

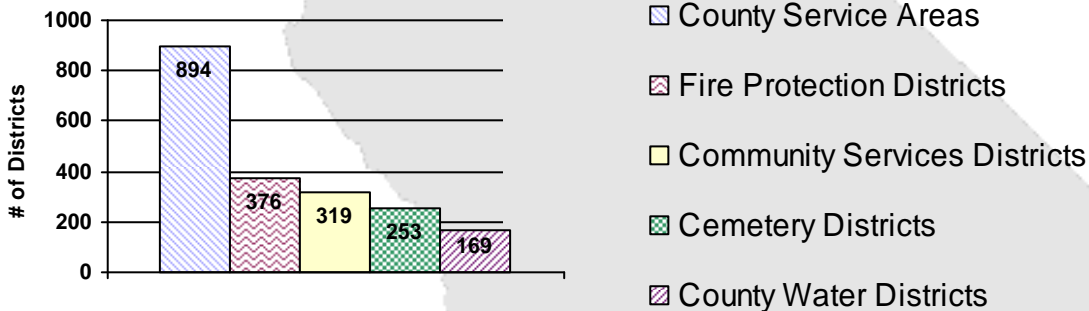
SPECIAL DISTRICT FACT SHEET

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 **16 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. The chart below shows some of the 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.

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

Special District Fact Sheet Continued

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 through 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 2003-04, enterprise districts generated about \$18.3 billion in revenues.
- **Non-enterprise districts deliver services that provide a general benefit 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 2003-04, non-enterprise districts generated about \$10.5 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 5-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.**