ESD FAQs

This information is provided for educational purposes only.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

1. **What is an Emergency Service District (ESD)?**

Simply put, an ESD is a political subdivision of the State of Texas similar to a school district or a hospital district, created under Texas Health and Safety Code, Chapter 775 or Chapter 776 as a means to better provide public funding for urban, suburban and rural emergency services organizations.

1. **What does an ESD do?**

Depending on the ESD’s creation documents, an ESD can provide fire protection, emergency medical services or both.

1. **How are ESDs created?**

ESDs are crated through a “grassroots” effort. A petition signed by at least 100 voters in the proposed district must be presented to the County Commissioners’ Court in the county (or counties) in which the ESD is intended to exist. If the ESD is deemed feasible and necessary by the Commissioners Court, an election is called in which the voters in the proposed District must elect to create the District. If a majority of the votes are cast in favor of creation, the District is created.

1. **What might the timeline of events look like should an ESD be approved?**

If Andrews voters approve the creation of an Emergency Services District (ESD) on November 4, 2025, a defined series of steps occur, each with specific timelines and statutory requirements. Below is an estimated timeline of key post-election events, based on ESD processes documented by other ESD organizations:

Nov. 2025

* Commissioners Court canvasses election results
* Commissioners Court enters a formal "Order Creating the District"
* Commissioners Court appoints a committee to recommend Board members
* Commissioners Court requests Board member applications

Dec. 2025

* Committee reviews Board member applications

Jan. – Mar. 2026

* Commissioners Court appoints five members to the initial ESD board
* Board members complete required 6 hours of training
* Board adopts bylaws, elects officers, and establishes meeting procedures
* Board applies for an Employer Identification Number (EIN)
* Board makes Interlocal Agreement with existing entities for ESD services
* Board submits creation and annual reports with County clerk and TDEM
* Board establishes banking relationships and accounting systems

Apr. - Jul. 2026

* Board works with the appraisal district to obtain the ESD’s property tax base
* Board determines service priorities and works on initial budget

Aug. 2026

* Board proposes and adopts initial budget/tax rate

Oct. 2026

* ESD’s first fiscal year begins

Nov. 2026

* ESD begins collecting first tax levy

Jan. 2027

* Board hires chief.

2027-2028

* ESD begins to hire staff and purchase equipment, vehicles, and facilities as funds become available. Full operational capacity may take up to 3 years, depending on funding, infrastructure needs, and service agreements.

1. **How many ESDs currently exist in the State of Texas?**

Currently, there are over 300 ESDs in Texas.

**GOVERNANCE**

1. **How are ESDs governed?**

A board of five commissioners governs ESDs. In most counties in Texas, the County Commissioners Court appoints the commissioners to two-year terms. (Commissioners are elected for ESDs in Harris, Orange, and Smith counties, as well as for ESDs that exist in more than one county.) Even though ESD commissioners are appointed by County Commissioners Courts, ESDs are independent governmental entities, responsible for their own decision-making.

1. **Do ESD boards have meetings?**

By law, ESD boards must meet at least once a month. All meetings are subject to the Texas Open Meetings Act. ESDs must also comply with the Texas Public Information Act concerning open records requests and records retention.

1. **What are the qualifications for an ESD Commissioner?**

To be eligible for appointment as an ESD Commissioner, a person must be: (1) at least 18 years of age; and (2) a resident citizen of the state that is a qualified voter within the ESD; or an owner of land subject to taxation in the ESD. Texas Health and Safet Code Chapter 775 requires that the commissioners court consider whether the individuals have knowledge of fire prevention or emergency services and knowledge that is relevant to the common policies of the Board.

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

**FINANCES**

1. **Where does an ESD get its money?**

If voters approve the creation of an ESD, property owners within its boundaries will pay a property tax to support it. As a political subdivision of the state, an ESD may levy an ad valorem (property) tax of up to $0.10 per $100 of property valuation, as authorized by voters. The district’s creation documents establish the initial tax rate, and the funds collected are dedicated to providing emergency services within the ESD’s jurisdiction.

For perspective, if an ESD is taxing at the maximum rate, a home valued at $200,000 would pay about $200 per year—or roughly $16.67 per month.

Currently, emergency services are funded in other ways. EMS is paid for entirely by the Andrews County Hospital District (ACHD), which has budgeted just over $2.7 million for FY2026—equal to about 3.0 cents per $100 of property valuation. Fire protection is funded jointly by Andrews County and the City of Andrews, with a combined FY2026 Volunteer Fire Department budget of about $700,000. This equates to approximately 0.4 cents per $100 valuation for the County and 2.9 cents per $100 valuation for the City.

If an ESD is created with a maximum tax rate lower than $0.10 per $100, any future increase to that ceiling would require voter approval. In addition to property taxes, ESDs may also generate revenue by billing for services provided—such as EMS or fire protection—if the Board chooses to do so.

1. **How are ESDs required to be financially accountable and transparent?**

As a political subdivision, ESDs must comply with all Truth-in-Taxation requirements.

Unless the ESD falls under an exception, ESDs are required by law to file an audit with their County Commissioners Court by June 1 of each year. If the audit is not filed by Sept. 1, the President and Treasurer of the ESD board are automatically removed from their offices.

**OPERATIONS**

1. **Do ESDs support only full-time Fire and EMS departments?**

No. While many ESDs support full-time emergency personnel, many others contract with or support all-volunteer departments or combination (career and volunteer) departments.

1. **If I call 911, what changes should I expect in emergency response?**

If an ESD funds full-time staffing, response times may improve. National standards for career fire departments recommend that crews be ready to leave the station within 80 seconds or less for 90% of calls. Having a four-person crew on the engine means emergency operations—such as beginning fire suppression or providing medical care—can start right away upon arrival.

Volunteer firefighters will often follow soon after, adding additional support and manpower as needed. This combination of a full-time crew for rapid response and volunteers for reinforcement helps ensure that emergencies are handled both quickly and with sufficient resources.

1. **Will the formation of an ESD impact job opportunities for local residents?**

The establishment of an ESD may create new employment opportunities. These could include positions for trained firefighters as part of a paid staff, as well as potential administrative roles to support day-to-day operations. The specific number and type of positions would depend on the structure and needs of the ESD if implemented.

1. **Is there a reference guide for the administration and operation of ESDs in Texas?**

The Texas State Association of Fire and Emergency Districts “ESD Handbook” can be found at the following link:

[**SAFED\_Handbook17-52312f44-cdaa-4967-9b3c-60f7eaf2bf18.pdf**](https://growthzonecmsprodeastus.azureedge.net/sites/1593/2019/10/SAFED_Handbook17-52312f44-cdaa-4967-9b3c-60f7eaf2bf18.pdf)

1. **If an ESD is created, will the Andrews Volunteer Fire Department continue to operate?**

If an ESD is formed, the Andrews Volunteer Fire Department could continue to serve the community as part of a combination fire department. In this model, volunteer and paid (career) firefighters work side by side to provide fire protection and emergency response. The specific structure, staffing levels, and roles would be set by the ESD’s governing board, taking into account the community’s needs and the resources available.

1. **Who will own the Fire/EMS stations and equipment, and who is responsible for their upkeep?**

If an ESD is created, the City and County will transfer ownership of existing Fire and EMS facilities and equipment to the new district. From that point forward, the ESD—being its own governmental entity—will assume full financial responsibility for operating, maintaining, and replacing those assets as needed.

**OTHER**

1. **Will the establishment of an ESD lower my property insurance?**

Establishing an ESD could affect the community’s Insurance Service Office (ISO) rating. If ratings improve, some property owners may see lower premiums.

1. **Will the ACHD, County, and City lower their property tax rates if an ESD is approved?**

If voters approve the creation of an ESD, responsibility for funding fire protection and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) would eventually shift from the Andrews County Hospital District (ACHD), Andrews County, and the City of Andrews to the new district. Because it will take time for an ESD to become financially self-sufficient, the three entities have agreed to continue funding services at current levels until the ESD is fully operational and financially stable. This ensures that the community continues to receive uninterrupted, high-quality emergency services during the transition. While tax rates could change in the future due to other factors, they will not be adjusted solely because an ESD is created.

Currently, EMS is funded entirely by the ACHD, with a FY2026 budget of just over $2.7 million—equivalent to about 3.0 cents per $100 of property valuation. Fire protection is funded by Andrews County and the City of Andrews, with a combined FY2026 Volunteer Fire Department budget of about $700,000. This equates to approximately 0.4 cents per $100 valuation for the County and 2.9 cents per $100 valuation for the City.

Once the ESD is financially independent and providing services directly, each governing body will evaluate whether adjustments to their tax rates are feasible. It is important to note, however, that no commitment can be made today regarding future tax rates. Tax rate decisions are influenced by a variety of factors, including community needs, legislative changes, and economic conditions. Additionally, one elected governing body cannot obligate a future governing body to take specific tax rate actions.

1. **If an ESD is created, will my homestead exemption apply to its property taxes?**

Homestead exemptions may apply to property taxes levied by an Emergency Services District (ESD), depending on decisions made by the ESD's governing board.

Here's a breakdown:

* Optional percentage exemptions: ESDs, like other taxing units in Texas, may choose to offer a homestead exemption of up to 20% of a home's appraised value.
* Optional exemptions for seniors and individuals with disabilities: ESDs may also choose to provide an exemption of at least $3,000 for property owners who are age 65 or older or who have a qualifying disability.

Important distinction: The mandatory $100,000 homestead exemption applies only to school districts in Texas. ESD exemptions are optional and must be specifically adopted by the ESD. To know whether these exemptions will apply, you would need to refer to the specific policies adopted by the ESD if and when it is formed.