

NEWS

From the County of San Bernardino
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 3, 2008

For more information, contact
Tom Sutton, Director, Special Districts
(909) 387-5967

County helps families by holding the line on rate increases

In an effort to assist families as they cope with a national economic crisis, the county today announced plans to scale-back proposed rate increases for vital services provided through the Special Districts Department.

Under normal circumstances, rate adjustments for various Special Districts services, such as water and sewer services in the unincorporated areas, would have increased by as much as 10 percent in some districts effective July 1 to support facility plant expansion projects, maintenance and the rising cost of utilities and fuel.

However, in consideration of families already facing rising costs for fuel and other products in the face of declining property values and employment prospects, the Special Districts Department will propose to raise rates by no more than 3 percent in most of the districts it oversees to cover the cost of inflation. Rates will increase only to the degree necessary to maintain current levels of service and the fiscal stability of each respective district.

In order to achieve the lower increases, the county will defer capital improvements to future years, reduce the amount of money set aside to fund future capital improvements, and cut back on other operational expenses where possible. County officials cautioned, however, that while this approach is a manageable one for the coming fiscal year, future rate increases above the inflationary minimum may be necessary to support required capital and operational costs in the future.

"Difficult economic times require us to do everything we can to hold the line on rate increases to our customers," said Tom Sutton, Special Districts Department Director. "We believe we were successful in being able to fund the inflationary increases facing our districts with this minimum rate increase, and not significantly disrupt our financial planning for the future capital projects we know will be necessary."

The San Bernardino County Special Districts Department directs the operational functions, construction and capital improvements of nine water districts and seven sanitation districts. The department also administers cemetery, cable, recreation & parks, roads, and street lighting districts.