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SDA NEWS

JANUARY 2026

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Designed by Emmett Jordan





Dear SDA Members,

Happy New Year! As we step into 2026 and into SDA's next fifty years, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to each of you for your membership, engagement, and commitment to local government. Colorado's special districts are the backbone of our communities, delivering essential services with innovation, integrity, and care. Your work defines what makes Colorado such an extraordinary place to live.

SDA exists to serve you, the Boards, managers, and professionals who dedicate yourselves every day to the public good. We are proud to be your membership organization and to see such strong participation at our Annual Conference in Keystone and at our Annual Regional Workshops each June.

Your enthusiasm and involvement continue to shape SDA's direction and strengthen our shared mission.

Looking ahead, we are excited to roll out several new and enhanced membership benefits designed to meet the needs of today's special districts. From expanded leadership and governance resources to new technology tools and training opportunities, SDA is committed to helping you lead with confidence and stay connected in an ever-changing environment.

At the state, local, and federal levels, we continue to advocate for policies that protect and strengthen special districts. Our goal is simple: to ensure your voices are heard and that you have the tools, knowledge, and support to serve your communities effectively.

We also look forward to collaborating with all of our partners in the coming year.

In addition, we are delighted to welcome Megan Wagner to SDA's Policy Team beginning January 1, 2026. Megan joins us with 17 years of experience in Colorado's policy world, where she has worked for Brandeberry McKenna Public Affairs and built a strong background in legislative research, stakeholder engagement, and state government processes.

Megan knows Colorado's policy landscape well and has gained valuable experience working with and around special districts throughout her career. Her strong analytical skills, collaborative approach, and passion for public service make her a wonderful fit for SDA and the members we serve.

In her new role, Megan will help lead our legislative analysis, support advocacy efforts at the State Capitol, and assist districts in navigating policy and regulatory issues. We are thrilled to have her on board and look forward to the valuable contributions she will bring to our organization. Please join us in welcoming Megan to SDA!

As we embark on the new year, SDA remains focused on continuity, capacity, and credibility, the hallmarks of the SDA difference. Thank you for the trust you place in us and for your ongoing commitment to serving Colorado. Together, we are building the future of local government, strong, connected, and ready for the next fifty years.

Warm regards,

Ann Terry

Ann Terry
Chief Executive Officer



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Keep These Items in Mind as the New Year Begins

There are several important statutory duties that a special district Board must take care of around the rollover of the annual calendar.

1. At the first Board meeting of each year, the Board must adopt a resolution designating the posting location for the district's 24-hour meeting notices. The location for posting the Board meeting notices should be a public place which is accessible by the public. Most districts are now posting Board meeting notices on their websites, which is probably more effective than a physical posting, but does not eliminate the need to adopt this notice. If your district is using its website as its posting location, House Bill 19-1087 requires the local government to provide the website address to the Department of Local Affairs.

A couple of additional points to be made regarding meetings:

- » Legislation was adopted in 2021 to clarify that the "location" of a meeting means the physical, telephonic, electronic, or other virtual place, or combination of such means, where a meeting can be attended. This amendment in House Bill 21-1278 states that special and regular Board meetings can be held in a physical location or by telephonic or other electronic means.
- » The meeting notice of all meetings of the Board that are held telephonically, electronically, or by other means not including physical presence must include the method or procedure, including the conference number or link, by which members of the public can attend the meeting.

2. By January 1, the district must file a current, accurate map of district boundaries (according to Division of Local Government standards) with the County Assessor, the Clerk and Recorder of each county in which the district is located, and the Division of Local Government. This map should include any inclusions or exclusions of property that affect district boundaries.

3. Between November 16 and January 15, the district must file an updated Notice to Electors (Transparency Notice). (32-1-809, C.R.S.) This is a detailed listing of vital information about the district. SDA members have the option of filing their Transparency Notice on the SDA website at www.sdaco.org.

4. The budget process, which begins with the appointment of a budget officer prior to October 15, normally ends when the adopted budget, with a budget resolution and certified mill levy, are filed with the Division of Local Government.

Editor's Note: This article was adapted from the January 2022 Ask Evan.



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Beginning of the Year Refresher on Executive Sessions

Since the use of executive sessions is somewhat technical and frequently not understood, a brief reminder for the beginning of the new year is a good idea.

The Open Meetings Law is the Colorado statutory enactment of the principle that government business is the public's business and should be conducted in full and open view of the public. The authority for special district Boards, as well as other local government entities, to consider certain issues in closed session is a tightly limited and closely guarded exception to open meetings. Its use is a right granted by the State Legislature, which is always subject to further limitations if the right is abused by local governments.

The critical steps in using an executive session are as follows:

- » The posted agenda of a meeting should include notice that an executive session will be held during the meeting and should list the subject matter, including reference to the statutory section that covers the subject matter. The description should be as complete as possible without disclosing the actual facts of the subject.
- » The executive session can only be held as part of a regular or special meeting of the Board.
- » When the item comes up in the meeting, the executive session must be called by a motion, which must be approved by a two-thirds majority. **CAUTION:** In a five-member Board, three out of five does *not* constitute 2/3. Three out of five is only 60%, while 2/3 requires at least 66%.
- » The motion must include an exact reference to the statutory section that covers the discussion. Most districts have ready access to the six statutory sections, and good practice is to read the exact words of the relevant section. **NOTE:** *The statutory sections can be supplied by the district's legal counsel as well as by reference in the SDA Board Member Manual.*

- » As the Board goes into executive session, only the Board and individuals who have specific relevance to the discussion should be in the meeting.
- » The discussion must be limited to the announced subject, and no action can be taken in the meeting. Beware of straw votes or other indicia of how the Board will act when the formal action comes up after returning to the public meeting.
- » The executive session must be electronically recorded, and the recording must be kept for 90 days during which time members of the public may make an open records request. **EXCEPTION:** If the district's counsel determines that the discussion is covered by attorney-client privilege, the attorney will so state, and the recording can be turned off during that part of the discussion.
- » If an open records request is denied, the requestor can ask that the recording be heard by a district court. The judge will review the recording in private and determine whether the Board discussed items other than what was in the announcement of the session and whether anything indicates that an action was taken, either formally or by wink-wink inference. If so, the judge can require that the recording be made public.
- » The discussion within the executive session is confidential and revealing the discussion is a serious breach of a fiduciary duty unless the reason for confidentiality has passed.

There are other provisions governing the conducting of an executive session, which legal counsel will make clear to a Board seeking an executive session. Failure to follow the rules can have consequences and should not be taken lightly. 🍷

Editor's Note: This article was adapted from the January 2022 Bonus Ask Evan.

A wide-angle photograph of the Colorado State Capitol building, featuring its iconic gold-domed tower. The building is surrounded by lush green trees and a clear blue sky with scattered white clouds. In the foreground, there are some colorful autumn leaves and a paved walkway.

2026 Legislative Preview

Perspectives from a Cloudy Crystal Ball

Global Perspectives

We begin by setting the stage for the Session that is just around the corner. The space of time between the end of a regular Legislative Session in a non-election year tends to be relatively quiet. Work at the Capitol over the summer was especially light in 2025 with fewer interim committees due to budget cuts in a tight budget year.

Also, life wouldn't be complete if there wasn't a Special Session. This year's Special Session (when do they stop being "special" and just labeled as "extra"?), which was held in late August, was called to balance the State's \$900 million budget deficit and was spiced up with another attempt to substantively address an Artificial Intelligence law passed in 2024. The drama from the Special Session lays the groundwork for more of the same drama that will continue into the 2026 Legislative Session.

The rearranging of the deck chairs also continued under the Gold Dome. This included drama of a different sort. The House Minority Leader, Rose Pugliese (R-Colorado Springs), resigned her seat after a tense exchange between her and several members of the House Democratic Caucus over her handling of the actions of Rep. Ryan Armagost (R-Berthoud), who also resigned due to inappropriate remarks about a photograph that led to public threats against Rep. Yara Zokaie (D-Fort Collins). As a result, we have two new members of the House GOP Caucus and a new Minority Leader, Jarvis Caldwell. Minority Leader Caldwell is a freshman from Colorado Springs who served on House Republican staff in prior Sessions.

The new year will also bring politics of the statewide variety into the November General Election. The race to replace Governor Jared Polis, who is term-limited in 2026, is in full-swing. While the GOP has 20+ candidates vying to win their primary, current state Senator Barb Kirkmeyer (R-Brighton) appears

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to be the leading candidate amongst the field of GOP candidates. For the Democrats, U.S. Senator Michael Bennet and Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser lead the field for the Democratic primary, with Bennet currently enjoying a lead in the polls. All other statewide offices—Secretary of State, Attorney General, and Treasurer—are up for election as well in 2026. While some polling is suggesting dissatisfaction with Democrats, Colorado is a blue state and conventional wisdom suggests it will remain so in 2026.

At this point, and this can change very quickly, we don't anticipate any property tax drama to get mixed up with the partisan political drama in 2026. Despite the budget balancing for the 2025-26 fiscal year that took place during the Special Session in August, the anticipated budget deficits that are estimated to be as high as \$850 billion for the next fiscal year will dominate the 2026 Legislative Session, though those numbers can change with the legislative revenue estimates that are revealed in the third week of December.

Let's turn our attention to potential 2026 legislation...

Outlook & Foresight

Legislative Forecast 2026

Here is our look beyond today's headlines to forecast the legislative landscape impacting special districts in the upcoming Session and beyond. The horizon is busy, with potential shifts in how districts operate, fund services, and interact with other government entities.

Here is what our policy team is predicting for the future.

Firefighter Trusts Funding

The message here is short and sweet. This is a Priority One issue for SDA in the upcoming Legislative Session. Our goal is to secure vital funding for the Heart (Cardiac), Cancer, and Behavioral Trusts in an environment that is clouded by a significant state budget shortfall. The funding for the Behavioral Trust was removed all-together in the last Legislative Session, and without a grant of \$250,000 from the Department of Public Safety, the program would likely be in a winding down stage. The Trusts are vital to the health and wellness of our firefighters across the state.

THE FORECAST: SDA, the Colorado State Fire Chiefs, and the Colorado Professional Fire Fighters will join forces to push for funding despite the fiscal climate. It is certainly an uphill battle that will take a collective push to convince the Legislature to dedicate funding for these essential Trusts.

Federal Funds and Local Tensions: Forecasting the Future of PILT Allocation

The process for distributing Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) has long been a source of discussion. Under federal law, federal payments are made to counties to offset local government property tax losses caused by non-taxable federal lands. While the formula for the total payment is clear, the allocation *within* a county remains a point of contention.

THE FORECAST: With authority from the SDA Board, we will make a dedicated push in the 2026 Session for legislation to create a known, reliable, and consistent revenue-sharing arrangement specifically between counties and fire protection districts. This joint effort with the Colorado State Fire Chiefs aims to establish clear ground rules for fire prevention, mitigation, and suppression funding, taking the guesswork out of county-level allocations.

Modernizing Transparency: A Possible Shift from Print to Digital Notices

The decline of local newspapers is accelerating, and with the loss of local newspapers, compliance headaches are growing for all districts which are required

by statute to publish public notices in a newspaper of general circulation. Counties in Colorado are also experiencing this logistical conundrum. The current environment makes statutory compliance nearly impossible in some areas. The problem isn't with special districts' willingness to comply with the statutory mandate; the problem is with the lack of newspaper outlets with which to comply. Compliance often leads to publishing in an adjacent county where the likelihood of the notice reaching the intended audience is slim at best.

THE FORECAST: The stage is set for a legislative change. SDA Policy Committee members universally supported a move to allow online publication on district websites or centralized state platforms and the SDA Board agreed. We are engaged with Colorado Counties, Inc. (CCI) to make a joint effort for the 2026 Session to leverage broad support across local government entities to finally modernize publication requirements. Opposition is likely to come from the Colorado Press Association, but the goal is not to avoid publishing with a local newspaper, the goal is to provide notice to the public of important statutory dates and times for special district activities.

Clarity on Clerks & Recorders' Fees

In 2024, the statewide Clerk and Recorder association was behind legislation that was intended to "clean up" fees charged by a Clerk and Recorder. Imagine everyone's surprise when an amendment in the bill created unintended consequences. Examples from our districts have included fees for receiving documents from a district where a fee was not previously imposed, and in some cases a requirement for in-person submissions at Clerk and Recorder offices. Once we heard of the problems created by the 2024 legislation, we opened a communications line with the Colorado County Clerks Association and quickly confirmed this was not the bill's intent.

THE FORECAST: A minor, corrective legislative fix is expected in 2026. A joint effort between SDA and the Colorado County Clerks Association will clarify the statute, ensuring appropriate filing processes and fees are maintained without creating unintended barriers and additional costs for special districts. It is our understanding that the Clerks are working on a clean-up bill to fix other similar needs for technical corrections, and this issue will fit nicely into that bill.

CORA Reforms

From the files of "didn't this already pass?" The answer is yes, and no. In the 2025 Legislative Session, the bill that SDA supported passed in both Houses with close to veto proof support. However, the Governor vetoed the bill and attempts to override the veto dwindled as the Legislative Session was drawing to a close, and tempers were elevated and patience was all but run out.

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THE FORECAST: The effort will be renewed in the 2026 Legislative Session to allow local governments more time to respond to “data mining” requests. The legislation uses the term “request is made for direct solicitation of business for pecuniary gain.” Our members and local governments support this change to allow more time but not deny such requests. The legislation would also extend the time to respond to non-data-mining requests by extending the time from three to five working days. Under the bill, if extenuating circumstances exist, the response period would be extended from seven days up to ten additional days. The new extensions of time create two classes of requesters: 1) the public, where the extension of time to produce records would be extended from three to five days, and 2) the press, which would keep the three- and seven-day time frames.

Workers' Compensation: Where Change is the Thing We Can Count On

You might recall a bill from the 2025 Legislative Session that has the potential of turning the workers' comp system upside down. We take some consolation that the bill, House Bill 25-1300 – Workers' Compensation Benefits Proof of Entitlement (Choice of Doctor), does not go into effect until January 1, 2028. On its face, the concept of choice of doctor for the injured worker appears to

be straightforward. However, the workers' compensation system has evolved over the last 30 years with minor give and takes from each side of the equation, thus maintaining a balance that both sides can live with. House Bill 25-1300 upsets the apple cart and most likely marks the end of both sides meeting and agreeing on a negotiated bill on which the claimants bar and the self-insured providers find middle ground. The Division of Workers' Compensation has been hosting several “listening sessions” over the fall to identify problem areas that are ripe for amendment in the 2026 Legislative Session.

THE FORECAST: While amendments to House Bill 25-1300 are not on the launching pad, the delayed effective date of the changes allows for two full Legislative Sessions to consider and bring changes to the provisions of House Bill 25-1300.

To add to the equation, following the legislative success of finally passing House Bill 25-1300, the claimants bar is likely to advance additional non-negotiated reforms that the workers' comp provider community will have to respond to in the legislative arena. In the absence of a process that develops a negotiated bill, we are faced with a pre-2003 system of legislation by ambush.

Long-Term Horizon: The Future of Voting Technology

The concept of using smartphones for special district elections was recently floated to a group of

election experts - again. Though from a new player in this space, this is an issue that was presented to special districts over five years ago as a test case for voting with smart phones. This was at or about the time when election results became a national talking issue. Attempts to undermine the current voting structures caused many to pump the brakes on voting by text, and the idea was placed on the back, back burner. Recently a philanthropically based non-profit organization suggested revisiting mobile voting. We had a productive meeting with the proponents that convinced them that the issue needs more study and discussion.

THE FORECAST: Rest assured, **nothing is in the works for the 2026 Legislative Session.** This is purely a long-term forecast item. Proponents will engage in further conversations and address numerous questions regarding security, access, and reliability before this concept moves anywhere near the legislative agenda.

In Closing...

This is the part where we sound like a broken record. There are no dull moments once the Legislature starts back to work on Wednesday, January 14. The initial days of the Session are spent sifting through numerous proposals that either shock our sensibilities or have zero percent chance of surviving the process. Then the real fun begins, and SDA will be there, from start to finish. 🍌



Parliamentary Procedures

—at a Glance—

As the new year begins, we thought it would be helpful to include an easy to follow guide on parliamentary procedures. The first chart lists motions and/or points in established order of precedence while the motions in the second chart have no established order.

In Established Order of Precedence						
To Do This ¹	You Say This	May You Interrupt Speaker?	Must You Be Seconded?	Is the Motion Debatable?	Is the Motion Amendable?	What Vote is Required?
Adjourn the meeting (before all business is complete)	"I move that we adjourn."	May not interrupt speaker	Must be seconded	Not debatable	Not amendable	Majority vote required
Recess the meeting	"I move that we recess until..."	May not interrupt speaker	Must be seconded	Not debatable	Amendable	Majority vote required
Complain about noise, room temperature, etc.	"Point of privilege."	May interrupt speaker	No second needed	Not debatable ²	Not amendable	No vote required ³
Suspend further consideration of something	"I move we table it."	May not interrupt speaker	Must be seconded	Not debatable	Not amendable	Majority vote required
End debate	"I move the previous question."	May not interrupt speaker	Must be seconded	Debatable	Amendable	Two-thirds vote required
Postpone consideration of something	"I move we postpone this matter until..."	May not interrupt speaker	Must be seconded	Debatable	Amendable	Two-thirds vote required
Have something studied further	"I move we refer this matter to a committee."	May not interrupt speaker	Must be seconded	Debatable	Amendable	Majority vote required
Amend a motion	"I move that this motion be amended by..."	May not interrupt speaker	Must be seconded	Debatable	Amendable	Majority vote required
Introduce business (a primary motion)	"I move that..."	May not interrupt speaker	Must be seconded	Debatable	Amendable	Majority vote required



No Established Order of Precedence						
To Do This ⁴	You Say This	May You Interrupt Speaker?	Must You Be Seconded?	Is the Motion Debatable?	Is the Motion Amendable?	What Vote is Required?
Object to procedure or to a personal affront	"Point of order."	May interrupt speaker	No second needed	Not debatable	Not amendable	No vote needed, Chair decides
Request information	"Point of information."	If urgent, may interrupt speaker	No second needed	Not debatable	Not amendable	No vote required
Ask for a vote by actual count to verify a voice count	"I call for a division of the house."	May not interrupt speaker ⁵	No second needed	Not debatable	Not amendable	No vote required unless someone objects ⁶
Object to considering some undiplomatic or improper matter	"I object to consideration of this question."	May interrupt speaker	No second needed	Not debatable	Not amendable	Two-thirds vote required
Take up a matter previously tabled	"I move we take from the table..."	May not interrupt speaker	Must be seconded	Not debatable	Not amendable	Majority required
Reconsider something already disposed of	"I move we now (or later) reconsider our action relative to..."	May interrupt speaker	Must be seconded	Debatable if original motion is debatable	Not amendable	Majority required
Consider something out of its scheduled order	"I move we suspend the rules and consider..."	May not interrupt speaker	Must be seconded	Not debatable	Not amendable	Two-thirds vote required
Vote on a ruling by the Chair	"I appeal the Chair's decision."	May interrupt speaker	Must be seconded	Debatable	Not amendable	Majority in the negative required to reverse Chair's decision

¹ These motions or points are listed in established order of precedence. When any one of them is pending, you may not introduce another that is listed below it, but you may introduce another that is listed above it.

² In this case, any resulting motion is debatable.

³ Chair decides.

⁴ These motions, points, and proposals have no established order of precedence. Any of them may be introduced at any time except when the meeting is considering one of the top three matters listed in the first chart (motion to adjourn, motion to recess, point of privilege.)

⁵ But division must be called for before another motion is started.

⁶ Then majority vote is required

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Fire Districts Use Different Strategies to Win November Elections

By Susan M. Thornton, M.S.

In November, utilizing a variety of approaches to their elections, Durango Fire Protection District, Upper Pine River Fire Protection District (in Bayfield), and South Metro Fire Rescue all won overwhelming approval from their voters for tax increases.

Durango Fire Protection District Wins a 4.45 Mill Increase

Prior to the November election this year, Durango Fire Protection District had a property tax of 8.2 mills. Today, after its win at the polls by a vote of 4,116 to 3,884, it has a property tax rate of 12.65 mills. Its annual general fund budget of \$20 million will increase to \$25 to \$26 million, according to Chief Randy Black.

The District did not have organized opposition to its tax rate proposal. Chief Randy Black says, “The only time we have lost elections (2006 and 2011) is when there was organized opposition.”

Costs Have “Gone Through the Roof”

Chief Black notes that costs for fire and EMS equipment for the full-service District have “gone through the roof.” Fire trucks, radios, cardiac monitors—“the cost of everything has gone up,” he says.

The dramatic cost increases have come at the same time as actions by the General Assembly have reduced assessment rates and “will have every fire district going to the voters in the future,” Chief Black predicts.

80 Percent of Calls are for Medical Services

The District, which serves approximately 40,000 people and covers 325 square miles, has about 6,500 calls for service each year, Chief Black says, 80 percent of them for medical services and some of them requiring a 45-minute drive to a call.

The full-service District, which had 16 fire stations prior to the election, will have 17 fire stations in the future, with five of them fully staffed to meet an area of growth in the city and county.

Upper Pine River Fire Protection District Takes a Different Direction

The Upper Pine River Fire Protection District took a different approach to the November election from Durango Fire Protection District—instead of a property tax increase, it went for a sales tax increase of 1 cent on a dollar and won by a vote of 2,247 to 1,652.

Diversifying Its Income Stream

Chief Bruce Evans says the District’s Board decided to “try to diversify its income stream,” going for a sales tax increase with



Upper Pine River Fire Protection District personnel fill sandbags.

revenue limited to salaries and benefits for its 33 full-time and six part-time employees.

With a population of 20,000 residents, the District covers 286 square miles and answers approximately 1,000 calls any given year, 70 percent of them for emergency services. In addition to full-time residents, the District grows in the summer to provide services to tourists and people with summer homes in the area.

Continued on page 16



Upper Pine River Fire Protection District personnel

Fire Occurred Just Prior to the Election

Chief Evans says the District didn't do a "hard press" to convince voters to approve the sales tax increase.

That's because just before the election, the Blue Ridge Fire occurred. The fire spread very quickly to 10 acres in the Forest Lakes subdivision, which accounted for 23 percent of Upper Pine's assessed valuation at the time.

The District hit the fire "hard and fast," Chief Evans says, calling local firefighters back to work, and bringing in helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft, and Forest Service crews. A lot of people were evacuated, but no homes were destroyed, he states.

A Record-Time Rescue

Chief Evans tells the story of a man who was packing his possessions to evacuate during the fire when he began having shortness of breath. "He had had a previous heart attack, so he knew what the symptoms meant and called 911," Chief Evans says. District responders were able to reach the man and take him to the catheterization laboratory at Mercy Hospital, reaching him and getting him down winding mountain roads. From the time Upper

Pine paramedics made contact with the man to the time they brought him to the cardiac catheterization lab was 68 minutes (the national standard for a cardiac event is 90 minutes, Chief Evans says).

Danger from Flooding

In addition, in October just before the election, there was significant flooding in the north end of the District in Vallecito Creek and two other tributaries.

Chief Evans says his phone alerted him at 5:30 a.m. one morning that the creek was rising dramatically, and the District was able to set up pre-evacuations to keep people safe.

Before the night was over, a levy on the creek had broken through in multiple places. The District made 12 high-water rescues on Saturday, four bridges were threatened, and firefighters filled more than 2,000 sandbags to safeguard the Grimes Creek bridge leading to a fire station.

Ultimately, 390 homes were evacuated and 90 sustained damage. Yet, there were no fatalities despite the area experiencing more than nine inches of rain in three days.

Chief Evans says he did not feel that it was fair to go out to

voters and urge them to pass a tax increase when they had just lost their homes. "It's all about public trust," he says.

"We try to do a good job for the taxpayers," Chief Evans says, "making sure they get good value for their taxes."

A Focus on Solving People's Problems

People in the District "understand that public services are based in the community," he says. "Call-back firefighters live in the community. Firefighters' children are in the schools. The parents are in Rotary or Kiwanis clubs. Voters understand that we're a fire department, but we don't just put out fires. We focus on solving people's problems."

It's All About Public Trust

Chief Evans says winning an election is all about public trust. He notes that he grew up in Des Moines, Iowa with parents who were volunteer firefighters and emergency medical services workers, and who instilled in him a strong sense of community.

It doesn't work to pass tax increases by saying, "We need a tax increase to save babies," he states. Instead, districts should be honest



Durango Fire Protection District firefighters work a 2025 wildfire.



South Metro Fire Rescue serves a diverse community. The Dive Team (above left) responded to a search and rescue call at Chatfield Reservoir in July of 2025. In March of 2025 their Tower 35 unit battled a commercial vehicle fire that threatened structures and in August the Aircraft rescue and Firefighting team responded to a plane crash at Centennial Airport.

and let the public know if they make errors and tell people what they will do better in the future.

Districts should also be specific about what they will do with increased tax dollars, he says. "Be specific!" he urges.

South Metro Fire Rescue Wins a Three-Mill Increase

South Metro Fire Rescue, which notes that it has had the lowest comparable mill levy for fire and emergency service providers in the Denver metro area, won an increase of three mills by a vote of 102,450 to 80,149.

The District covers 287 square miles, serving 12 municipalities and

the counties of Arapahoe, Douglas, and Jefferson as well as the busy Centennial Airport, Lockheed Martin, Highlands Ranch, and The Pinery.

It staffs 30 stations with 800 personnel and had 51,705 calls for service in 2024, up from 41,546 in 2019. Of the calls, 647 were for fire, while 33,565 were for emergency medical assistance. The District is large and growing; its population of 571,500 is expected to increase to 595,000 by 2029, with a resulting increase in the number of calls.

Mike Dell'Orfano, Chief Government Affairs Officer for the District, says that without the property tax increase, the District projected a \$16 million shortfall

beginning in 2026, with an additional annual average of \$34 million needed to address rising costs, demands for services, and future needs.

A Dramatic Increase in Costs

Costs, he noted, have been rising dramatically. For example, a heat- and impact-resistant firefighter's helmet that cost \$299 in 2019 costs \$425 today. A bunker coat that was \$1,757 is now \$2,350, and a 100-foot hose that was \$658 six years ago now costs \$927. Purchasing a new fire engine has gone up 79% in six years, from \$725,000 in 2019 to \$1.3 million today.

Dell'Orfano says the District's

Continued on page 18



Durango Fire Protection District personnel on scene at the Ore House fire.



In 2025, South Metro Fire Rescue participated in the 2025 Tech Rescue Academy training with Castle Rock Fire and West Metro Fire Rescue.

Board “did their homework” and spent intensive hours studying whether services could be cut, or whether voters should be asked for a property or sales tax increase. It interviewed 16 stakeholders from 12 organizations and contacted more than 4,000 voters in two surveys. Of the voters, 73 percent were familiar with the District’s services and 84 percent approved of those services.

The District also launched an interactive educational website and delivered more than 50 presentations to a variety of stakeholders.

Values Unique to South Metro’s Core

In its outreach to voters, the District emphasized its goal of maintaining sufficient response times to calls; adequate fire and medical staffing for effective responses; wild-fire preparation and response; and health programs to prevent and treat cardiac, cancer, and injuries in first responders.

“These and other critical aspects

of our services are the core philosophies that drive South Metro,” Dell’Orfano says. “The Board looked at why the District offers these services and why we have invested in firefighters’ health and wellness for so many years. It asked, ‘Why are these services important? What if we couldn’t provide them?’”

Soul-Searching by the Board

“The Board did a lot of soul-searching,” Dell’Orfano says, before deciding to go to a vote for a property tax increase.

The three-mill property tax increase, which had no organized opposition in the election, will cost homeowners with a \$750,000 home an additional \$11.72 per month, Dell’Orfano says. But with that increased funding, the District will be able to provide full services —emergency and fire response, emergency medical transportation, community risk-reduction, maintenance

of facilities, and protection of its employees’ health.

High Praise for SDA

Durango’s Chief Black has high praise for SDA, which he says has been “a big supporter” of fire districts, helping them with lobbying, data points, and information about legislative changes. “SDA also helps us navigate those legislative changes,” he says, “and we are very appreciative for that.”

Dell’Orfano says, “We’ve enjoyed our partnership with SDA for decades, especially now as we work together to provide critical input during Legislative Sessions. SDA has great leaders who work hard to represent their members and the industry.”

Upper Pine River’s Chief Evans joins the praise for SDA as well.

SDA “is always helpful,” Chief Evans says, providing guidelines for legislation and urging transparency with budgets. And, he adds, “The conferences are great!” 🍌

There's an Easy Way to Receive a **25% Discount** on Your **SDA Membership Renewal!**

All you have to do is renew by March 1!

If you're a district and you renew your SDA membership by March 1 (and pay by July 1), you will receive a 25% discount! It's that simple!

If you haven't renewed yet, now's the perfect time! Plus, the process is quick and easy. Simply go online to the SDA website at www.sdaco.org (if you're a district, remember to have your 2026 budget information handy as you go through the process).

Plus, don't forget that your SDA membership comes with an added benefit: access to the

National Special Districts Association (NSDA). This national membership provides additional resources, support, and networking opportunities at a national level. NSDA also has grant funding options (please refer to <https://www.nationalspecialdistricts.org> for more information).

If you have any questions or need any assistance, please feel free to contact Karla Boughey, Membership Services Coordinator, at 303-863-1733.

Don't delay; go online and renew today! 🍂

Would You Like to Be a Speaker or Exhibitor at the 2026 SDA Annual Conference?

If you answered "yes," then make sure to watch your emails and the SDA website at www.sdaco.org in January and February! That's when our Call for Speakers and exhibitor space sign-up will open!

We will be announcing specific dates soon so keep your eyes open for all the details to come (especially for the exhibitor space as it sells out quickly!). And in the meantime, everyone can mark their calendars to join us back up in Keystone, September 15-17! 🍂



2026 SDA Annual Conference
September 15-17
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Making the Most of Your CSD Pool Membership With...

Vector Solutions for Fire and EMS

Guest article by the Colorado Special Districts Property and Liability Pool

The Colorado Special Districts Property and Liability Pool (CSD Pool) remains committed to our more than 2,500 public entities as *Your Risk Management Partner*. Each month, we are focusing on a different program or service we offer our membership, either at no cost or at a discounted rate. This month, we're highlighting Vector Solutions for Fire and EMS, a nationally recognized industry leader in first responder training.

Property and Liability members receive a 50% discount and Workers' Compensation members receive a 25% discount on Vector Solutions for Fire and EMS training services. Additionally, the cost is eligible for our Safety and Loss Prevention Grant program, which reimburses districts up to 50% on safety and loss prevention purchases—up to a total of 75% savings when discounts are combined.

With Vector Solutions for Fire and EMS, you'll receive:

- » 600+ NFPA-certified and EMS CEU courses
- » District-specific branded online training center

- » Access to training and technical assistance anytime, anywhere
- » Opportunities to connect with other fire agencies locally and nationally

Vector Solutions for Fire and EMS also allows you to track job performance requirements by position, manage records, and is compatible with Vector Solutions Check It and the CSD Pool's Training Credit Program.

Please visit csdpool.org/vector-solutions-for-fire-ems and csdpool.org/safety-grants to learn more about these generous discounts.

As *Your Risk Management Partner*, we remain committed to providing specialized coverages tailored for public entities, exemplary claims support, and safety and loss prevention services to ensure everyone within the organization – from Board members to supervisors and staff – has the tools they need to succeed. If you have any questions about the resources mentioned here, please visit csdpool.org or email us at info@csdpool.com.



Join Us on January 20 for Our First SDA Legislative Briefing of 2026!

Are you looking for an easy and convenient way to stay up to date on the latest legislative issues for special districts? Then make sure to mark your calendars to join us for the **2026 SDA Legislative Briefings!**

The 2026 Legislative Session officially convenes on Wednesday, January 14, and we already have our full set of Legislative Briefings scheduled and ready to go.

The first briefing will take place on Tuesday, January 20 at 12:00 pm. These briefings will take place via Zoom, and all SDA members are welcome to listen in as we review the current hot topics and issues we have been working on at the Capitol.

Following the first briefing, the schedule of briefings for the entire Session is as follows:

- > Tuesday, February 10 at 12:00 pm
- > Tuesday, February 24 at 12:00 pm
- > Tuesday, March 10 at 12:00 pm
- > Tuesday, March 24 at 12:00 pm
- > Tuesday, April 7 at 12:00 pm
- > Tuesday, April 21 at 12:00 pm
- > Tuesday, May 5 at 12:00 pm

Please visit the SDA website at www.sdaco.org for more information and for the Zoom links to register for each meeting.

Whether you would like to listen every time or just once in a while, this is an easy way to stay informed on all the current issues (please note that we will not be recording the briefings).

In addition, you will also be able to access a wide variety of legislative information on the SDA website. Here you will find the full Legislative Briefing schedule, the bill tracker, and any other pertinent legislative update or reports, all in one easy-to-find place. This added convenience is a quick and helpful way for members to stay up to date with the Legislative Session.

As always, please contact the SDA office at 303-863-1733 and ask for Ann Terry or Michael Valdez if you have any questions.



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