid program and provides free or low-cost health coverage to children and adults, including preventive care, doctor visits, hospital services, mental health treatment and prescription medications. Coverage levels vary based on income, age, disability status and other qualifying factors, ensuring families and individuals can access vital care without financial strain.

County of San Diego news release · Aug 13, 2026

COUNTY

County Invites Public to Help to Shape County's 2027 Legislative Priorities

The County of San Diego

wants to hear from you. Join a virtual community meeting to learn how the County advocates for state and federal legislation and help shape the 2027 legislative program.

The County's Economic Development and Government Affairs (EDGA) office is asking residents to weigh in on the issues that matter most. Your input helps guide the County's legislative strategy and helps ensure that the strategy reflects real community priorities.

The legislative program outlines the Board of Supervisors' policy goals and directs EDGA's year-round advocacy on state and federal bills and regulatory actions. priorities.

So far this year, the County has taken positions on 16 state and federal bills focused on key priorities:

Responding to the Tijuana River Valley Sewage Crisis

The virtual community forum is set for Tuesday, Aug. 25, from 5 to 6 p.m. on Zoom. Register and learn more at Engage San Diego County . For disability-related

modifications, language interpretation, or other accommodations, please email Legislative.Program@sdcounty.ca.gov . The County will record and post the session in full on the Engage San Diego site afterwards.

You can also submit your comments on Engage San Diego County through September 14.

Beyond its legislative work, EDGA also drives the County's economic development strategy, supports small businesses, leads to County's binational affairs efforts in the California-Baja region, manages County grant programs, and updates and implements the County's Strategic Plan and governance documents.

For details, visit the EDGA website or call 619-531-5198.

County of San Diego news release · Aug 18, 2026

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