

Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFG)



Preserve Funding for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program

AFG is key to adequately equipping the nation's first responders and ensuring a high level of protection against fires, natural disasters, terrorism, and other emergencies across the United States.

The Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program was established by Congress in 2001 to assist communities in equipping our nation's first responders, including firefighters and EMS personnel. Through AFG, local fire departments may apply for grants to purchase new and needed equipment, much of which replaces older, outdated equipment that no longer meets standards established by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). AFG provides funding to equip firefighters and other first responders, helping to provide a universal level of protection across the United States, and ensuring public safety. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) administers the grants in cooperation with the United States Fire Administration (USFA).

Through the FEMA program, fire departments of all sizes purchase personal protective clothing (PPE), self-contained breathing apparatuses (SCBA), personal alert safety system (PASS) devices, fire apparatuses, and other essential safety and response equipment. AFG is extremely important to every state's first responders.

FAMA and FEMSA. The Fire Apparatus Manufacturers' Association (FAMA) and the Fire and Emergency Manufacturers and Services Association (FEMSA) represent "the industry that helps first responders save lives" by manufacturing and supporting the lifesaving equipment utilized by first responders. Member companies are predominately U.S.-based, employ approximately 90,653 U.S. workers, and tend to be small and medium-sized businesses.

Reauthorization. In 2012 Congress reauthorized the AFG program for five years (through FY 2017) at a level of \$750 million, annually indexed to inflation. Twenty-five percent of annual grant funds must be awarded to volunteer, career, and "combination" fire departments each; an additional 10% of funds are available for open competition among all three categories of departments;

10% of funds must be awarded to fire prevention and safety organizations; and 2% to non-affiliated EMS organizations. Congress also reauthorized the SAFER (hiring) program and the U.S. Fire Administration.

Appropriations. For the AFG program, Congress appropriated \$565 million in FY 2009; \$390 million in FY 2010; \$405 million in FY 2011; \$337.5 million in FY 2012; and \$337.5 million in FY 2013. Due to sequestration, the AFG program was cut an additional 5.1% in FY 2013, leaving the program with a total of \$320 million. However, Congress made up for the 5.1% cut by not charging the AFG program for its administrative costs (about 5%). Congress thereby provided almost the same amount for grant awards to fire departments as in FY 2012. The President's FY 2014 budget proposes that Congress fund the AFG program at \$335 million. The SAFER program would also be funded at \$335 million with the President's budget, bringing the total funding for fire grants to \$670 million.

Efficient and effective. AFG is one of the most efficiently-run and effective programs in the federal government. Funds are distributed directly to local fire departments and are also devoted to program administration. Bureaucracy is minimal and local community benefit is maximized.

America's fire service. In 2011, the nation's fire and rescue services responded to over 30 million calls to protect the public. These firefighters and EMS personnel serve as the backbone of the nation's first response capabilities for both natural disasters and potential terrorist attacks. As the population ages and expands, this number is expected increase significantly.

The nation has approximately 1.1 million fire and rescue personnel, with over 756,400 (69%) of these serving as volunteers. Without such service, the nation's response capability would be seriously compromised and no longer universal, serving all communities.