

# News & Risk Management Review

SPRING 2026



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## **SDAO Board of Directors**

### **President**

Ben Stange, Polk County Fire District #1

### **Vice President**

Kathy Kleczek, Union Health District and Sunset Empire Transportation District

### **Secretary**

Adam Denlinger, Seal Rock Water District

### **Treasurer**

Jennifer Holland, Sisters Park & Recreation District

### **Board Member Emeritus**

Todd Heidgerken, Clackamas River Water

### **Board Members**

Nick Bakke, Rogue Valley Sewer Services

Michele Bradley, Port of Tillamook Bay

Paula Miranda, Port of Newport

Meg Spencer, Siuslaw Public Library District

Scott Stanton, Umatilla County Fire District #1

Brent Stevenson, Santiam Water Control District

Holly Tavernier, Lower Umpqua Hospital District

## **Next Board of Directors Meetings**

**April 2nd** | 9am | Best Western - Hood River | Joint Meeting with SDIS Board of Trustees

**April 2nd** | 1pm | Best Western - Hood River

**June 11th** | 10am | SDAO Salem Office

## **Executive Director**

Frank Stratton

## **Services**

Awards, Consulting Services, Education and Training, Internship Grant, Legislative, Research and Technical Assistance, Scholarship and Grant Fund, 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](mailto:sdao@sdao.com) | Web: [www.sdao.com](http://www.sdao.com)

### **Claims Office**

PO Box 23879 | Tigard OR 97281-3879

Toll-Free: 800-305-1736

Phone: 503-670-7066

# 2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

## Wrap-Up



Thank you to all who joined us for the 2026 SDAO Annual Conference in Seaside! Over 700 people attended, which included representatives from special districts, insurance agencies, vendors, and more.

We kicked off our pre-conference day under beautiful, sunny skies, with five engaging sessions available for attendees to choose from. The HR Alliance and Finance Alliance each hosted roundtable discussions for their members, creating space for meaningful conversation and connection. To officially launch the event, keynote speaker Corey Saban took the stage and guided us through strategies for navigating the media during challenging situations, sharing practical examples of what to say and what to avoid when faced with tough questions.

The Exhibitor Trade Show was once again a big hit, featuring 30 vendors. We greatly appreciate their support of our event. If you did not have an opportunity to connect with them during the conference, we encourage you to learn more about their products and services. Their contact information remains available on our conference app and website.

During the Annual Business Meeting on Saturday, we received updates from our board president, trust chair, caucus chairs, and the SDAO Chief Financial Officer. Additionally, the membership voted on the seats up for election on the SDAO Board of Directors. The following individuals were selected for the 2026-2029 term:





#### **AT-LARGE**

- Michele Bradley, Port of Tillamook Bay
- Meg Spencer, Siuslaw Public Library District
- Scott Stanton, Umatilla County Fire District #1

#### **FIRE**

Ben Stange, Polk County Fire District #1

#### **IRRIGATION**

Brent Stevenson, Santiam Water Control District

#### **SANITARY**

Nick Bakke, Rogue Valley Sewer Services



Later, we received an update from our legislative staff. On Saturday evening, we celebrated the achievements of two special districts and four individuals during the annual awards banquet. Each story was truly inspiring and highlighted the incredible impact our members make within their communities.

Following the banquet, attendees took part in a murder mystery, working together to decipher clues and uncover the killer.

The conference concluded on Sunday with breakfast and door prize giveaways generously donated by members.

We appreciate all of our members and had a wonderful time with you in Seaside. We hope to see you at **our next conference, February 4 through 7, in Sunriver.**

- Frank Stratton

The background features a stylized illustration of a hand holding a large dollar sign. The hand is rendered in shades of blue and yellow, with visible brushstrokes. The dollar sign is a bright yellow-green color. The overall style is artistic and textured.

# SDAO INTERNSHIP *Grant Program*

**Application Deadline:**  
5pm on Friday, April 17, 2026

Applications are now being accepted for the 2026 SDAO Internship Grant Program! Essential and critical to Oregon's communities, special districts deliver much-needed services while also supporting their local workforce. In addition, many districts offer summer internships to college-level students in their area who are seeking to learn more about local government careers. SDAO recognizes and supports these efforts by providing matching grants through the SDAO Internship Grant Program.

Through this program, interns must be hired by the district as temporary employees to be in compliance with wage and hour laws relative to compensating student interns. A freshman through junior college-level student will need to be hired to qualify for funding of this grant.

The maximum grant per district is \$3,000; the funding must be matched by the district by 50%. For example, you may be eligible to receive up to \$3,000 on your request for a project that will cost your district \$6,000 or more. You may be eligible to receive up to a maximum of \$2,100 on your request for a project that will cost



*"We are extremely grateful to have received funds to support a much-needed project that served the community as well as our firefighters."*

**Chief Brandon Nicol**  
*Junction City RFPD*



*"This internship provided a valuable opportunity to apply administrative, regulatory and operational knowledge to real-world EMS and fire service environments."*

**Intern**

*McKenzie Fire & Rescue*

your district \$4,200. SDAO may not fund all grant requests. This grant is not intended to fund routine maintenance needs or normal staffing requirements.

The SDAO Awards Committee will review each application to determine which projects are eligible to receive funding. Funds will be disbursed by July 1, 2026.

To be considered, your completed Internship Grant Program application must be received by

SDAO by **5pm on Friday, April 17, 2026**. Submit your completed application by mail to **SDAO, PO Box 12613, Salem, Oregon 97309**; by e-mail to **memberservices@sdao.com**; or **directly on our website**. Attach a separate sheet if necessary. Learn more and download the Internship Grant Program application at: **[www.sdao.com/internship-grant-program](http://www.sdao.com/internship-grant-program)**.



*"This internship helped [intern] apply her academic interests to real operational challenges, strengthening her confidence and preparing her for roles in recreation or sports management."*

**Andrew Maeda**

*Ontario Recreation District*

2026

SDAO AWARDS

*Banquet*

Each year, the SDAO Awards Program recognizes member districts for their remarkable accomplishments, enabling them to enhance their service to the public. Additionally, the program acknowledges individuals who have significantly contributed to their district's success. The following award winners were selected by the SDAO Awards Committee and honored at the 2026 SDAO Annual Conference on Saturday, February 7th. You can watch videos featuring each award winner on our website at [www.sdao.com/sdao-awards-program](http://www.sdao.com/sdao-awards-program).

### **OUTSTANDING SPECIAL DISTRICT SERVICE AWARD: BOARD MEMBER**

**Bob Koenig, Santiam Water Control District**



Bob Koenig has dedicated 44 years of exemplary service as a board member of the Santiam Water Control District, providing steady leadership through major challenges including floods, wildfires, ice storms, droughts, and significant financial and legal pressures. He played a key role in guiding the district through major legislative and regulatory changes in Oregon water law, actively representing the district in statewide advocacy efforts through the Oregon Water Resources Congress.

Throughout his tenure, he has been a committed steward of historic water rights dating back to 1866, supporting irrigation, municipal, hydroelectric, and commercial water systems across more than 17,000 acres. His leadership supported major infrastructure and planning initiatives, including water conservation planning, hydropower development, drought contingency planning, and modernization projects that improved water efficiency and regulatory compliance. Beyond the district, his long-standing civic involvement and personal conservation efforts reflect a lasting legacy of service, collaboration, and responsible water resource stewardship.

### **OUTSTANDING SPECIAL DISTRICT SERVICE AWARD: MANAGER**

**Ray Monroe, Tillamook SWCD**



Ray Monroe has served the Tillamook County Soil & Water Conservation District for 29 years, playing a central role in advancing natural resource conservation and agricultural sustainability across Tillamook County. He has been instrumental in distributing Farm Bill funds and working directly with dairy farmers and landowners to develop comprehensive farm plans that protect water quality, restore salmon habitat, and ensure long-term stewardship of natural resources. Ray has led and supported large-scale conservation efforts, including extensive fencing and tree-planting projects completed through partnerships with agricultural, forestry, and fisheries organizations. Throughout his tenure, he has helped landowners navigate and remain compliant with complex federal, state, and local regulations while securing critical grant funding and maintaining the

trust and support of the community. Beyond his professional role, his deep civic involvement and volunteer service reflect a sustained commitment to conservation, education, and the well-being of Tillamook County's working lands and waters.

## OUTSTANDING SPECIAL DISTRICT SERVICE AWARD: EMPLOYEE

*Joy King-Cortes, Seal Rock Water District*



Joy King-Cortes has dedicated nearly three decades of full-time service to the Seal Rock Water District, serving as a steady and trusted leader through periods of growth, transition, and challenge. Her exceptional fiscal management and mastery of the budgeting process have kept the district financially sound, enabled major capital investments, and ensured consistent transparency and public trust. Under her leadership, the district has received clean, unqualified audits every year, supported by strong internal controls and meticulous financial stewardship. Joy's professionalism and collaborative leadership style have fostered a stable, high-functioning workplace, marked by cross-trained staff, minimal turnover, and strong institutional continuity. Beyond her technical expertise, her integrity, resilience, and unwavering dedication have left a lasting

legacy of excellence that underpins the district's success today.

## OUTSTANDING SPECIAL DISTRICT SERVICE AWARD: VOLUNTEER

*James Audritsh, Woodburn Fire District*



James Audritsh has dedicated 40 years of exceptional volunteer service to the Woodburn Fire District, providing critical support to emergency response operations and rural fire protection. He has taken on leadership responsibilities maintaining an outstation, supporting apparatus readiness, and responding to large-scale fires by delivering essential water supplies to areas without hydrants. James consistently volunteers for community events, parades, and emergency call-outs, embodying the spirit of service that strengthens both the fire district and the broader community. Beyond the fire district, his long record of civic leadership includes extensive involvement in local government, service organizations, public safety, and charitable efforts that have directly benefited hundreds of families across the region. Recognized repeatedly for his commitment and reliability,

his lifelong dedication has made a lasting and meaningful impact on the safety, resilience, and well-being of the Woodburn and Hubbard communities.



## **OUTSTANDING SPECIAL DISTRICT PROGRAM AWARD: 6-25 EMPLOYEES**

### *Port of Cascade Locks*



The Port of Cascade Locks established an innovative Economic Development Grant Program to advance the goals of its 2024–2029 Strategic Business Plan by supporting locally driven projects that deliver measurable community benefits. Through this program, the port awarded \$150,000 in its second grant cycle to fund initiatives focused on downtown revitalization, tourism and recreation, public safety improvements, and emergency preparedness. By shifting from a traditional large-employer recruitment model to a grassroots business retention and expansion approach, the port expanded its economic development capacity through partnerships with local businesses, nonprofits, and public agencies. Administration of the program through an intergovernmental agreement with the Mid-Columbia Economic Development District ensured transparent scoring,

efficient grant management, and accountability while maximizing the impact of limited public funds. The program has strengthened trust, collaboration, and communication across the community and created a replicable model for small ports seeking practical, cost-effective strategies to support local economic growth and resilience.

## **OUTSTANDING SPECIAL DISTRICT PROGRAM AWARD: 26+ EMPLOYEES**

### *Western Lane Fire & EMS Authority*



The Western Lane Fire and EMS Authority established the Western Lane Crisis Response program to provide a mobile, community-based alternative to law enforcement and emergency department responses for behavioral health and non-criminal crises in rural western Lane County. The program pairs a qualified mental health associate with a peer support specialist, combining professional expertise and lived experience to deliver on-scene assessment, de-escalation, safety planning, and extended follow-up care that can continue for weeks or months. By diverting non-medical and non-criminal calls from traditional emergency responders, the program improves public safety, reduces strain on law enforcement and EMS, and connects individuals to the appropriate level of care. Since implementation, the program has handled an average of 60–90 calls per month, with most

calls resolved without hospitalization or law enforcement involvement, resulting in cost savings and reduced repeat emergency calls. Designed as a scalable and replicable model, the program demonstrates how fire and EMS agencies can strengthen community safety and behavioral health outcomes through collaboration, innovation, and compassionate response.

# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

BY: HASINA WITTENBERG,  
GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

The 83rd Oregon Legislative Assembly concluded the 2026 Legislative Session by adjourning Sine Die at 4:17 pm on March 6, two days ahead of the constitutionally mandated deadline. Lawmakers considered a total of 304 bills during the session, with 115 measures introduced in the Senate and 189 in the House.

## **SIGNIFICANT LEGISLATION PASSED**

- **SB 1501 – MODA CENTER RENOVATION FUNDING**

Oregon lawmakers approved Senate Bill 1501 on March 6, 2026, authorizing the state to issue \$365 million in bonds over 20 years (representing nearly two-thirds of the projected \$600 million total cost) to fund major renovations of the aging Moda Center in Portland, aimed at securing the Portland Trail Blazers' long-term commitment through a required 20-year lease under joint state-city ownership, with additional funding from the city and Multnomah County.

- **SB 1507 – FEDERAL DISCONNECT**

Senate Bill 1507 is expected to raise approximately \$311 million by rejecting certain federal tax breaks. The three main components include:

- » **100% bonus depreciation (under IRC Section 168(k)):** This allows businesses to immediately deduct the full cost of qualifying machinery and equipment purchases in the year placed in service, rather than depreciating over time; it's the largest, with an estimated \$267 million revenue impact for Oregon if conformed to.
- » **Deduction for qualified passenger vehicle loan interest:** A new federal deduction for interest paid on loans for new cars (often specified for U.S.-assembled vehicles), preserving about \$36 million in state revenue by rejecting it.
- » **Expanded exclusion for gains on Qualified Small Business Stock (QSBS):** An exemption for profits from selling stock in certain private companies (qualified small business stock), which would have cost the state around \$39 million if adopted.

- **SB 1517 – RECREATIONAL IMMUNITY**

SB 1517 addresses a longstanding issue caused by the 2014 Oregon Supreme Court ruling in *Bagley v. Mt. Bachelor, Inc.*, which deemed many liability waivers unenforceable, which has led to a surge in lawsuits, skyrocketing insurance premiums, and threats of insurers exiting the market or refusing coverage. The bill restores enforceability for ordinary negligence claims in these sectors but does not allow waivers to bar lawsuits in several key exceptions, including:

- » Claims involving greater than ordinary negligence (e.g., gross negligence, recklessness, willful misconduct, or intentional acts).
- » Injuries not sustained during the core activity itself (e.g., in parking lots, lodges, or rental areas).
- » Issues with improper maintenance/inspection of safety equipment.

- » Negligent safety-related training of workers.
- » Abuse, physical assault, or sexual assault.
- » Negligent hiring, training, credentialing, supervision, or retention of employees.
- » Operation or use of vehicles (e.g., snowmobiles, chairlifts in certain contexts).

- **SB 1599 – TRANSPORTATION PACKAGE TO MAY BALLOT**

The legislature's measure to re-time the referral of the transportation package from November to May is now being legally challenged.

- **HB 4018 – CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM**

HB 4018 makes technical fixes and clarifications to the landmark 2024 campaign finance reform law (originally HB 4024) by allocating over \$1.5 million to the Secretary of State's office for system upgrades, delaying the implementation of complex tracking and disclosure requirements (including a campaign finance dashboard and original source reporting) from 2028 to 2031-2032 while keeping contribution limits for unions, businesses, candidates, committees, and individuals set to take effect in 2027.

- **HB 4084 – GOVERNOR'S LAND USE/FAST TRACK PERMITTING**

HB 4084 imposes a one-year moratorium on new data centers' eligibility for standard enterprise zone property tax exemptions in urban and suburban areas (such as Hillsboro), potentially saving the state \$85 million this year amid \$450 million in total data center incentives, while preserving larger rural incentives worth \$365 million, in response to concerns over unsustainable energy demands. Governor Kotek's newly formed Data Center Advisory Committee will make recommendations to the legislature in 2027.

- **HB 4145 – GUN CONTROL**

HB 4145 was significantly watered-down, stripping out controversial provisions that would have enhanced permitting processes, raised fees, extended approval timelines, exempted background check data from public records, and shared fingerprints with the FBI. Instead, HB 4145 will delay in the implementation of voter-approved Measure 114 (the 2022 gun control law requiring permits, background checks, safety training, and banning magazines over 10 rounds) until 2028 pending court challenges.

- **HB 4148/HB 4134 – TRANSIENT LODGING TAX**

HB 4148 increases the statewide transient lodging tax on hotels, short-term rentals like Airbnbs, and campgrounds, from 1.5% to 2.75% (a 1.25 percentage point hike) to generate approximately \$37-38 million annually for wildlife conservation efforts. HB 4134 reduces the required share of local transient lodging tax proceeds dedicated to tourism promotion or related facilities from 70% to 50% to allow cities and counties to allocate up to 50% for general local services such as public safety, infrastructure, and other services.

## LEGISLATION THAT FAILED

- **SB 1586 – JOBS ACT**

Oregon lawmakers' push to add approximately 1,700 acres of prime farmland northwest of Hillsboro to the city's urban growth boundary for industrial development—primarily to support the semiconductor industry and advanced manufacturing failed.

## BUDGET

After months of warnings about a potential \$650–\$750 million budget hole tied to federal tax and spending changes, legislative budget writers released a balanced plan that requires approximately \$128 million in adjustments: a much smaller amount than earlier projected.

Co-chairs of the Ways and Means Committee indicated that no core programs or direct services will be eliminated. Instead, agencies will leave vacant positions unfilled, reduce supplies and services spending, and shift reserves or interest earnings from dedicated accounts to close gaps.

Several factors narrowed the projected shortfall: passage of SB 1507 disconnecting three federal tax provisions from Oregon law (generating roughly \$312 million in additional revenue), an improved February revenue forecast, and lower-than-expected state costs to implement new federal Medicaid and food assistance requirements. However, budget writers caution that the current solution relies heavily on one-time adjustments and fund shifts, and that significantly larger structural pressures are expected in the 2027-29 and 2029-31 biennia, particularly from federal cost shifts in Medicaid and food programs.

### **INTERIM COMMITTEE DAYS WILL OCCUR PRIOR TO THE 2027 SESSION AS FOLLOWS:**

- June 15-June 17
- September 8-10
- December 1-3

### **DEADLINES AND INFORMATION FOR THE JANUARY-JUNE 2027 SESSION ARE AS FOLLOWS:**

- Deadline to request LC drafts is COB **September 11, 2026**.
- Deadline for LC to return LC drafts is COB **December 1, 2026**.
- Deadline to file bills for introduction with the clerk is COB **December 11, 2026**.

The January 2027 legislative session is anticipated to begin on **January 19, 2027**, and must adjourn on or before **June 27, 2027**.

# SDAO COMMITTEE INTEREST FORM



We need your help! Our strength and effectiveness as an organization is directly related to the involvement of our members. The talent and energy that our members bring to SDAO are the critical components of our success as an association. Please review the volunteer opportunities listed below and indicate those of which you are willing to serve. If you have any questions, please contact SDAO at **800-285-5461** or **[sdao@sdao.com](mailto:sdao@sdao.com)**.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title/Position: \_\_\_\_\_

District: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (w) \_\_\_\_\_ (h) \_\_\_\_\_ (c) \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

- Awards Committee**      Reviews applications and submits rankings for the SDAO Awards Program and SDAO Internship Grant Program. This is conducted by email.
- Conference and Education Committee**      Meets two to three times prior to the SDAO Annual Conference to provide recommendations for conference programming.

Submit your completed form to:



P.O. Box 12613, Salem, OR 97309-0613

Fax: 503-371-4781

Email: [sdao@sdao.com](mailto:sdao@sdao.com)

**DEADLINE: MAY 22, 2026**

*Thank you for your willingness to serve!*

# *Congratulations*

TO OUR RECENT ACADEMY CERTIFICATE RECIPIENTS!

## *Board Leadership Academy*

**DENISE DAVIS**  
FALCON COVE BEACH WATER DISTRICT



**JEFF DAVIS**  
FALCON COVE BEACH WATER DISTRICT



**BERNARD YOO**  
FARMERS IRRIGATION DISTRICT



## *Fire District Directors Academy*

**BOBBY MEYER**  
AURORA FIRE DISTRICT



# CONSULTING SERVICES PROGRAM UPDATE

**BY: SHANTA CARTER,  
CONSULTING SERVICES  
MANAGER**

Spring is in the air and so is opportunity! As districts gear up for another busy season, the SDAO Consulting Services team is here to help you stay compliant, prepared, and moving forward with confidence. From strengthening internal policies to sharpening governance skills, we're excited to support you this spring and beyond.

## **SPRING SPOTLIGHT: EMPLOYEE HANDBOOKS**

A strong employee handbook is more than just a document, it's a roadmap for consistency, clarity, and compliance.

If your handbook hasn't been reviewed recently, now is the perfect time. Laws change, best practices evolve, and your district may have grown or shifted in ways your current handbook doesn't reflect.

Our consultants can help you create a new handbook, update existing policies to align with current employment laws, ensure consistency between board policy and daily operations, and reduce risk while clearly communicating expectations to staff.

Best of all, employee handbook development may be covered under your district's free eight hours of consulting services. Let us help you spring-clean your policies and set your team up for success.

## **MARK YOUR CALENDAR: REGIONAL TRAINING SUMMITS**

The SDAO Regional Training Summits are a two-day event combining our traditional regional trainings into a comprehensive, convenient experience.

Day one focuses on board-related topics to strengthen governance and leadership, while day two covers human resources, legal, and risk management topics with practical, real-world takeaways. Flexible registration options allow you to attend one day or both, and all trainings qualify for 2026 SDIS Best Practices credit.

## 2026 LOCATIONS AND DATES:

- April 14–15 | Pendleton
- June 24–25 | Klamath Falls
- August 18–19 | Redmond
- October 13–14 | Newport

# NEW CONSULTANT

*Kenny Frentress*



Kenny joins the Consulting Services team with a strong background in fire service operations and leadership. His practical experience and understanding of district governance make him a trusted resource for fire districts seeking guidance on operations, policy development, and best practices.

## WE'RE HERE TO HELP

Have a project in mind or a challenge you're trying to solve? Many of our consulting services are included in your district's free eight hours each year.

If there's a service you need that isn't listed, reach out to us at [consultingservices@sdao.com](mailto:consultingservices@sdao.com), chances are, we can help or point you in the right direction.

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





The SDAO Regional Training Summit delivers governance, HR, legal, and risk management education in a focused, two-day format. Board members, managers, and staff will gain practical skills they can apply immediately, while also connecting with special district peers from across the state. This event offers both high-value learning and meaningful networking opportunities.

## DAY ONE (BOARD GOVERNANCE FOCUS)

### Responsibilities and Requirements of Special District Board Members

Get a concise overview of the essential duties of special district board members, emphasizing the legal and ethical standards required for effective governance. Participants will gain clarity on their decision-making authority, statutory responsibilities, and accountability to the public.

#### KEY TOPICS

- Ethics and conflicts of interest
- Ordinances and resolutions (adoption & use)
- Board powers and liability protections
- Public meetings & public records requirements
- Roles and responsibilities of board members
- Budgeting and financial oversight
- Core principles of public contracting

#### REGISTRATION INFORMATION

- » **One-Day Only: \$75**
- » **Two-Days : \$145**

*Cost includes continental breakfast, lunch, and coffee.*

Use code **SDAORTS26** for **\$75 off** your registration. Limited amount of codes available. First come, first served. Limit one code per district.

Register online at  
[\*\*https://cvent.me/NaDa2v\*\*](https://cvent.me/NaDa2v)

*scan to register!*



## DAY TWO (HUMAN RESOURCES, LEGAL, & RISK MANAGEMENT FOCUS)

### HR, Legal, and Risk Management Topics for Managers and Staff

Day two of our summit will focus on human resources, legal, and risk management topics important to special districts. These include:

- **Sex Abuse in Special Districts**

Recognize grooming behaviors, understand predator tactics, know your reporting obligations, and implement boundary setting practices that keep youth safer in your programs.

- **Handbooks: A Living Tool (Not a One and Done)**

Your employee handbook – what must be in (and out) it, how to align policy with practice, and how to maintain it without becoming a yearly fire drill.

- **The Inspection Process**

Learn how walkthroughs identify hazards, reduce exposure, and strengthen safety – plus how partnering with Risk Management Consultants improves loss prevention efforts.

- **Driving District Vehicles**

Reduce incident rates, claims, and brand damage while improving productivity – learn how to implement a district-wide defensive driving program that works.

- **Employment ADA: Workplace Accommodations**

We'll break down what to do from first hint to closure: triage, interactive process, documentation, roles, and real world examples for consistent, lawful responses.

- **Employee Leaves: Optional & Required (Oregon's "Leave Swamp")**

Map mandatory vs. discretionary leaves, set clear rules where the law sets only the floor, and simplify tracking and communications.

### DATES & LOCATIONS (SAME PROGRAM AT EACH SITE)

April 14–15	Pendleton	The Vert
June 24–25	Klamath Falls	Running Y
August 18–19	Redmond	Eagle Crest
October 13–14	Newport	Hallmark Inn

9:00 AM – 4:00 PM EACH DAY

### AVAILABLE CREDITS



### QUESTIONS?

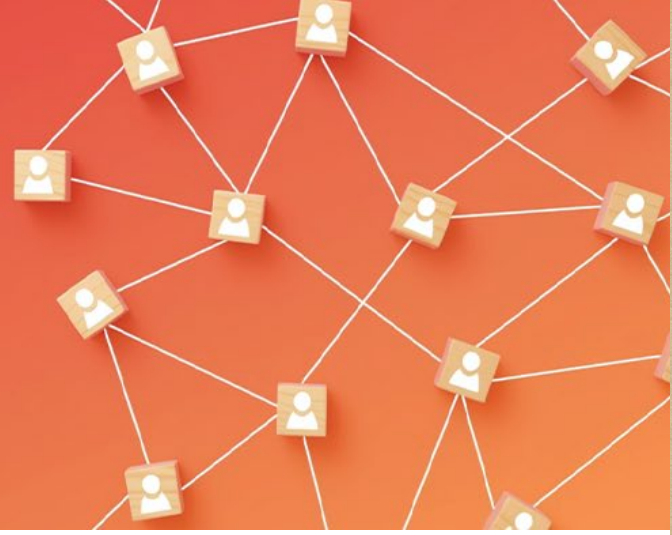
SDAO Member Services

800 285 5461 • [memberservices@sdao.com](mailto:memberservices@sdao.com)

SDAO  
SPECIAL DISTRICTS  
ASSOCIATION OF OREGON

# RISK MANAGEMENT ALLIANCE

SD|A|O Special Districts  
Association of Oregon



The Risk Management Alliance is an online forum for professionals across all levels of experience in risk management. Our community includes risk managers, compliance officers, health and safety professionals, and anyone responsible for mitigating risks within their organization.

Members of the alliance can post questions, share insights, and engage in discussions related to risk management using our interactive online and email-based forum. Think of it as your go-to resource for finding answers, discussing best practices, and staying updated on the latest trends and challenges in the field. Whether you're working on a tight deadline or just browsing in your free time, the Risk Management Alliance is always available to support your professional growth.

## WHY JOIN

- **Network:** Connect with professionals and experts in risk management.
- **Learn:** Access a wealth of knowledge and stay updated on industry trends.
- **Contribute:** Share your experiences and help others navigate their challenges.

## HOW TO JOIN

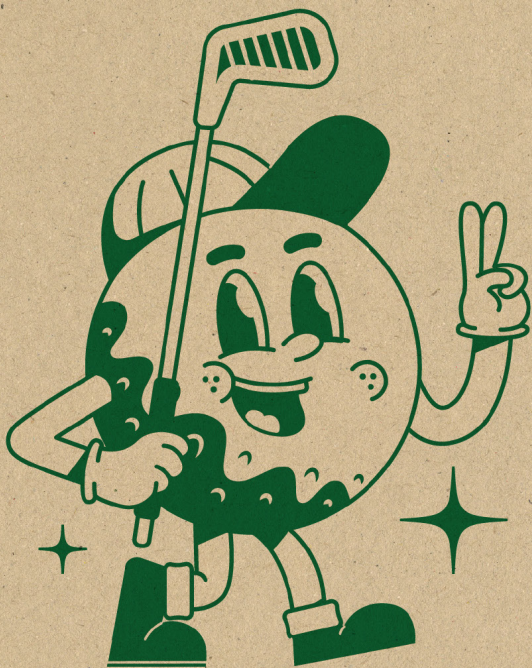
Getting started with the Risk Management Alliance is simple:

- **Sign Up:** Send a message with your name, title, district, and email address to Haley Kofstad at [hkofstad@sdao.com](mailto:hkofstad@sdao.com) to be added. You will then be provided with instructions on how to access the platform and participate in discussions.
- **Engage:** Start posting questions, sharing insights, or responding to discussions.
- **Learn & Share:** Take advantage of the collective knowledge of the community.

## QUESTIONS

Reach out to your risk management team at [riskmanagement@sdao.com](mailto:riskmanagement@sdao.com) or 800-285-5461.

**SAVE THE DATE!**



**SDAO**  
**MEMBER SCHOLARSHIP  
GOLF TOURNAMENT**

**SEPTEMBER 11, 2026**

**CHEHALEM GLENN GOLF COURSE**

*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

## **Services**

- Background Checks
- Claims Administration
- Drug-Free Workplace
- Risk Management
- Pre-Loss Legal
- Public Safety EAP
- Safety and Security Grant Program
- SDIS Insurance Programs

## **Next SDIS Board of Trustees Meetings**

**April 1** | 1pm | Best Western - Hood River

**April 2** | 9am | Best Western - Hood River | Joint Meeting with SDAO Board of  
Directors

**June 3rd** | 10am | SDAO Tigard Office

# CYBER THREATS TO PUBLIC ENTITIES CONTINUE TO SURGE IN 2026

BY: JENS JENSEN, DIRECTOR OF PC CLAIMS

Cybercriminals will continue to target attacks on public entities. Recent data from early 2025 through early 2026 shows that local governments and public entities remain one of the most targeted sectors for ransomware, phishing, and data-theft campaigns.

Ransomware attacks continue to inflict some of the most severe damage to our member districts, and there is no indication this trend is slowing. Attackers routinely encrypt critical data and demand high ransom payments, forcing some to stop operation or continue to provide service at a reduced capacity. The exposure is not limited to finances. Breaches of personal records can instill distrust in an entity's operations.

Phishing, QR-code scams, and credential-harvesting campaigns remain frequent ways hackers disrupt school operations. Phishing attempts maintain high frequency as attackers frequently impersonate administrators or contractors to capture passwords or convince staff to send funds to different bank accounts.

Use of third-party educational apps or contracted services software increases the chances of such breaches. Just because a third-party software company contractually agrees to handle breaches due to their failures doesn't mean they have the capacity to.

## WHY ARE PUBLIC ENTITIES ATTRACTIVE TARGETS?

- **High-value data:** Patron identities, financial information, and more.
- **Under-resourced IT teams:** A good percentage of public entities report being underprepared for ransomware, and few have a dedicated cybersecurity specialist.
- **Legacy systems & fragmented infrastructure:** Many districts run outdated software or lack full multi-factor authentication (MFA).

## WHAT CAN BE DONE TO COMBAT THIS?

- **Adopt MFA (multi-factor authentication)** across all systems to reduce credential theft.
- **Establish a dedicated incident response plan**, with regular tabletop exercises.
- **Increase cybersecurity staffing or use managed security services** to offset resource constraints.
- **Conduct regular vulnerability assessments and phishing simulations** to keep staff alert.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU DISCOVER A BREACH?

- **Contact your cyber coverage provider as soon as possible.** Starting a response and plan to address these issues quickly is paramount to the successful resolution here.
- **Be honest with your provider.** The breach has happened, now is not the time to determine where the shortcoming was, that can be unwound later. Now is the time to help your provider with the most accurate information so they can devise a plan to help fix this.



# PUBLIC SAFETY EAP UPDATE

Several years ago, Special Districts Insurance Services (SDIS) recognized the importance of first responders' mental health and overall wellbeing and began offering the Public Safety EAP at no cost to all career firefighters in Oregon, as well as to first responders covered under our workers' compensation program.

Since that time, SDIS has stopped providing workers' compensation coverage. While the Public Safety EAP saw strong participation in its early years, utilization has steadily declined. Many employees are now accessing mental health services through their medical plans instead. Based on these trends, SDIS has decided to transition to a new EAP provider and align EAP coverage directly with the SDIS and OFCA medical plans.

## **WHAT'S CHANGING**

### **Beginning July 1, 2026:**

- All employees enrolled in the SDIS or OFCA health program will be automatically enrolled in the Canopy EAP.
- First responders enrolled in the SDIS or OFCA health program will have access to the Public Safety Canopy EAP, which is specifically designed to meet the unique needs of first responders.

## **EXPANDED COVERAGE FOR VOLUNTEERS**

We are pleased to share that SDIS will cover volunteers for fire and emergency service districts at no cost. If your district participates in the SDIS or OFCA medical plan, your volunteers will also be eligible for the Canopy EAP.

## **WHY THIS MATTERS**

This change streamlines our benefit offerings and strengthens the value of the SDIS and OFCA medical programs. Many SDIS-covered districts are already using Canopy, and this transition ensures consistent, accessible support.

## IF YOU ARE NOT ENROLLED IN THE SDIS OR OFCA MEDICAL PLANS

Districts not enrolled in the SDIS or OFCA medical plan will not be automatically enrolled in the Canopy EAP. However, support options may still be available.

- If your district is not on the SDIS or OFCA medical plan, you may:
  - Connect with Public Safety EAP or Canopy EAP directly to request a quote:
    - » Public Safety EAP: Jayme Robbins, [jaymerobbins@theeap.com](mailto:jaymerobbins@theeap.com)
    - » Canopy EAP: Shannon Morrison, [smorrison@canopywell.com](mailto:smorrison@canopywell.com)
  - Work with another EAP provider of your choice to secure coverage that best meets your needs.

These options allow districts to maintain access to important mental health and wellbeing resources for employees and first responders.

## NEXT STEPS

You may continue utilizing services through the Public Safety EAP until June 30, 2026. Beginning July 1, 2026, Public Safety EAP benefits will no longer be accessible under the SDIS plan. If your district would like to continue with Public Safety EAP and is not a part of the SDIS or OFCA medical plans, please contact Jayme Robbins ([jaymerobbins@theeap.com](mailto:jaymerobbins@theeap.com)) for assistance with setting up an account with them.

## AFTER JULY 1ST, PLEASE BE SURE TO:

- Update EAP flyers and posters at fire stations and other locations where employees typically access benefit information.
- Remove outdated materials to avoid confusion.

More information and updated resources will be shared as we approach the July 1, 2026 transition date. If you have any questions, please contact Shelly Barker at [sbarker@sdao.com](mailto:sbarker@sdao.com).



# LEADING WITH PURPOSE, BELIEF, AND IMPACT

BY: DEBORAH JEFFRIES  
HR ANSWERS



Leadership has never been easy — and it hasn't gotten any lighter lately. Leaders today are navigating constant change, rising expectations, burnout, and uncertainty, all while being asked to keep teams engaged, productive, and committed.

Positive leadership isn't about ignoring challenges or putting on a "happy face." It's about leading with purpose, belief, and intentional behaviors that create trust, resilience, and results — even when things are hard.

**At its core, positive leadership is an integrated approach:**

- **Purpose** — Why we lead. The meaning behind the work.
- **Belief** — Optimism, hope, resilience, and mindset.
- **Behavior** — Traits, habits, language, and daily actions.
- **Culture** — What gets reinforced, tolerated, and celebrated.
- **Results** — Engagement, trust, performance, and retention.

When leaders align these elements, leadership stops being reactive and starts being intentional.

**Purpose is the Fuel.** Goals matter — but purpose is what sustains energy and commitment. Purpose answers the "why." It gives people a North Star, especially during stressful or uncertain times. Many leaders are surprised to learn that burnout isn't always about workload — it's often about a loss of purpose. When leaders reconnect their teams to meaning, clarity, and direction, the results follow.

**Optimism is a Leadership Strength.** Real optimism doesn't deny reality — it combines belief with action. Positive leaders acknowledge obstacles while maintaining confidence that progress is possible. They model resilience, manage their own energy, and intentionally "weed out" negativity while "feeding" positivity through gratitude, recognition, and encouragement. Leaders don't just manage tasks — they transfer energy.

**Culture Is Created Daily.** Culture isn't a program or a poster. Culture is what leaders think, say, and do — every day.

What leaders tolerate becomes the standard. What leaders reinforce becomes the norm.

Positive leaders understand that consistency, integrity, and accountability shape the environment far more than policies ever will.

**Traits of Positive Leadership. Positive leadership shows up through observable traits and behaviors, including:**

- Care and support
- Authenticity and transparency
- Confidence and self-awareness
- Encouragement and optimism
- Accountability with empathy
- Mindfulness and self-control

These traits are not personality-based – they are learnable and practicable skills. The key is to take the insight of these traits and put them into practice. Positive leadership doesn't happen by accident. It requires intention:

- Choosing language carefully
- Supporting ownership within clear expectations
- Modeling the behavior you want to see
- Addressing negativity early
- Investing in growth and feedback

Leadership is not about perfection – it's about progress.

## **THE REQUEST, TAKE THIS BEYOND THE BLOG**

Positive leadership isn't something that lives on a slide deck or in a single training session – it's strengthened through conversation, reflection, and shared practice. Even if not everyone on your leadership team attends our upcoming program, there are meaningful ways to use and share these ideas right now:

### **1. SPARK A LEADERSHIP CONVERSATION**

Share this article with your leadership or management team and ask a simple question:

*“Which of these ideas shows up most in how we lead today – and which one do we want to strengthen?”*

This can be a powerful starting point for aligning expectations and leadership behaviors.

### **2. USE IT AS A REFLECTION TOOL**

Invite leaders to reflect individually on one question: How does my leadership behavior contribute to the culture I want – or the culture I'm getting?

Encouraging even brief reflection helps leaders become more intentional role models for their teams.

### **3. REINFORCE POSITIVE LEADERSHIP IN ACTION**

Use the concepts from this post to notice and name positive leadership behaviors when you see them. Calling out purpose, optimism, accountability, or encouragement in real time helps reinforce the behaviors you want more of – and reminds leaders that not only how they lead matters every day, but literally how they show up and “walk in the door” everyday matters – their employees are watching and listening.

Positive leadership grows when it's shared, discussed, and practiced – not just learned. Whether through conversation, reflection, or recognition, these ideas can start or restart shaping behaviors, the department, and reinforcing the culture you want.

## **JOIN US FOR A DEEPER DIVE**

If this resonates with you – or if you're feeling the weight of leadership more than ever – join us for our upcoming live, interactive webinar:

***Positive Leadership: Leading with Purpose, Belief, and Impact***  
**April 16 | 9:00–11:00am**

This session will go beyond theory and focus on practical tools, reflection, and application you can use immediately with your team.

# PREVENTION FIRST: SAFEGUARDING YOUTH AND VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

BY: MCKENZIE NIX, SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION CONSULTANT

Protecting children and other vulnerable populations is a responsibility shared by all special districts, especially those that offer programs or services involving youth. On the [new Sex Abuse Prevention resource page](#), it is emphasized that prevention is not limited to a single type of program, it applies across parks and recreation activities, summer camps, library programs, and even cadet and youth firefighter initiatives. The same is true for minors that are employees or volunteers. Wherever young people work or are served, districts have a duty to create environments that prioritize safety.

Taking proactive steps to prevent sexual abuse is essential, not only to protect individuals from harm, but also to safeguard districts from serious legal and reputational consequences. Prevention is far more effective than response, and districts that fail to act put both people and public trust at risk.

SDAO has created educational and awareness tools designed to help staff and leaders. These materials focus on prevention, reinforcing the importance of building a culture where safety is understood, discussed, and actively upheld. Additional tools and resources will be added to [the page soon](#).

## SDIS RECEIVES AGRIP RECOGNITION AWARD

Special Districts Insurance Services (SDIS) was honored with an AGRiP Recognition Award at the recent AGRiP Conference held in March, a milestone that reflects SDIS's continued commitment to excellence in public entity risk pooling. Executive Director Frank Stratton and SDIS Board of Trustees Chair Andrea Klaas (pictured) accepted the award on behalf of SDIS during the conference.

AGRiP Recognition is a structured framework that enables risk pools to conduct a comprehensive self-assessment against Advisory Standards developed from decades of industry experience and informed by current operating norms. Achieving Recognition signals a pool's dedication to strong governance, sound operations, and continuous improvement. Even for pools that do not pursue formal Recognition, the Advisory Standards serve as a valuable tool for evaluating operational strengths and areas for growth while encouraging learning and collaboration across the pooling community. For SDIS, this recognition underscores a culture focused on accountability, peer learning, and delivering high quality service to its members.



# PREVENTIVE SCREENINGS ARE 'NO-BRAINER' FOR SAVING LIVES AND COSTS



Regence

Chief Medical Officer Dr. Donna Milavetz urges employees to prioritize early detection as new research highlights dramatic impact of routine health screenings.

Recent research from Blue Cross Blue Shield has reinforced what healthcare professionals have long known: preventive health screenings save lives and significantly reduce healthcare costs. The data on colorectal and breast cancer screenings reveals a compelling case for early detection.

Dr. Donna Milavetz, Cambia's Chief Medical Officer, calls the evidence a "no-brainer" and is encouraging employees to take advantage of covered preventive services that are now more accessible than ever.

## COLORECTAL CANCER

- Preventive screening catches **81%** of cases early vs. 67% after symptoms appear
- Early detection (stage I) **costs less than half** of late-stage (stage IV) treatment
- Five-year survival rate:
  - Stages I and II: approx. **91%**
  - Stages III and IV: approx. 13%

## BREAST CANCER

- Preventive screening catches **86%** of cases early vs. 77% through diagnostic testing
- Early detection (stage I) **costs one-third** of late-stage (stage IV) treatment
- Five-year survival rate:
  - Stage I: approx. **91%**
  - Stage IV: approx. 33%

## THE POWER OF PREVENTION

"Most primary care doctors will tell you that an ounce of prevention is worth its weight in gold when it comes to saving downstream costs," Dr. Milavetz said in a recent interview. "Early detection and prevention help reduce disease burden and improve longevity."

The research shows that catching cancer early doesn't just improve survival rates — it dramatically reduces treatment costs. Early-stage cancer treatment costs a fraction of what late-stage care requires, making prevention both a health imperative and a financial one.

## **BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS TO CARE**

Dr. Milavetz, Medical Director at Regence BlueCross BlueShield, noted that mandatory coverage for preventive care didn't exist until the Affordable Care Act in 2010. Before that, cost barriers prevented many Americans from accessing these life-saving screenings.

### **Today, access has expanded in several practical ways:**

- Home testing options: Colon cancer screening kits like Cologuard or FIT can be completed at home in about 10 minutes and last for up to three years
- Direct scheduling: Women in Cambia's five-state footprint can schedule screening mammograms without a prescription
- Expanded provider networks: Pharmacists and, in some states, dentists can now administer vaccinations

## **WHY PEOPLE STILL SKIP SCREENINGS**

Despite improved access and coverage, many people still avoid preventive care. Dr. Milavetz identified several reasons: busy schedules, uncomfortable procedures, long wait times for appointments, and sometimes fear of discovering a health problem.

"I think people deprioritize health until they're sick. It's human nature — nothing's broken, nothing hurts, so why take time out of your busy life?" she explained.

But she offered a compelling analogy: "You change your car's oil every three months because you need that car to work for you every day. The body is a machine too. Why would you treat it differently?"

Dr. Milavetz emphasized that by the time symptoms appear, it's often too late for the most effective interventions. "Prevention is about getting ahead of symptoms, not reacting to them."

Dr. Milavetz's advice to employees is straightforward: "Schedule your annual wellness exam. Just do it. After reading this, pick up the phone and make the appointment."

She noted that many preventive services can be completed during a single annual wellness visit at no cost.

The message is clear: in an often uncontrollable world, preventive health screenings are something employees can control — and the benefits extend far beyond individual health to families, communities, and the healthcare system as a whole.



**Deadline: November 6, 2026**

# 2026 BEST PRACTICES Program

SDAO members in the property/liability program can receive up to a 10% discount on 2027 general liability, auto liability and property insurance contributions. There are five opportunities to earn 2% towards the total discount.

These opportunities include the following:

## 1. AFFILIATE ORGANIZATION MEMBERSHIP | *credit: 2%*

You will receive a 2% credit for being a member of any of the following affiliated organizations:

- Cemetery Association of Oregon
- Oregon APCO-NENA
- Oregon Association of Chiefs of Police
- Oregon Association of Clean Water Agencies
- Oregon Association of Conservation Districts
- Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems
- Oregon Association of Water Utilities
- Oregon Economic Development District Association
- Oregon Fire Chiefs Association
- Oregon Fire District Directors Association
- Oregon Library Association
- Oregon Mosquito and Vector Control Association
- Oregon People's Utility Districts Association
- Oregon PRIMA
- Oregon Public Ports Association
- Oregon Recreation and Park Association
- Oregon Rural Health Association
- Oregon Transit Association
- Oregon Water Resources Congress

## 2. SDAO/SDIS TRAINING | *credit: 2%*

At least one (1) representative of the district must complete a SDAO/SDIS training of the following listed options:

- Any SDAO Regional Training Summit - One or Two-Day Attendance Qualifies
- SDAO Annual Conference
- Metro Breakfast
- Board Practices Assessment

## 3. CHECKLIST | *credit: 2%*

To receive credit in this category, districts must complete the self-evaluation checklist that is available within the Best Practices Survey online ([www.sdis.org](http://www.sdis.org)).

## 4. POLICY REQUIREMENT | *credit: 2%*

In order to receive the 2% credit, districts must have adopted or have a current policy (updated within the last two years) in regard to public meetings. A sample policy will be provided in the SDAO Resource Library at [www.sdaoresourcelibrary.com](http://www.sdaoresourcelibrary.com).

## 5. PUBLIC MEETINGS TRAINING | *credit: 2%*

In order to receive the 2% credit, ALL members of the district's board must complete one of the following options:

1. Online public meetings training offered on Vector Solutions (formerly SafePersonnel). This training will be located in the course library and can be found by searching under the Special Districts Insurance Services tab, then search for Public Meetings in the search box.
2. In-person public meetings law training offered through the SDAO Consulting Services Program. To check availability please contact Consulting Services at [consultingservices@sdao.com](mailto:consultingservices@sdao.com).
3. An Oregon Government Ethics Commission (OGEC) approved training. Trainings can be found at:  
<https://www.oregon.gov/ogec/training/Pages/Public-Meetings-Law-Training.aspx>

## RECEIVING CREDIT

To receive credit, a district representative must complete the Best Practices Survey (located online on the SDIS Insurance Site) and click the Save button at the upper right-hand corner of the screen. Credit will only be awarded in a category when a box within that section is checked. If you cannot answer “yes” to at least one question within that category, credit will not be recorded. The survey **must** be submitted by a district representative who will verify completion of the credit requirements within the survey. Training credits taken by members are not automatically updated in the Best Practices Survey and must be manually checked off by the member. **Please note, each district is responsible for completing their own survey online. The deadline to complete the survey is November 6, 2026.**

1. If you have any questions regarding the Best Practices Program or need help completing it online, please contact Jaime Keeling at [jkeeling@sdao.com](mailto:jkeeling@sdao.com) or **800.285.5461 ext. 122**.

**CONTACT SDAO**

**Administrators for SDIS**  
Toll-Free: 800-285-5461

**GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS**

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

**MEMBER SERVICES**

Toll-Free: 800-285-5461  
Email: [memberservices@sdao.com](mailto:memberservices@sdao.com)  
Fax: 503-371-4781

**UNDERWRITING**

Toll-Free: 800-285-5461  
Email: [underwriting@sdao.com](mailto:underwriting@sdao.com)  
Fax: 503-371-4781

**RISK MANAGEMENT**

Toll-Free: 800-285-5461  
Email: [riskmanagement@sdao.com](mailto:riskmanagement@sdao.com)  
Fax: 503-371-4781

**REPORT AN SDIS P/C CLAIM**

Toll-Free: 800-305-1736  
Email: [claims@sdao.com](mailto:claims@sdao.com)  
Fax: 503-620-9817

## MEMBER CALENDAR

- April 1* **SDIS Board of Trustees Meeting: Hood River**
- April 2* **SDIS Board of Trustees and SDAO Board of Directors Joint Meeting: Hood River**
- April 2* **SDAO Board of Directors Meeting: Hood River**
- April 14-15* **SDAO Regional Training Summit: Pendleton**
- April 15* **Spring Cybersecurity Summit: Corvallis**
- April 16* **NSDA Webinar: Federal Grants with The Ferguson Group Brown Bag Discussion**
- May 25* **Memorial Day – SDAO Offices Closed**
- June 3* **SDIS Board of Trustees Meeting: Tigard**
- June 4* **NSDA Webinar: Governance and Parliamentary Procedures**
- June 11* **SDAO Board of Directors Meeting: Salem**
- June 24* **NSDA Webinar: Website ADA and PDF Accessibility**
- June 24-25* **SDAO Regional Training Summit: Klamath Falls**

