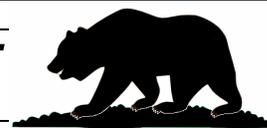




# SPECIAL DISTRICT FACT SHEET

-- Senate Local Government Committee, August 2009 --

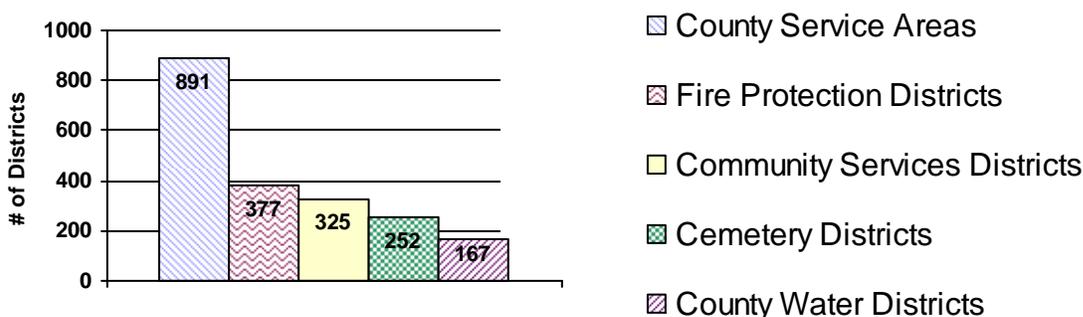


California has nearly 3,400 special districts. Special districts are limited purpose local governments – separate from cities and counties. Within their boundaries, special districts provide focused public services such as fire protection, sewers, water supply, electricity, parks, recreation, sanitation, cemeteries, and libraries.

**Service Area Boundaries** - Districts’ service areas range from a few acres to thousands of square miles crossing city and county lines. The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California serves over **18 million people** in more than **5,200 square miles** in six counties. By contrast, the Arden Manor Recreation and Park District in Sacramento County covers only **21 acres**; Stallion Springs Community Services District in Kern County serves about **2,500 people**.

**Types of Special Districts** - There are about **50 major types of special districts** (and many subcategories) ranging from airport to cemetery to water conservation districts. **All types of districts operate under either a *principal act* or a *special act*.**

A *principal act* is a generic state law that applies statewide to all special districts of that type. There are about 60 principal acts. This chart shows the five most common principal act districts:



A *special act* is a law that the Legislature tailored to the unique needs of a specific area. There are about 120 special act districts. Examples are: Kern County Water Agency, Fairfield-Suisun Sewer District, and Humboldt Bay Harbor, Recreation, and Conservation District.

## Special District Fact Sheet Continued

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**Understanding Special Districts** - One way to understand special districts is to look at their *activities, funding, and governance*:

### Activities

Nearly 85% of California's special districts are *single function* districts, which provide only one service such as fire protection, mosquito abatement, or waste disposal. The remaining districts are *multi-function* districts providing two or more services. For example, several *municipal utility districts* provide fire protection and park services in addition to utility services. *Fire protection districts* often provide ambulance services too. *County Service Areas (CSAs)* can provide any service that a county can provide. **A district's name does not always indicate which services it provides or is authorized to provide.**

### Funding

Special districts generate revenue from several sources including property taxes, special assessments, and fees.

- **Enterprise districts run much like business enterprises** and provide specific benefits to their customers. These districts are **primarily funded by the fees that customers pay for services**. About 27% of special districts are enterprise districts and include airport, harbor, hospital, transit, waste disposal, and utility districts. In 2006-07, enterprise districts generated about \$23.9 billion in revenues.
- **Non-enterprise districts deliver services that provide general benefits to entire communities**. These services, such as fire protection, flood control, cemeteries, and road maintenance, do not lend themselves to fees. **Non-enterprise districts rely primarily on property taxes for their revenues**. In 2006-07, non-enterprise districts generated about \$13.6 billion in revenues.

### Governance

There are two forms of special district governance:

- About 2/3 of special districts are *independent districts* with independently elected boards or appointed boards whose directors serve for fixed terms. Most have five-member boards but they vary with the size and nature of the district. Cemetery, Fire Protection, and Community Services Districts are mostly *independent districts*.
- The other 1/3 of special districts are *dependent districts* governed by either a city council or county board of supervisors. County Service Areas are *dependent districts*.