

ABOUT SAFE-D

SAFE-D is the only association dedicated to meeting the needs of Texas emergency services districts. Through SAFE-D, member districts work smarter and work better to provide fire protection and emergency medical services to the people they serve.

State Association of Fire and Emergency Districts

PO Box 676
Pflugerville, TX 78691
512-251-8101 • (f) 512-251-8152
safed@texas.net
www.safe-d.org

President: Scott Morgan

Harris County ESD No. 29

Vice President: James Kelly

Montgomery County ESD No. 8

Secretary: Liz Cargile

Medina County ESD No. 5

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Don Wagner, Comal County ESD No. 3

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Emergency Services Districts

Questions and Answers



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Prepared by the
State Association of
Fire and Emergency
Districts

Q What is an emergency services district?

A An emergency services district is a grassroots governmental entity that provides fire protection or emergency medical response (or a combination of the two) to Texans. Many ESDs started as rural fire prevention districts. In 2003, the Texas Legislature declared ESDs the preferred method for delivering fire protection and emergency medical response and converted all remaining rural fire prevention districts to ESDs.

Q Where does an ESD get its money?

A Short answer: Not from the State or County. (Although some counties do choose to supplement an ESD with minor grants.) As a political subdivision of the state, an ESD can levy a property tax. Under the Texas Constitution, an ESD's property tax is capped at no more than 10 cents per \$100 of assessed value. In most ESDs taxing at the ceiling, a home valued at \$150,000 pays \$150 a year – \$12.50 a month (about three Happy Meals) – for fire protection that often meets or exceeds the standards of the nearest municipality. By contrast, the property tax effort to support municipal fire departments may be twice as high as the ceiling that ESDs hit. Or higher. Under that low ceiling, local communities decide on how much they are willing to spend for fire protection or EMS. With voter approval, ESDs may also levy a sales tax of up to 2 percent as local conditions permit.

Q How do ESDs help county governments?

A ESDs free county governments from the chore of running emergency services and paying for them with county tax dollars. With local districts, residents in one part of the county can choose to fund an ESD at one rate, while residents in another area can pay more or less, depending on their needs.

Q How do ESDs interact with county government?

A Although a separate entity from an ESD, the County government plays an important role in an ESD's operation.

CREATION: Residents of an area may petition for an election to create an ESD. The County judge receives the petition for creation of an emergency services district, and the county commissioners court holds a hearing on the matter. If the commissioners court finds the district is "feasible and will promote the public safety, welfare, health and convenience" of residents of the proposed district, it will grant the petition for an election.

APPOINTMENT: Once an ESD is approved, the County Commissioners Court appoints the five members of the Board of Commissioners of an emergency services district to serve staggered two-year terms. (In ESDs that cover territory in more than one county and in Harris, Smith and

Orange counties, commissioners are elected.) Like county officials, ESD commissioners are required to receive six hours of training, certified by an institution of higher learning, every two years after appointment or election. If an appointed ESD commissioner fails to get the required training, the county commissioners court may remove the ESD commissioner.

REPORTS: An ESD board of commissioners is required to submit several reports to the county government. A written report is required no later than Feb. 1 to the County commissioners court "regarding the district's administration for the preceding calendar year and the district's financial condition." A district located in only one county must prepare and file an audit of the district's fiscal accounts and records by June 1 each year. (Smaller districts may not be required to prepare a full audit.) Failure to file an audit by Sept. 1 automatically removes the president and treasurer of an ESD board.

Q What does SAFE-D do?

A SAFE-D has been training ESD commissioners to act professionally since 2001. SAFE-D's regular training helps those who help others.

Visit www.safe-d.org to find out more about SAFE-D, training opportunities and how to become a member.