

## Budget pact hits special districts, library

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SANTA CRUZ — Fax machines, calculators and blue pencils got a workout Thursday, as the state budget battle finally came home.

Frustrated county budget analysts scratched their heads over the convoluted language of state spending bills. Special districts scanned their budgets to see where they could squeeze and trim to absorb what's shaping up to be 10 percent hits — without gutting fire, library and water services.

Fewer on-duty firefighters and closing library branches are some of the more dramatic options being discussed. Freezes on hiring and equipment are certain, officials said, while virtually all agencies are putting capital improvement projects on hold.

"This special district stuff is what scares me the most," said Pat Busch, assistant county administrative officer. "Special districts are very important to us in Santa Cruz County. ... Fire, library, parks and recreation, lighting — (special districts) are very important vehicles for those kinds of services."

More than half of the county's residents live in rural, unincorporated areas, Busch said. Statewide, the average is 25 percent, while in Santa Clara, by contrast, only 10 percent of residents live in unincorporated areas.

The figures are significant, he said, because cities got off relatively lightly in the recent budget bloodletting, with counties and special districts taking the lion's share

of the cuts.

Cities throughout the state lost some \$200 million — some 9 percent of their property tax revenues, he said. Counties and special districts cuts start at 10 percent, and total some \$900 million statewide.

Statewide, special districts lost some \$375 million from their budget. But the cut is not across-the-board, and most local agencies don't yet know precisely how much they're going to lose.

Branch closings and shorter hours are on the list of options for the city/county public library system, which is looking at an estimated loss of 10 percent of its budget, perhaps \$450,000, said Busch.

Two-thirds of that funding comes from the county, Busch said, and

the city supplies the other third.

"There probably are going to be some cutbacks," said John Mahaney, chairman of the Library Oversight Committee.

Mahaney said the committee looked for places to cut its budget last month, in anticipation of the cuts. Library director Anne Turner is expected to make her recommendations to the committee at its Sept. 14 meeting.

Last week, as the state ended its second month without a budget, Turner said she could not guarantee that no branches would close.

The library includes 10 branches and some 138 full and part-time employees. Personnel costs take about 62 cents of each library dollar, she said.

"If you're contemplating 10 per-

cent cuts in the budget, you have to look at cutting personnel," Turner said. "And that means cutting hours (the branches are open)."

The library has already put a freeze on buying new materials, and has left several vacant positions unfilled.

One unfilled vacancy will soon suspend a popular program that takes Spanish-language paperbacks and story hours to children living in the county's migrant camps.

An indication of the budget's complexity is that Scotts Valley Fire District officials are reviewing a summary that is 16 pages long, said Division Chief Mel Angel.

A 10 percent cut would take about \$300,000 of the district's \$3 million budget, Angel said. Some

likely cuts would include:

- Sick or vacationing employees won't be replaced, to avoid paying overtime.

- A \$100,000 addition to the district's Erba Lane administration office will be postponed.

- Upgrading or replacing the small Sims Road Station, estimated at \$250,000 to \$500,000, would go on hold.

- The department will use up its reserve and contingency funds.

"We've gone as far as we can go without laying people off or cutting positions," Angel said. "... We can certainly understand the problem the state is having. Everybody is having to cut back and we're willing to do what we can. But the \$300,000 is going to take us down to where you're right on the edge of sacrificing public safety."