

News & Risk Management Review

SUMMER 2025

S|D|A|O

SPECIAL DISTRICTS
ASSOCIATION OF OREGON

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SDAO Board of Directors

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Ben Stange, Polk County Fire District #1

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Emily Robertson, Urban Flood Safety and Water Quality District

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Michele Bradley

Jennifer Holland

Paula Miranda

Meg Spencer

Scott Stanton

Brent Stevenson

Next Board of Directors Meeting

September 11th | 10am | Salem, OR

Executive Director

Frank Stratton

Services

Awards, Education and Training, Internship Grant, Legislative, Research and Technical Assistance, Scholarship and Grant Fund, Consulting Services, and SDAO Advisory Services, LLC

Contact

Main Office

PO Box 12613 | Salem OR 97309-0613

Toll-Free: 800-285-5461

Phone: 503-371-8667

Email: sdao@sdao.com | Web: www.sdao.com

Claims Office

PO Box 23879 | Tigard OR 97281-3879

Toll-Free: 800-305-1736

Phone: 503-670-7066

LEGISLATIVE VICTORY

Recreational Immunity Passes

BY FRANK STRATTON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



We are thrilled to announce a major legislative win for Oregon's special districts and local governments—Senate Bill 179 (SB179) has officially passed both the House and Senate floors and has been signed into law by the Governor!

What is SB179?

SB179 makes permanent the temporary changes enacted by Chapter 64, Oregon Laws 2024, which expanded landowner immunity protections. Specifically, the bill ensures that landowners—including local governments and special districts—are shielded from liability

for injuries sustained by visitors on their land. This clarification and extension of immunity is a crucial step in reducing legal exposure and encouraging continued public access to lands managed by local entities.

Why It Matters

This legislation is a significant win for all local governments across Oregon. By solidifying these protections, SB179 helps preserve public access to recreational lands while minimizing the legal risks for landowners who generously open their properties to the public.

A Collective Effort

This milestone wouldn't have been possible without the hard work of our SDAO government affairs team, our partners at the Oregon Recreation and Park Association, and the passionate support and advocacy from our members. Your calls, emails, and testimonies made a real impact. Thank you to everyone who took the time to reach out to their legislators—your voices were heard, and your efforts truly made a difference. We couldn't have done it without you!

CELEBRATING A DECADE OF DEDICATED SERVICE: SDAO ADVISORY SERVICES TURNS 10

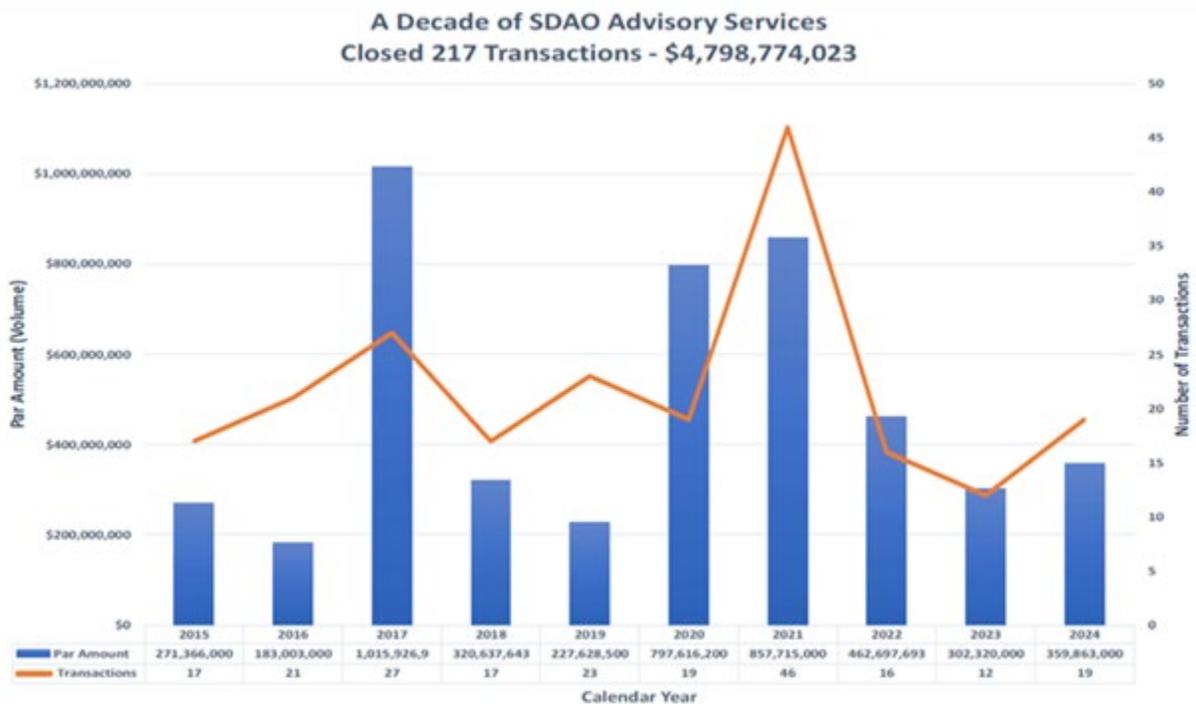
As SDAO Advisory Services (SDAOAS) approaches its 10-year anniversary on July 1, 2025, we reflect with pride on a decade of unwavering commitment to Oregon’s special districts. Launched in 2015, SDAOAS entered a competitive landscape with approximately 11 firms offering municipal advisory services across the state. Today, that number has dwindled to just three or four consistent providers—of which SDAOAS is the only one headquartered in Oregon. This shift underscores the resilience and relevance of SDAOAS in a challenging and evolving market.

The decline in advisory firms over the past decade is largely due to reduced debt issuance by local governments, industry consolidation, and shifting career paths. In contrast, SDAOAS has not only endured but thrived. Our growth is a testament to our mission: to provide conflict-free, expert financial guidance tailored to the unique needs of Oregon’s special districts. We’ve remained steadfast in our commitment to transparency, innovation, and member-first service.

Among our most notable achievements is the establishment of a funding program with Alpha Ledger, leveraging blockchain technology to modernize municipal finance. To date, over \$310 million in financings have been completed on this platform. We also played a pivotal role in launching the SDIS Member Loan Program and were among the first in the nation to facilitate a municipal loan using blockchain as a funding vehicle—demonstrating our leadership in financial innovation.

Our advisory services have directly benefited Oregon taxpayers and ratepayers, helping local governments close and fund refinancing transactions that have saved more than \$250 million. These efforts have propelled SDAOAS to the top of the state’s municipal advisory rankings, capturing nearly 34% of the market share and earning the distinction of being Oregon’s leading municipal advisory firm by transaction volume.

As we look ahead to the next decade, SDAO Advisory Services remains steadfast in its commitment to empowering Oregon’s special districts. We thank our members for their trust and partnership over the past 10 years and look forward to continuing to serve you. For more information, visit sdao.com/sdao-advisory-services.





SDAO Special Districts Association of Oregon



MEMBER SCHOLARSHIP

GOLF



TOURNAMENT

FRIDAY, 09.12.25



CHEHALEM GLENN GOLF COURSE | NEWBERG, OREGON

REGISTER ONLINE: <https://cvent.me/EvWIKP>





GET READY FOR A FANTASTIC DAY ON THE FAIRWAY AT CHEHALEM GLENN

Mark your calendar for an unforgettable afternoon of golf at the stunning Chehalem Glenn Golf Course in Newberg! Whether you're a seasoned golfer or just picking up a club for the first time, this event is all about fun, connection, community, and raising funds to support the education of SDAO members.

This annual favorite brings us together to raise funds for the SDAO Scholarship and Grant Fund, helping our members access valuable education and training. Every dollar raised goes directly back to our members, investing in their growth and success.

WHY YOU SHOULD JOIN US:

- **Give Back to Education** - All proceeds from the tournament go straight to the SDAO Scholarship and Grant Fund. Thanks to your support, we've already contributed over \$30,000 toward educational opportunities for our members!
- **A Laid-Back, Enjoyable Atmosphere** - No pressure here—just a great time on the green with fellow golf lovers of all skill levels.
- **Build Your Network** - Meet and mingle with other special district professionals, SDAO staff, and generous sponsors in a relaxed setting.

EVENT DETAILS

Friday, September 12th at Chehalem Glenn Golf Course in Newberg

8am – Registration Opens

9am – Shotgun Start

1:30pm – Lunch and Awards Ceremony

\$45 per player – includes 18 holes of golf, snacks, shared use of cart, and a buffet lunch

Maximum of four golfers per district.

Please Note: Breakfast is not included.

Learn more and register: <https://cvent.me/EvWIKP>

**OREGON VOTERS BACK
MAJORITY OF LOCAL
MEASURES IN MAY
SPECIAL ELECTION**

**BY HASINA WITTENBERG,
GOVERNMENT RELATIONS STRATEGIES INC.**

In Oregon's May special district election, voters showed strong support for local investments in public services, approving a majority of the 49 tax, levy, and bond measures on the ballot. As of Thursday, May 22, 34 measures had passed, reflecting a 69.4% approval rate. Nearly 600,000 ballots were counted, representing just over 20% of Oregon's 3 million registered voters—a modest increase from 2019's turnout but still trailing 2021 and 2023 levels.

STRONG SUPPORT FOR FIRE AND SCHOOL FUNDING

Voters overwhelmingly backed measures to fund fire protection and education. All five fire-related measures passed, including levies and bonds for equipment, operations, and new facilities in communities like Albany, Molalla, and Hoodland. School districts also saw success, with nearly 86% of education-related measures approved. Portland Public Schools, Lincoln County, and several rural districts secured funding for safety upgrades, repairs, and modernization.

MIXED RESULTS FOR POLICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

While emergency services and mixed public safety proposals fared well (78% approval), police-specific measures were more divisive. Only half of the eight police-related proposals passed. Voters in Sweet Home, King City, and Columbia County approved funding renewals, but new facility bonds in Forest Grove, Dallas, and Umatilla were rejected.

PARKS, LIBRARIES, AND TRANSPORTATION SEE MODERATE SUCCESS

Measures supporting parks and recreation passed at a 66.7% rate, including Salem's operating levy and the formation of a new park district in Midland. Library and transportation proposals also saw two-thirds approval, though a library bond in Jefferson County narrowly failed.

NOTABLE FAILURES AND CLOSE CALLS

Some measures fell short, including a proposed lodging tax increase in Tillamook County that failed by just 20 votes—well within the recount margin. Utility-related proposals struggled, with the sole measure in that category failing. Other rejected measures included a sewer rate increase in North Bend and a fuel tax in Hubbard.

APPROVAL RATES BY CATEGORY

- Fire & Rescue: 100% (5/5)
- Schools: 85.7% (6/7)
- EMS/Mixed Public Safety: 77.8% (7/9)
- Parks & Recreation: 66.7% (4/6)
- Police: 50% (4/8)
- Libraries & Transportation: 66.7% (2/3 each)
- Utilities: 0% (0/1)
- Miscellaneous: 71.4% (5/7)

A SNAPSHOT OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

This election highlights Oregon voters' continued willingness to invest in essential services, particularly fire protection and education. While turnout remains below peak years, the results reflect a community-driven approach to local governance and infrastructure



EVER FEEL LIKE YOUR HANDBOOK IS MORE MYSTERY NOVEL THAN USER GUIDE?

A clear, comprehensive employee handbook establishes consistent policies, communicates expectations, and keeps you on the right side of the law. SDAO Consulting Services now offers a structured approach to developing or overhauling your handbook, keeping you in the driver's seat while providing expert guidance every step of the way.

We'll help you create a clear, easy-to-follow handbook with a ready-to-use template and best-practice frameworks you can tailor to your district's atmosphere, plus ongoing support. Have questions? We've got answers from kickoff through final review (and even a brief annual tune-up).

Add employee handbook development to your annual plan. Ready to get started? Shoot us an email at ***consultingservices@sdao.com*** or call ***800-305-1736 ext. 251!***

Have a service in mind that we don't yet offer? Shoot us an email at ***consultingservices@sdao.com***, chances are we can help. Or tell us what new services you'd like to see. Our goal is always to be of service to our special district members!

We are looking forward to hearing from you.

Please visit ***<https://www.sdao.com/consulting-services-program>*** to learn more about the other services we provide.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BOARD TRAINING

WHY INVEST IN BOARD TRAINING?

Well-trained board members are your district's first line of defense, against confusion, conflict, and compliance hiccups. When directors clearly understand their roles, responsibilities, and the legal framework they operate in, everyone wins.

KEY BENEFITS:

- **Clear Roles & Expectations:** Training eliminates guesswork about what board members can and cannot do.
- **Stronger Governance:** Well-informed directors make better policy decisions and hold each other accountable.
- **Legal Compliance & Risk Reduction:** Knowing the statutes (like public meetings law) and ethics rules prevent costly missteps.
- **Effective Strategic Oversight:** Trained boards ask the right questions, set realistic goals, and monitor progress.
- **Improved Team Dynamics:** Shared training experiences build trust and foster constructive collaboration.

Investing a few hours in board training pays dividends in smoother meetings, stronger community trust, and more effective leadership. It's more than a checkbox; it's your roadmap to a high-functioning board!

Don't miss out on this year's SDAO Board of Directors and Management Staff Training Series!

DATES AND LOCATIONS

August 5 – Pendleton

August 6 – Hood River

August 20 – Klamath Falls

August 26 – Redmond

September 16 – Eugene

September 23 – Astoria

September 24 – Salem

TIME: 9AM-4PM

COST: \$85 for attendees associated with an SDAO member district or SDIS agent
\$185 for non-members

REGISTRATION: <https://cvent.me/lyE17g>



Save the Date 2026 SDAO ANNUAL CONFERENCE

SEASIDE, OREGON FEBRUARY 5–8, 2026

Join us on the beautiful Oregon coast for the 2026 SDAO Annual Conference! This premier event brings together leaders, innovators, and professionals from across the state for three days of networking and education. Whether you're a seasoned attendee or a first-timer, you won't want to miss the opportunity to connect, learn, and grow with your peers in Seaside.

Stay tuned for registration details coming in early December!

Congratulations

TO OUR RECENT ACADEMY CERTIFICATE RECIPIENTS!

Board Leadership Academy

BRANDON SLYTER

CHEHALEM PARK & RECREATION DISTRICT



Fire District Directors Academy

CHERYL AZEVEDO-JOHNSON

ILLINOIS VALLEY FIRE DISTRICT



MINIMUM WAGE INCREASE: JULY 1, 2025

Effective July 1, 2025, minimum wage in Oregon will increase according to the list below.

- Standard: \$15.05/hour
- Portland Metro: \$15.95/hour
- Nonurban Counties: \$13.70/hour

Download required worksite posters from the BOLI website at:

<https://www.oregon.gov/boli/employers/Pages/required-worksite-postings.aspx>

ANNUAL BUDGET + CONTACT INFORMATION UPDATE

Each year, we request updated budget and contact information from our members. This ensures accurate records and helps us calculate your membership dues.

In May, we emailed the forms to district key contacts with an email address on file. Physical copies were mailed to those without an email address.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Submitting your budget information is required to maintain your SDAO membership and insurance coverage through Special Districts Insurance Services.

HOW TO COMPLETE THE FORMS

- Use your district's 2025–26 LB-1 form as a reference.
- If your district does not file an LB-1, refer to your budget documents.
- If no formal budget exists, provide a list of applicable expenditures.
- Include supporting documentation (LB-1, budget, or expenditure list).
- Note: Property tax forms like the LB-50 are not accepted.
- Review the district roster we sent and notify us of any changes.

HOW TO SUBMIT

Send your completed form and supporting documents via:

MAIL

PO Box 12613
Salem, OR 97309

EMAIL

memberservices@sdao.com

FAX

503-371-4781

QUESTIONS?

We're here to help! Contact us at [**memberservices@sdao.com**](mailto:memberservices@sdao.com).

2026 SDAO AWARDS PROGRAM

Help us celebrate the ingenuity, creativity, and diversity of our members by nominating an individual or special district for the SDAO Awards Program! This program recognizes the outstanding accomplishments of member districts as well as district board members, managers, employees, and volunteers.

OUTSTANDING SPECIAL DISTRICT PROGRAM (DISTRICT)

This award category recognizes innovative projects and programs, outstanding safety, public information, public involvement in a district decision making process, and outstanding achievement. Three subcategories have been established for this award:

- Districts with 5 or fewer employees
- Districts with 6 to 25 employees
- Districts with 26 or more employees

OUTSTANDING SPECIAL DISTRICT SERVICE (INDIVIDUAL)

This award category recognizes individuals who have contributed substantially to the improvement and successful operation of their special district. Four subcategories have been established for this award:

- Board Member
- Manager (Nomination must be submitted by the district's board of directors.)
- Employee (Nomination must be submitted by the district's manager.)
- Volunteer

SDAO Board of Directors and SDIS Board of Trustees members are ineligible to be nominated for this award. Winners will be recognized at the **2026 SDAO Annual Conference in Seaside, Oregon.**

The deadline to submit a nomination is October 3rd.

To learn more visit www.sdao.com/sdao-awards-program.



*Providing reasonable, stable rates, and
broad coverage to Oregon's public entities*

SDIS Board of Trustees

- Chair:** Andrea Klaas, Port of The Dalles
- Vice Chair:** Darren Bucich, McKenzie Fire & Rescue
- Secretary:** David Lindelien, Lane Transit District
- Treasurer:** Stacy Maxwell, Jackson County Fire District 3
- Trustees:** Pete Boone, Tualatin Valley Water District
Nicole Dalke, Springfield Utility Board
Mark Hokkanen, Tualatin Hills Park and Recreation District
- Emeritus:** Ted Kunze, Molalla RFPD #73

Next SDIS Board of Trustees Meeting

September 10th | *Tigard, OR* | 10AM

UPCOMING TRAININGS

RISK MANAGEMENT REGIONAL TRAINING SERIES

The Risk Management Department is excited to offer a series of regional trainings coming soon to your area. These three-hour sessions will cover key topics including effective safety committees, updates on property claims, and practical cybersecurity basics designed to help protect your organization—no IT expertise required. We look forward to your participation in this valuable learning opportunity.

UPCOMING DATES AND LOCATIONS

- July 29 – Bend | Central Oregon Community Center
- July 30 – The Dalles | Fairfield Inn
- September 18 – Eugene | Lane Events Center
- October 21 – Medford | Jackson County Library Services - Medford Branch
- October 22 – Coos Bay | Bon Appetit Catering & Event Center
- December 9 – Seaside | Sunset Empire Park & Recreation
- December 10 – Tigard | SDAO Office

Visit <https://cvent.me/grbVbZ> for more information and to register!

FROM COMPLAINT TO CONCLUSION: A LEADERSHIP LAB IN HARASSMENT, RISK & RESPONSE

This scenario-driven training is designed for leaders who play a critical role in preventing, identifying, and responding to workplace misconduct. We will walk through the full lifecycle of a harassment investigation while highlighting leadership responsibilities, legal exposure, and best practices along the way. After a brief overview of reporting protocols and investigative steps, the session shifts into a fast-paced, team-based quiz game using real-world cases drawn from the facilitator's extensive experience. Participants respond to complex scenarios sparking meaningful discussion and practical insights. The day concludes with a hearty discussion about practical steps and strategies for exploring and implementing workplace disability-related interactive processes and accommodations like a pro.

DATE AND LOCATION

- August 28 – Redmond | Eagle Crest Resort

Visit <https://cvent.me/NM8Ex8> for more information and to register.



BOILER TRAINING

Travelers Boiler & Machinery, as the new carrier of equipment breakdown coverage and provider of jurisdictional inspection services, is excited to introduce SDIS & PACE members to our inspectors and provide an overview of our equipment breakdown services, including jurisdictional inspections, equipment breakdown claim investigation, and risk control consultation/resources.

Utilizing a data-driven approach to risk control, Travelers Boiler & Machinery seeks to partner with each of our customers to provide impactful, actionable information to inform and empower our customers in their onsite equipment preventive maintenance and risk control efforts.



WHERE & WHEN

July 29th | 9am-11am

David Douglas High School
1001 SE 135th Ave, Portland, OR

» WHAT WILL BE COVERED:

- Who are the local RCCs?
- Equipment breakdown claims services
- Jurisdictional inspection services and local code requirements
- Data driven risk control and Travelers Risk Control Customer Resource Center
- Engaging with Travelers as a resource

» TARGET AUDIENCE

Facility managers, maintenance supervisors and technicians, boiler operators and anyone responsible for the safe operation of commercial, industrial, and institutional boilers.

NO COST TO ATTEND!

Register today at: <https://cvent.me/l4Gmog>

DEFENSIBLE SPACE, WILDFIRE SMOKE & HEAT ILLNESS

BY: GREG JACKSON, ARM, RISK MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT

DEFENSIBLE SPACE

As wildfire season approaches it is a great time to create a defensible space around your structures. To create a defensible space a well-managed landscape must be maintained within 100' of each structure. A defensible space is broken into zones.

ZONE 1: 0-30 FEET FROM BUILDINGS

- Remove all dead plants, leaves, and pine needles from roofs, gutters, decks, and yards
- Keep grass mowed to four inches or shorter
- Use fire-resistant plants and non-combustible landscaping materials
- Trim tree branches at least 6-10 feet from the ground and 10 feet from structures
- Move propane tanks and other combustibles at least 30 feet away
- Clear space around decks, fences, and sheds
- Install one-sixteenth to one-eighth inch metal mesh over vents to block embers

ZONE 2: 30-100 FEET (OR TO PROPERTY LINE)

- Thin trees to keep at least 10 feet between canopies
- Remove small trees or shrubs growing beneath taller trees (ladder fuels)
- Keep vegetation well-spaced and maintained
- Dispose of slash, wood debris, and dry vegetation regularly
- Maintain clear access roads and driveways for emergency vehicles

ONGOING MAINTENANCE

- Re-check zones seasonally (especially spring and late summer)
- Clean up after storms or high winds
- Stay informed on local fire danger levels and regulations
- Contact Oregon Department of Forestry, your local fire department, or Department of Oregon State Fire Marshal for site-specific advice

Oregon's topography and increasing wildfire threats make it especially important to maintain these zones year-round, not just during fire season. The Department of Oregon State Fire Marshal offers free defensible space assessments for special districts. During the assessment, a fire service professional will visit your property at a time that works for you and provide personalized recommendations to help reduce wildfire risk. Visit oregondefensiblespace.org to learn more and schedule your free assessment. Implementing these practices not only protects individual properties but also contributes to broader community wildfire resilience.

WILDFIRE SMOKE

Oregon OSHA's wildfire smoke rule mandates that employers protect workers from hazardous air quality levels, specifically when the Air Quality Index (AQI) reaches 101 or higher. Employers must assess exposure at the start of each shift and throughout the shift or workday and implement exposure controls, such as relocating work to areas with better air quality or altering work schedules. If exposure remains above an AQI of 101, employers are required to provide NIOSH-approved filtering facepiece respirators, like N95 masks, for voluntary use. When the AQI exceeds 277, respirator use becomes mandatory. When the AQI reaches 849 you must have a comprehensive respiratory protection program in place or suspend work that would expose employees to smoke.

Additionally, employers must develop a two-way communication system to notify employees of changing air quality conditions, including when AQI levels reach 101, 277, or 849, and when they drop below these thresholds. Training is essential and must be provided annually to all employees who may be exposed to wildfire smoke. This training should cover the health risks of wildfire smoke, symptoms of exposure, how to access AQI information, the proper use of respirators, and emergency procedures. Employers are also required to maintain records of this training for at least one year.

For more information and training, you can visit the OR-OSHA web page on wildfires:

<https://osha.oregon.gov/Pages/topics/wildfires.aspx>

HEAT ILLNESS

Oregon OSHA's heat illness prevention rule (OAR 437-002-0156) establishes specific requirements to protect workers from heat-related illnesses, particularly during high-heat conditions. You must also develop and implement a heat illness prevention written program. If you need help developing a program, please reach out to us at riskmanagement@sdao.com. When the heat index reaches or exceeds 80°F, employers must provide access to shade and an adequate supply of drinking water. As temperatures rise, additional measures are mandated.

HEAT INDEX OF 90°F OR HIGHER:

- Ensure effective communication between employees and supervisors.
- Monitor employees for signs of heat illness.
- Follow your written program for heat illness prevention breaks in accordance with the heat index and other factors that add to the heat load for employees.
- Develop and implement an emergency medical plan.
- Implement acclimatization practices to help employees gradually adjust to working in heat.

Employers must also provide annual training to all employees on heat illness prevention, covering topics such as environmental and personal risk factors, symptoms of heat-related illnesses, and the importance of hydration and rest. Additionally, a written heat illness prevention plan should be developed and maintained, outlining procedures for water access, shade, rest periods, and emergency response. These measures are crucial for safeguarding workers' health.

For more information and training, visit the OR-OSHA web page on heat illness prevention at:

<https://osha.oregon.gov/Pages/topics/heat-stress.aspx>

If you have any questions regarding these topics, please reach out to the Risk Management Department at riskmanagement@sdao.com.



THE BELONGING MOVEMENT: LEADERSHIP'S NEXT FRONTIER

BY: DEBORAH JEFFRIES, HR ANSWERS

While the fundamental value of workplace diversity is well established, the landscape of how diversity drives organizational success continues to evolve. Right now, this concept is under fire in more ways than one. The next step in managing diversity isn't just about hitting diversity numbers. It's about building workplaces that can adjust and make the most of their diverse teams depending on the situation—while still treating everyone fairly and with respect. To succeed, organizations need to move past old ideas and start using new research and smarter ways of putting diversity and inclusion into practice.

Recent neuroscience research has revealed that cognitive diversity—the variation in how people process information and approach challenges—may be even more impactful than demographic diversity alone. A 2023 study in *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* found that teams with high cognitive diversity solved complex problems 45% faster than homogeneous teams, even when demographic profiles were similar (1).

Rather than focusing solely on traditional diversity metrics, leading organizations are now mapping cognitive diversity across teams. Tools like the Cognitive Process Profile (CPP) help identify thinking style distributions and potential blind spots in decision-making processes.

As organizations deepen their understanding of diversity, the focus has shifted from external representation to internal transformation. It's no longer enough to track who is in the room; leaders must consider how individuals experience being in the room. And that starts with the environment leaders create. This is where the conversation moves from metrics to meaning, and from surface-level inclusion to a deep sense of belonging.

Belonging and employee engagement are key results of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategies. Even though some leaders might be reluctant to talk about DEI, the proven outcomes will ensure that DEI will remain a priority—regardless of what it's called. All business leaders can agree that they want their employees to feel comfortable and productive at work.

Organizations thrive when belonging is fostered and suffer when it's absent. According to Great Place To Work, belonging in the workplace is “an employee's sense that their uniqueness is accepted and even treasured by their organization and colleagues. [It] is an accumulation of day-to-day experiences that enables a person to feel safe and bring their full, unique self to work.”

Belonging starts with leadership—leaders doing inner work, showing up authentically, and modeling behaviors that build trust, inclusion, and psychological safety. It's time to challenge leadership and HR to move beyond buzzwords and create workplaces where people truly feel seen, heard, and valued for their contributions.

BELONGING IS STRATEGIC, NOT JUST CULTURAL

A sense of belonging is directly tied to employee performance. In fact, employees who feel they belong are 75% more likely to thrive in their roles (2). For belonging to truly matter, it must be measured and woven into leadership evaluations—not just referenced in vision statements. HR leaders must highlight those who model inclusive behaviors and offer coaching to those who don't. A useful reflective question is: Would people choose to work for this leader again?

THE INNER WORK OF LEADERSHIP

The journey begins with leaders being willing to put aside the need to appear perfect and instead engage in introspection. Understanding personal narratives around success, failure, and self-worth is not a “soft” skill—it's a strategic imperative. When leaders do this inner work, they show up with greater clarity, compassion, and courage. While HR is well-known for supplying toolkits and training resources, the next step is to go deeper—asking the questions that prompt self-reflection, not just handing out materials.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF WORK

Employees want to be seen and treated as individuals. They aren't asking for grand gestures, but rather consistent, daily acts of care. Empathy, feedback, praise, time, and trust—these are the true currencies of employee engagement. HR must reinforce that care and connection are not optional extras but leadership essentials.

HR'S ROLE IN ACCOUNTABILITY AND CHANGE

HR has the responsibility to act as cultural liberators, not simply enforcers. Belonging is not what's printed on posters or walls—it's what's felt in the halls or in the small moments on a Zoom call. That's why HR must audit culture for harm, not just performance. These audits need to happen especially at the frontline level, where culture is most lived. Thoughtful, revealing questions like “What did you appreciate about your last manager?” and “What didn't work?” can surface valuable insights.

THE COST OF INAUTHENTICITY

Employees often feel the pressure to “cover” parts of themselves to fit in. This quiet conformity reduces trust, creativity, and overall engagement. Even worse, when organizations post values they don't actively live, it breeds mistrust. Buzzwords like “we all belong here” can easily become camouflage for inaction if not backed by consistent behaviors.

BUILDING TRUE BELONGING

True belonging means making room for nuance, discomfort, and even disagreement. It means creating intentional spaces for values-based dialogue—where employees don't need to agree on everything to feel like they belong. Belonging is not achieved through slogans but through action. Expectations must be clarified and values must be embodied—not just written in handbooks but lived daily. Leading organizations are now going beyond basic psychological safety training to use “safety mapping,” identifying the specific emotional needs of different employee groups and designing solutions that truly support them.

WE ALL HAVE A CALL TO ACTION

Now more than ever, HR must raise the bar for leaders and hold them accountable. Ask bold questions—like “If your workplace disappeared tomorrow, would anyone miss it?” Belonging is not about fitting in—it's about making space for everyone to thrive. This work goes beyond leadership development or culture—it's a movement. A meaningful one.

The message is clear: belonging starts with leadership at the top. It's time to rethink how we define diversity and inclusion at work. This movement calls for courage, intention, and sustained action—not just words on a wall. HR professionals have the power and responsibility to lead this change—and in doing so, to help build the kinds of workplaces where people don't just survive, but truly thrive.

(1), (2): Louis Carter, Best Practices Institute; *Most Loved Workplaces 2024*



A CURE FOR SUMMERTIME BLUES

BY: JENS JENSEN, DIRECTOR OF PC CLAIMS

With summer upon us, now is the perfect time to take proactive steps to minimize liability and property risks that often arise during the warmer months. One of the most significant threats the Trust faces is property damage from fire.

If you created a Defensible Space in the spring, great! If not, now is an ideal time to assess and strengthen that space to help prevent wildfire damage. Cleaning up vegetation and maintaining your property serves several important purposes:

- 1. Fire Prevention:** Removing vegetation near buildings reduces the risk of fire reaching your structures and helps prevent fire from spreading between multiple buildings on the premises.
- 2. Pest Control:** Clearing overgrowth limits access for insects and vermin that might otherwise find their way inside.
- 3. Roof & Gutter Maintenance:** Less vegetation means fewer leaves blowing onto roofs and clogging gutters.
- 4. Slip and Fall Prevention:** Keeping sidewalks and parking lots clear of debris helps prevent accidents and potential liability claims.
- 5. Security Enhancement:** Removing overgrown areas eliminates hiding spots for vandals. This is also a good time to evaluate whether additional security lighting is needed—vandals prefer low-light, low-visibility areas.
- 6. Water Drainage:** Properly maintained landscaping helps direct water away from buildings. Check for areas where poor grading may trap water near foundations or allow it to seep into crawlspaces.
- 7. Sidewalk Safety:** Walk the sidewalks on or near your property. Tree roots may have caused uneven surfaces, which can often be ground down to reduce tripping hazards.

Taking these steps now can help reduce risks and keep your property safe and accessible as summer rolls in.

NEW HEALTH PLAN OPTION: FIRST CHOICE HEALTH PPO NETWORK

We're pleased to announce that effective July 1, 2025, SDIS will be offering a new health plan option through First Choice Health (FCH), a national independent PPO network. This new plan is being introduced as an alternative for members impacted by Salem Health's departure from the Regence network.

The new FCH plans will be administered by EBMS and are designed to ensure continued access to Salem Health as an in-network provider.

EXTENDED OPEN ENROLLMENT

To support this transition, we are extending our annual open enrollment period. Districts may:

- Switch to the new FCH plan, or
- Add it as a dual option, giving employees the choice.

No minimum enrollment requirement: The usual 10-employee minimum is waived for FCH plans due to the network change.

- Districts may add the FCH plan with effective dates through October 1, 2025.
- No retroactive changes will be allowed.
- Changes not involving FCH will not be permitted after July 1, 2025.

WHAT TO EXPECT WITH THE FCH PLAN

- Same rates as your current Regence renewal rates
- Matching plan designs to existing SDIS and OFCA options (*Note: supplemental benefits may differ due to different networks and TPAs*)
- Prescription coverage through CVS Caremark
- All enrolled family members must be on the same plan

PROVIDER & PHARMACY SEARCH TOOLS

Before making a decision, employees can explore participating providers and pharmacies:

- First Choice Health Provider Search: fchn.com/Members
- CVS Caremark Pharmacy Directory: CVS Participating Retail Pharmacies

We appreciate your patience and flexibility as we work to provide a smooth transition and continued access to quality care. If your district is impacted, this new option ensures that Salem Health remains in-network for your employees. For questions or support, please contact the SDIS Benefits Department at benefits@sdao.com.

SDIS Offers No-Cost Online Risk Management Training to Members

As part of SDIS's ongoing commitment to safety, compliance with regulatory requirements, and containing healthcare costs, SDIS has partnered with Vector Solutions (formerly SafePersonnel) to provide a series of free online risk management trainings.

SDAO members enrolled in the SDIS Property/Casualty program can complete safety and liability trainings through the Vector Solutions (formerly SafePersonnel) online training system at no charge.

S | D | I | S Special Districts
Insurance Services

Automated Features Make Administration Easy

- This extensive library of trainings is accessible to each district through a personalized website set up by Vector Solutions.
- Set up personalized training plans in minutes for groups of staff, new hires, or individuals.
- Keep everyone on track with email notifications and reminders of assignments.
- Track course completions in real-time.
- Receive compliance reports directly in your inbox.

To get started with Vector Training, scan the QR code or visit the URL to complete the implementation request form.



<https://forms.office.com/r/kXAfridFS3>

2025-2026 SAFETY & SECURITY GRANT



Applications are now being accepted for the 2025-2026 SDIS Safety & Security Grant Program! SDIS members are eligible to apply for a matching grant to help fund expenses related to projects that mitigate exposures to safety and security threats.

The SDIS Safety & Security Grant Program assists members with funding of projects that lead to reduced exposure in high-level claims categories. It is our goal to eliminate or lower risk to the SDIS insurance program by supporting members' proactive approaches to preventing loss.

WHAT IS THE FOCUS OF THIS YEAR'S PROGRAM?

The 2025-2026 matching grant program will focus on projects that mitigate property loss and enhance security at your district.

WHAT DOES "MATCHING GRANT" MEAN?

This is a 50/50 matching grant program, which means the cost of the project will be split equally between your district and SDIS, up to a maximum of \$2,500.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY "A MAXIMUM OF \$2,500"?

If your district is planning a \$5,000 project, you can apply to receive a maximum of \$2,500 from SDIS.

**APPLICATION DEADLINE:
NOON ON WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2025**

HOW ARE PROJECTS SELECTED FOR A GRANT?

The SDIS Safety & Security Grant Committee will review each application and award matching grants to applicants that meet the eligibility requirements by order of priority and on a first come, first served basis.

THE COMMITTEE WILL CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING IN DETERMINING GRANT RECIPIENTS:

PRIORITY FOR FUNDING

Applicants who did not receive an SDIS Safety & Security Grant in the 2024-2025 grant year will be given priority over those who received one during that time. All other applicants will then be considered in the order received.

ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

Your district may apply for any new project that supports the focus of this year's program. A great example is preventing water loss during winter storms – SDIS pays out a significant number of claims each year related to these losses.

Other examples of eligible projects include, but are not limited to:

- Leak Detection Equipment
- Heat Tape
- Equipment for Winter Storm Damage Prevention
- Alarms
- Window Film
- Securing Valuables
- Cybersecurity Equipment
- Security Systems
- Fencing
- Lighting
- Cameras

Expenses must be incurred after July 1, 2025. Routine maintenance to existing facilities, subscription based or recurring payment services, and normal business expenses will not be considered.

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

The purpose of this program is to reduce risk exposures by assisting our members to complete safety and security related projects. Your district must have insurance coverage for the risk exposure you are trying to mitigate. For example, if you do not have property coverage through SDIS, a project that prevents burglary would not be considered. **Since SDIS no longer provides workers' compensation insurance, unfortunately, we cannot accept grant applications for employee safety exposures.**

HOW CAN WE APPLY?

Fill out and return the application for your district by mail to ***SDAO, PO Box 12613, Salem, Oregon 97309*** or email to ***memberservices@sdao.com*** by ***noon on Wednesday, November 19, 2025.*** You can download a copy of the application on our website:

www.sdao.com/safety-security-grant-program

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

Hasina Wittenberg: 503-906-7228
Mark Landauer: 503-906-7238

UNDERWRITING

Toll-Free: 800-285-5461
Email: underwriting@sdao.com
Fax: 503-371-4781

REPORT AN SDIS P/C CLAIM

Toll-Free: 800-305-1736
Email: claims@sdao.com
Fax: 503-620-9817

MEMBER SERVICES

Toll-Free: 800-285-5461
Email: memberservices@sdao.com
Fax: 503-371-4781

RISK MANAGEMENT

Toll-Free: 800-285-5461
Email: riskmanagement@sdao.com
Fax: 503-371-4781

MEMBER CALENDAR

- July 1* | Registration for the Member Scholarship Golf Tournament Opens
- July 4* | Independence Day (SDAO Offices Closed)
- July 29* | Low Pressure Boiler Training – Portland
- July 29* | Risk Management Regional Training – Bend
- July 30* | Risk Management Regional Training – The Dalles
- August 5* | Board of Directors and Management Staff Training – Pendleton
- August 6* | Board of Directors and Management Staff Training – Hood River
- August 20* | Board of Directors and Management Staff Training – Klamath Falls
- August 26* | Board of Directors and Management Staff Training – Redmond
- August 28* | From Complaint to Conclusion: A Leadership Lab in Harassment, Risk & Response
- September 1* | Labor Day (SDAO Offices Closed)
- September 10* | SDIS Board of Trustees Meeting – Tigard
- September 11* | SDAO Board of Directors Meeting – Salem
- September 12* | Member Appreciation Golf Tournament – Newberg
- September 16* | Board of Directors and Management Staff Training – Eugene
- September 18* | Risk Management Regional Training – Eugene
- September 23* | Board of Directors and Management Staff Training – Astoria
- September 24* | Board of Directors and Management Staff Training – Salem