

CRS Report for Congress

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United States Fire Administration: An Overview

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Summary

The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) — which includes the National Fire Academy (NFA) — is currently an entity within the Directorate for Preparedness of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Its objective is to significantly reduce the nation's loss of life from fire, while also achieving a reduction in property loss and non-fatal injury due to fire. A major issue in the 109th Congress has been the viability and status of the USFA and NFA within the Department of Homeland Security. The FY2006 appropriation for the USFA is \$40.037 million. The President's FY2007 budget requests \$40.887 million in FY2007. On June 6, 2006, the House passed the FY2007 DHS appropriations bill (H.R. 5441) approving \$40.887 million for USFA, the same as the President's request. On July 13, 2006, the Senate passed H.R. 5441, also approving \$40.887 million for USFA. This report will be updated as events warrant.

Background

The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) — formerly a part of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) — is currently an entity within the Directorate for Preparedness of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Its mission is to provide leadership, coordination, and support for the nation's fire prevention and control, fire training and education, and emergency medical services activities, and to prepare first responders and health care leaders to react to all hazard and terrorism emergencies of all kinds. One of USFA's key objectives is to significantly reduce the nation's loss of life from fire, while also achieving a reduction in property loss and non-fatal injury due to fire. Although fire loss has improved significantly over the past 25 years, the fire problem in the U.S. remains serious. The U.S. still has one of the highest fire death rates in the industrialized world, with 14.8 deaths per million population. According to the National Fire Protection Association, in 2005 there were 3,675 civilian fire deaths, 17,925 civilian

fire injuries, and an estimated \$10.672 billion in direct property loss.¹ According to the U.S. Fire Administration, there were 115 firefighter on-duty deaths in 2005.²

The genesis of USFA and FEMA's fire prevention and control activities can be found in the landmark 1973 report of the National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control,³ entitled *America Burning*. The Commission recommended the creation of a federal fire agency which would provide support to state and local governments and private fire organizations in their efforts to reduce fire deaths, injuries, and property loss. The Commission recommended that this new agency be placed within the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Congress instead opted to place the agency in the Department of Commerce, and with the passage of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (P.L. 93-498),⁴ the National Fire Prevention and Control Administration (NFPCA) was established. In 1978, Congress changed the name of NFPCA to USFA (P.L. 95-422), and in 1979, President Carter's Reorganization Plan No. 3 placed the USFA within the newly created FEMA. Also in 1979, the National Fire Academy (NFA) in Emmitsburg, Maryland was opened, offering courses and training to fire service personnel and other persons engaged in fire prevention and control.

During the early 1980s, the Reagan Administration proposed the elimination of the USFA (while preserving the Fire Academy). Although Congress did not allow the termination of the USFA, the agency suffered severe staff reductions and the Fire Academy was separated from the USFA and housed organizationally with other FEMA emergency training programs. In 1991, the NFA was subsequently reorganized back into the USFA, where it remains today.

Currently, the USFA is located on the grounds of the National Emergency Training Center in Emmitsburg, Maryland. USFA programs include the following:

Data Collection — USFA's National Fire Data Center (NFDC) administers a national system for collecting, analyzing and disseminating data and information on fire and other emergency incidents to State and local governments and the fire community. The NFDC provides a national analysis of the fire problem, identifying problem areas for which prevention and mitigation strategies are needed.

Public Education and Awareness — Through partnerships and special initiatives, USFA involves the fire service, the media, other federal agencies and safety interest groups in the development and delivery of fire safety awareness and education programs. These programs are targeted at those groups most vulnerable to the hazards of fire, including the young, elderly, and disabled.

¹ Karter, Michael J., National Fire Protection Association, *Fire Loss in the United States During 2005*, July 2006, available at [<http://www.nfpa.org/assets/files/PDF/OS.fireloss.pdf>].

² U.S. Fire Administration, *Firefighter Fatalities in the United States in 2005*, FA-306, July 2006, Available at [<http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/fa-306-508.pdf>].

³ The Commission was created by P.L. 90-259, the Fire Research and Safety Act of 1968.

⁴ 15 U.S.C. 2201 *et seq.*

Training — USFA’s National Fire Academy (NFA) offers educational opportunities for the advanced professional development of the mid-level and senior fire/EMS officer and allied professionals involved in fire prevention and life safety activities. The Academy develops and delivers educational and training programs with a national focus that supplement and support State and local fire service training. The NFA also offers training to support the National Incident Management System Integration Center (NIC) and nationwide implementation of the National Incident Management System (NIMS). Also affiliated with USFA is the Noble Training Center — located at Fort McClellan, Alabama — which trains emergency managers and health care professionals to manage a mass casualty event resulting from natural disasters, technological incidents, and acts of terrorism.

Technology — Through research, testing and evaluation, USFA works with public and private entities to promote and improve fire and life safety. Research and special studies are conducted on fire detection, suppression and notification systems as well as issues related to firefighter and emergency responder health and safety. Research results are published and made available to the public free of charge through the USFA Publications Center.

Budget

In previous years, the USFA, through FEMA, received its yearly appropriation through the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on VA, HUD, and Independent Agencies. Beginning in FY2004, the USFA received its appropriation through the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Homeland Security. The USFA is authorized in the House by the Committee on Science, Subcommittee on Basic Research. The USFA is authorized in the Senate by the Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs.

Appropriations. Beginning in FY2004, the USFA was funded through the Preparedness, Mitigation, Response, and Recovery (PMRR) account within the Emergency Preparedness and Response Directorate of the Department of Homeland Security. On July 13, 2005, DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff announced a restructuring of DHS, effective October 1, 2005. USFA was removed from the PMRR account and now receives a separate appropriation (its own line item) under the new DHS Directorate for Preparedness. The USFA appropriation appears as “United States Fire Administration and Training” within Title III of the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations bill. The appropriation includes funding for the Noble Training Center, a hospital facility in Fort McClellan, AL used to train hospital and health care professionals in disaster preparedness and response.

FY2006. The Administration’s July 22, 2005 FY2006 budget amendments for DHS restructuring requested \$44.948 million for USFA and Training in FY2006, which included \$4.5 million for the Noble Training Center. The Conference Report for the FY2006 Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill (H.R. 2360; H.Rept. 109-241) set USFA and Training at \$44.948 million and moved the program into the new Preparedness Directorate. The Department of Homeland Security Act (P.L. 109-90) was signed into law on October 18, 2005. The government-wide 1% rescission mandated by the FY2006 Department of Defense appropriations bill (P.L. 109-115) lowered the

FY2006 appropriation to \$44.499 million. See Table 1 for a recent history of USFA appropriations.

The Senate Appropriations Committee bill report to H.R. 2360 (S.Rept. 109-83) directed DHS to commission a study of the preparedness of local fire departments to meet traditional and post 9/11 requirements. The Appropriations Committee encouraged the use of an “independent organization” to conduct the study, and noted that the last comprehensive study, “A Needs Assessment of the U.S. Fire Service,” was conducted in December 2002.

FY2007. The President’s budget proposal requests \$46.849 million for USFA and Training in FY2007. This reflects an increase of 5% over the FY2006 level. Of the total requested increase of \$2.35 million, \$1.5 million is designated for the Noble Training Center for the funding of new training curriculum and an additional FTE to prepare medical emergency personnel to manage the effects of natural disasters, terrorist attacks, and other catastrophic events. The remaining amount of the increase (\$0.85 million) will cover USFA mandatory cost increases associated with payroll and inflationary costs. On May 17, 2006, the House Appropriations Committee approved \$46.849 million for USFA and Training (H.R. 5441; H.Rept. 109-476), the same as the President’s request. Of the total USFA and Training appropriation, the Committee specified \$5.962 million for the Noble Training Center. H.R. 5441 was passed by the House on June 6, 2006. On June 29, 2006, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved \$45.887 million for USFA and Training (S.Rept. 109-273), including \$5 million for the Noble Training Center. H.R. 5441 was passed by the Senate on July 13, 2006.

Table 1. Appropriations, U.S. Fire Administration and Training
(\$ millions)

	FY2006 (enacted)	FY2007 Admin. request	FY2007 (House passed)	FY2007 (Senate passed)
U.S. Fire Administration	40.037	40.887	40.887	40.887
Noble Training Center	4.462	5.962	5.962	5.0
Total, USFA and Training	44.499	46.849	46.849	45.887

Authorizations. The U.S. Fire Administration Reauthorization Act of 2003 (P.L. 108-169) was signed into law on December 6, 2003. The act reauthorizes the USFA through FY2008 at the following levels: \$63 million for FY2005, \$64.85 million for FY2006, \$66.796 million for FY2007, and \$68.8 million for FY2008. P.L. 108-169 also reestablishes the Presidentially-appointed position of the U.S. Fire Administrator, which had been statutorily abolished by the Homeland Security Act of 2002. Additionally, the legislation (incorporating S. 321/H.R. 545, Firefighting Research and Coordination Act) directs the USFA to develop new firefighting technologies and standards in coordination with private sector standards groups and federal, state, and local agencies. P.L. 108-169 requires that equipment purchased with fire grant money meet or exceed voluntary consensus standards when feasible.

Assistance to Firefighters Program (FIRE Act Grants)⁵

During the 106th Congress, many in the fire community asserted that local fire departments require and deserve greater support from the federal government. Accordingly, H.R. 1168, the Firefighter Investment and Response Enhancement (FIRE) Act, was introduced on March 17, 1999 by Representative Pascrell. Ultimately, FIRE Act authorization language was incorporated into Title XVII of the FY2001 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 106-398, H.R. 4205/H.R. 5408), which was signed into law on October 30, 2000. P.L. 106-398 established a new office in FEMA to administer grants to fire departments and fire prevention organizations for a variety of purposes, including hiring and training personnel, prevention programs, equipment and facilities, and public education.

At its inception, the fire grant program was administered by the USFA and focused on enhancing the basic needs of fire departments across the nation. Since FY2004, the fire grant program has been administered by the Office for Domestic Preparedness (ODP) and (in FY2005) by the Office of State and Local Government Coordination Preparedness (OSLGCP). Congressional appropriations reports have instructed DHS to maintain USFA involvement in the grant administration process. The FY2006 DHS restructuring plan placed the fire grants (as well as the SAFER grants⁶) within the Office of Grants and Training in the DHS Directorate for Preparedness.

Issues

A major issue in the 109th Congress has been the viability and status of the USFA and National Fire Academy within the Department of Homeland Security. While initially supportive of the reorganization of FEMA into DHS, many in the fire service community have cautioned that USFA and NFA programs — which address the day-to-day challenges faced by fire departments — should not be overshadowed in an organization which focuses on homeland security and counterterrorism. Since the establishment of DHS in March 2003, fire service groups have opposed a number of actions DHS has taken with respect to the USFA and NFA. These include the abolishment of the presidentially-appointed position of U.S. Fire Administrator (subsequently reestablished by enactment of the USFA Reauthorization Act); proposed cancellations of some NFA courses in 2003 due to an across-the-board FEMA budget cut (those NFA courses were subsequently restored after fire service protests); and the transfer of the fire grants program from the USFA to the Office for Domestic Preparedness. On July 13, 2005, DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff announced a restructuring of DHS, effective October 1, 2005. Under this restructuring, USFA was removed from FEMA and located under the new DHS Directorate for Preparedness.

During the First Session of the 109th Congress, fire service groups expressed concerns that USFA and NFA programs were being progressively diminished by DHS,

⁵ For more information, see CRS Report RS21302, *Assistance to Firefighters Program*, by Lennard G. Kruger.

⁶ For more details on the SAFER grant program, see CRS Report RL33375, *Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response: The SAFER Grant Program*, by Lennard G. Kruger.

pointing to reductions in the USFA and NFA budget since FEMA was incorporated into DHS. On February 24, 2005, the International Association of Fire Chiefs convened a summit meeting of 18 major fire service organizations to address concerns about the USFA and NFA budget and to discuss the position and status of the fire service within DHS. At the summit meeting, then-USFA Administrator Paulison presented a detailed look at the USFA budget. Administrator Paulison maintained that while some USFA programs have been cut over the past four years, the cuts have not been dramatic, the budget remains manageable, and that some programs are getting funds under new programs at DHS.⁷

At the summit, the fire service identified five policy goals: (1) America's fire services must be represented by fire chiefs and other senior fire service officials within the office of the Secretary of Homeland Security and in key positions throughout the department; (2) the U.S. Fire Administration must occupy a key position and function in a comprehensive role within the Department of Homeland Security proportionate to the responsibilities of the fire services in responding to incidents of terrorism and all hazards events; (3) the Office of Management and Budget and the Department of Homeland Security need to recognize and designate the U.S. Fire Administration and the National Fire Academy as being "homeland security critical" in the federal budgeting process; (4) the U.S. Fire Administration and the National Fire Academy must be fully funded to the authorized levels to support the ongoing mission to reflect contemporary issues and community risks; and that (5) to ensure the most effective utilization of training resources, the Department of Homeland Security should be required to work more closely with the National Fire Academy and state and local fire training academies regarding the use of curriculum and the delivery system for terrorism response training.

Legislation in the second session of the 109th Congress would provide for a further organizational restructuring of the USFA. H.R. 5316, the RESPOND Act of 2006, would transfer USFA to a reconstituted, cabinet-level independent FEMA. H.R. 5316 was reported by the House Committee on Government Reform on June 22, 2006 (H.Rept. 109-519, Part I) and ordered to be reported by the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure on May 17, 2006. H.R. 5351, the National Emergency Management Reform and Enhancement Act of 2006, ordered to be reported by the House Select Committee on Homeland Security on May 17, 2006, would transfer the USFA into a newly created Directorate of Emergency Management within DHS. In the Senate, the United States Emergency Management Authority Act of 2006 (Title VIII of Senate-passed H.R. 5441, the DHS appropriations bill) and the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 (S. 3721, reported by the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs on July 27, 2006) would locate the USFA within a United States Emergency Management Authority within DHS.

⁷ "Paulison Offers Status Report at IAFC Summit Meeting," *Fire Chief*, March 1, 2005, available at [<http://firechief.com/ar/paulison-status-report/>].