



Assistance to Firefighters Program: Distribution of Fire Grant Funding

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August 28, 2009

Congressional Research Service

7-5700

www.crs.gov

RL32341

Summary

The Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Program, also known as fire grants or the FIRE Act grant program, was established by Title XVII of the FY2001 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 106-398). Currently administered by the Grant Programs Directorate of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the program provides federal grants directly to local fire departments and unaffiliated Emergency Medical Services (EMS) organizations to help address a variety of equipment, training, and other firefighter-related and EMS needs. A related program is the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters (SAFER) program, which provides grants for hiring, recruiting, and retaining firefighters.

The fire grant program is now in its ninth year. Over \$4.8 billion has been appropriated to the fire grant program since FY2001. The Fire Act statute was reauthorized in 2004 (Title XXXVI of P.L. 108-375) and provides overall guidelines on how fire grant money should be distributed. There is no set geographical formula for the distribution of fire grants—fire departments throughout the nation apply, and award decisions are made by a peer panel based on the merits of the application and the needs of the community. However, the law does require that fire grants be distributed to a diverse mix of fire departments, with respect to type of department (paid, volunteer, or combination), geographic location, and type of community served (e.g. urban, suburban, or rural).

On February 17, 2009, the President signed P.L. 111-5, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. The ARRA included an additional \$210 million in firefighter assistance grants for modifying, upgrading, or constructing state and local non-federal fire stations, provided that 5% be set aside for program administration and provided that no grant shall exceed \$15 million. The application period for Assistance to Firefighters Fire Station Construction Grants (SCG) grants opened on June 11 and will close on July 10, 2009.

For FY2010, the Obama Administration is proposing \$170 million for fire grants, a 70% decrease from the FY2009 level, and \$420 million for SAFER, double the amount appropriated in FY2009. The total amount requested for firefighter assistance (AFG and SAFER) is \$590 million, a 24% decrease from FY2009. The House-passed FY2010 Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill (H.R. 2892) provided \$810 million for firefighter assistance, including \$390 million for AFG and \$420 million for SAFER. The Senate-passed version of H.R. 2892 also provided \$810 million for firefighter assistance, including \$390 million for AFG and \$420 million for SAFER.

The Obama Administration's FY2010 budget proposal for firefighter assistance is likely to receive heightened scrutiny from the fire community, given what was viewed as inadequate past budget proposals by the Bush Administration, and given the national economic downturn and local budgetary cutbacks that many fire departments are now facing. Meanwhile, reauthorization legislation for AFG and SAFER will be introduced into the 111th Congress. Debate over the AFG reauthorization is likely to reflect a competition for funding between career/urban/suburban departments and volunteer/rural departments. The urgency of this debate will be heightened by the probable reduction of overall AFG funding in FY2010, and the economic downturn in many local communities increasingly hard pressed to allocate funding for their local fire departments.

This report will be updated as events warrant.

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Background

Firefighting activities are traditionally the responsibility of states and local communities. As such, funding for firefighters is provided mostly by state and local governments. During the 1990s, shortfalls in state and local budgets, coupled with increased responsibilities of local fire departments, led many in the fire community to call for additional financial support from the federal government. Although federally funded training programs existed (and continue to exist) through the National Fire Academy, and although federal money was available to first responders for counterterrorism training and equipment through the Department of Justice,¹ there did not exist a dedicated program, exclusively for firefighters, which provided federal money directly to local fire departments to help address a wide variety of equipment, training, and other firefighter-related needs.

Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program

During the 106th Congress, many in the fire community asserted that local fire departments require and deserve greater support from the federal government. The Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFG), also known as fire grants or the FIRE Act grant program, was established by Title XVII of the FY2001 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 106-398).² Currently administered by the Grant Programs Directorate of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the program provides federal grants directly to local fire departments and unaffiliated Emergency Medical Services (EMS) organizations to help address a variety of equipment, training, and other firefighter-related and EMS needs.

First Reauthorization

On October 28, 2004, the President signed the FY2005 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 108-375). Title XXXVI of P.L. 108-375 is the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program Reauthorization Act of 2004, which reauthorized the fire grant program through FY2009. **Table 1** provides a summary of key provisions of the first reauthorization.

¹ For a list of federal programs providing assistance to state and local first responders, see CRS Report R40246, *Department of Homeland Security Assistance to States and Localities: A Summary and Issues for the 111th Congress*, by Shawn Reese.

² “Firefighter assistance” is codified as section 33 of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act (15 U.S.C. 2229).

Table I. Major Provisions of the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program Reauthorization Act of 2004

Grant recipient limits:
populations over 1 million—lesser of \$2.75 million or 0.5% of total appropriation
populations of 500K to 1 million—\$1.75 million
populations under 500K—\$1 million
no single grant can exceed 0.5% of total funds appropriated for a single fiscal year
DHS can waive the funding limits for populations up to 1 million in instances of extraordinary need; however the lesser of \$2.75 million or 0.5% limit cannot be waived
Nonfederal match requirements:
20% for populations over 50K
10% for populations 20K to 50K
5% for populations less than 20K
No match requirement for non-fire department prevention and firefighter safety grants
Authorized for five years:
FY2005—\$900 million
FY2006—\$950 million
FY2007—\$1 billion
FY2008—\$1 billion
FY2009—\$1 billion
Expands grant eligibility to emergency medical service squads, not less than 3.5% of fire grant money for EMS, but no more than 2% for nonaffiliated EMS
Provides grants for firefighter health and safety R&D
Requires the USFA Administrator to convene an annual meeting of non-federal fire service experts to recommend criteria for awarding grants and administrative changes
Requires fire service peer review of grant applications
Requires the USFA, in conjunction with the National Fire Protection Association, to conduct a \$300,000, 18-month study on the fire grant program and the need for federal assistance to state and local communities to fund firefighting and emergency response activities

Source: Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program Reauthorization Act of 2004, Section XXXVI of P.L. 108-375, FY2005 National Defense Authorization Act

Second Reauthorization

The current authorization of AFG expires September 30, 2009; the authorization of SAFER expires September 30, 2010. On July 8, 2009, the House Committee on Science and Technology, Subcommittee on Technology & Innovation, held a hearing on the reauthorization of the FIRE grant programs (both AFG and SAFER).³ Testimony was heard from FEMA and many of the major fire service organizations including the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), the

³ See http://science.house.gov/publications/hearings_markup_details.aspx?NewsID=2539.

International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC), and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

A major issue surrounding the fire grant reauthorization is whether the current distribution of fire grant funds should be altered. Under current law, the majority of funding goes to rural and volunteer fire departments. This is the case because individual fire departments throughout the nation apply directly for funding, and there are many more volunteer and rural fire departments than career and urban/suburban fire departments.⁴ In general, career departments tend to protect the more densely populated urban and suburban areas, while volunteer departments tend to protect more rural areas.

Testimony presented by the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), representing career (paid) firefighters, argued that under current law, “the overwhelming majority of FIRE grants are awarded to fire departments that protect a relatively small percentage of the population.”⁵ According to IAFF, a greater proportion of funding should go to career fire departments protecting the more densely populated suburban and urban areas, and suggested the following changes in the fire act statute:

- professional, volunteer, and combination departments should each be guaranteed at least 30% of total grant funding each year (under current statute, volunteer and combination departments must receive *no less* than 55% of funding; in practice career departments have received about 20% of AFG funding);
- funding caps for a single grant should be raised to \$10 million for communities of 1 million population or more, \$5 million for communities of 500,000 or more, \$2 million for communities of 100,000 or more, and \$1 million for communities with populations under 100,000 (current statutory caps are \$2.75 million for populations over 1 million, \$1.75 million for populations over 500,000, and \$1 million for populations under 500,000); and
- the local match requirement for fire grants should be set at 15% for all applicants, with DHS having the authority to waive the match requirement for needy departments (the current statutory matching requirements are 20% for populations over 50,000, 10% for populations over 20,000, and 5% for populations less than 20,000).⁶

On the other hand, testimony from the National Volunteer Fire Council (NFVC) stated that its main priority for reauthorization of AFG (as well as SAFER) is to extend the programs without substantial changes, and that “the programs are well-run, distributing funding in an efficient

⁴ According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), there are an estimated 30,185 fire departments in the United States (2007 data). Of those, 7.5% are career departments, 5.8% are mostly career, 16.5% are mostly volunteer, and 70.1% are all volunteer. Most career firefighters (74%) are in communities that protect 25,000 or more people, while most volunteer firefighters (95%) are in departments that protect fewer than 25,000, and more than half are located in small, rural departments that protect fewer than 2,500 people.

⁵ Kevin O’Connor, Assistant to the General President, International Association of Fire Fighters, testimony before the House Subcommittee on Technology and Innovation, Committee on Science and Technology, July 8, 2009, p. 3, http://democrats.science.house.gov/Media/file/Commdocs/hearings/2009/Tech/8jul/O'Connor_Testimony.pdf.

⁶ *Ibid.*

manner to the most deserving awardees.”⁷ NVFC argued that volunteer departments are concentrated in rural communities with smaller tax bases and higher poverty rates, that “DHS needs assessments have consistently shown that equipment training and apparatus needs are most acute in volunteer departments,”⁸ and that since 2001 DHS first responder grants for terrorism and disaster response have predominantly gone to urban areas.

Meanwhile, other suggested reauthorization changes to the AFG statute made by the July 8 hearing witnesses included:

- establish DHS waiver authority for the existing local match requirement for economically challenged jurisdictions (IAFC);
- establish centers of excellence in fire safety research (IAFC);
- allow larger grants for regional projects (IAFC);
- eliminate the cost-share requirement for fire departments in the Fire Prevention and Firefighter Safety grant program (NFPA and IAFF);
- designate a minimum of 5% of funding for fire service-based emergency medical services (NFPA);
- utilize funds for training and equipment to meet the latest applicable national voluntary consensus standards available at the time of application (NFPA); and
- make state training agencies (e.g. state fire academies) eligible for AFG funding (NVFC).

To date, no AFG reauthorization legislation has yet been introduced into the 111th Congress. As manifested in the July 8 hearing, debate over the AFG reauthorization is likely to reflect a competition for funding primarily between career/urban/suburban departments and volunteer/rural departments. The urgency of this debate will likely be heightened by probable reductions in FY2010 AFG funding and by the economic downturn in many local communities increasingly hard pressed to allocate funding for their local fire departments.

Appropriations

From FY2001 through FY2003, the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Program (as part of USFA/FEMA) received its primary appropriation through the VA-HUD-Independent Agencies Appropriation Act. In FY2004, the Assistance to Firefighters Program began to receive its annual appropriation through the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Homeland Security. The fire grant program is in its ninth year. **Table 2** shows the appropriations history for firefighter assistance, including AFG, SAFER, and the Fire Station Construction (FSC) grants provided in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Over \$4.8 billion has been appropriated to the AFG program since FY2001, its initial year. **Table 3** shows recent and proposed appropriated funding for the AFG and SAFER grant programs.

⁷ Jack Carriger, First Vice Chairman of the National Volunteer Fire Council, testimony before the House Subcommittee on Technology and Innovation, Committee on Science and Technology, July 8, 2009, p. 3, http://democrats.science.house.gov/Media/file/Commdocs/hearings/2009/Tech/8jul/Carriger_Testimony.pdf.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Table 2. Appropriations for Firefighter Assistance, FY2001-FY2009

	AFG	SAFER	SCG^a	Total
FY2001	\$100 million			\$100 million
FY2002	\$360 million			\$360 million
FY2003	\$745 million			\$745 million
FY2004	\$746 million			\$746 million
FY2005	\$650 million	\$65 million		\$715 million
FY2006	\$539 million	\$109 million		\$648 million
FY2007	\$547 million	\$115 million		\$662 million
FY2008	\$560 million	\$190 million		\$750 million
FY2009	\$565 million	\$210 million	\$210 million	\$985 million
Total	\$4.812 billion	\$689 million	\$210 million	\$5.711 billion

a. Assistance to Firefighters Fire Station Construction Grants (SCG) grants were funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (P.L. 111-5).

Table 3. Recent and Proposed Appropriations for Firefighter Assistance

(millions of dollars)

	FY2009 (Admin. request)	FY2009 (P.L. 110-329)	FY2010 (Admin. request)	FY2010 (House-passed H.R. 2892)	FY2010 (Senate-passed H.R. 2892)
FIRE Grants (AFG)	300	565	170	390	390
SAFER Grants	0	210	420	420	420
Total	300	775	590	810	810

FY2009

The Bush Administration proposed \$300 million for fire grants in FY2009, a 46% cut from the FY2008 level of \$560 million. No funding was proposed for SAFER grants. The total request for firefighter assistance was 60% below the FY2008 level for fire and SAFER grants combined. According to the budget justification, “the Administration believes that \$287 million is an appropriate level of funding given the availability of significant amounts of funding for first responder preparedness missions from other DHS grant programs which are coordinated with state and local homeland security strategies and, unlike AFG, are allocated on the basis of risk.” Priority would be given to applications that enhance capabilities needed for terrorism response and other major incidents. Funding would only be available for critical response equipment, training, and personal protective gear, and would not be available for wellness/fitness activities or modifications to facilities for firefighter safety.

On June 19, 2008, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved the FY2009 appropriations bill for the Department of Homeland Security (S. 3181; S.Rept. 110-396). The bill would provide \$750 million for firefighter assistance, including \$560 million for fire grants and \$190 million for

SAFER grants. This is the same funding level approved for FY2008. The Committee directed DHS to continue the present practice of funding applications according to local priorities and those established by the U.S. Fire Administration, and further directed DHS to continue direct funding to fire departments and the peer review process. Additionally, \$3 million was made available for foam firefighter equipment used in remote areas.

On June 24, 2008, the House Appropriations Committee approved its version of the FY2009 appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security, and reported its bill on September 18, 2008 (H.R. 6947; H.Rept. 110-862). The Committee would provide \$800 million for firefighter assistance, consisting of \$570 million for fire grants and \$230 million for SAFER grants. The Committee directed FEMA to continue granting funds directly to local fire departments and to include the U.S. Fire Administration during the grant administration process, while also maintaining an all-hazards focus and not limiting the list of eligible activities. The Committee would continue the requirement that FEMA peer review grant applications that meet criteria established by FEMA and the fire service, rank order applications according to peer review, fund applications according to their rank order, and provide official notification detailing why applications do not meet the criteria for review. The Committee also directed FEMA to encourage regional applications.

The Consolidated Security, Disaster Assistance, and Continuing Appropriations Act, 2009 (P.L. 110-329)—which contains the FY2009 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act—provided \$775 million for firefighter assistance, including \$565 million for fire grants and \$210 million for SAFER. The DHS explanatory statement directed FEMA to continue the present practice of funding applications according to local priorities and those established by the USFA.

FY2010

For FY2010, the Obama Administration is proposing \$170 million for AFG, a 70% decrease from the FY2009 level, and \$420 million for SAFER, double the amount appropriated in FY2009. The total amount requested for firefighter assistance (AFG and SAFER) is \$590 million, a 24% decrease from FY2009. The FY2010 budget proposal states that the firefighter assistance grant process “will give priority to applications that enhance capabilities for terrorism response and other major incidents.”⁹

The House FY2010 Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill (H.R. 2892; H.Rept. 111-157) provided \$800 million for firefighter assistance, including \$380 million for AFG and \$420 million for SAFER. Although the SAFER level matches the Administration’s request, the AFG level is more than twice what the Administration proposed. According to the Committee Report, the Administration’s request of \$170 million for AFG “is woefully inadequate given the vast needs of fire departments across the nation for equipment.” The Committee directed FEMA to continue granting funds to local fire departments, include the United States Fire Administration in the grant decision process, and maintain an all-hazard focus while prohibiting the limiting of eligible activities including wellness.

The House passed H.R. 2892 on June 24, 2009. During floor consideration of H.R. 2892, the House approved a manager’s amendment that added \$10 million to the AFG account. Therefore, the House-passed total for AFG is \$390 million.

⁹ Office of Management and Budget, Appendix: Budget of the United States Government, FY2010, p. 547.

The Senate FY2010 Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill (S. 1298; S.Rept. 111-31) provided \$800 million for firefighter assistance, including \$380 million for AFG and \$420 million for SAFER. The Appropriations Committee directed DHS to continue funding applications according to local priorities and priorities established by the United States Fire Administration, and to continue direct funding to fire departments and the peer review process.

The Senate passed H.R. 2892 on July 9, 2009. During floor consideration, the Senate adopted an amendment (S.Amdt. 1458) that added \$10 million to the AFG account. Therefore, the Senate-passed total for AFG is also \$390 million.

Fire Station Construction Grants in the ARRA

Since its inception, the traditional fire grant program has provided money specifically for health and safety related modifications of fire stations, but has not funded major upgrades, renovations, or construction. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 (P.L. 111-5) provided an additional \$210 million in firefighter assistance grants for modifying, upgrading, or constructing state and local non-federal fire stations, provided that 5% be set aside for program administration and provided that no grant shall exceed \$15 million. The Conference Report (H.Rept. 111-16) cited DHS estimates that this spending would create 2,000 jobs. The ARRA also included a provision (section 603) that waived the matching requirement for SAFER grants funded by appropriations in fiscal years 2009 and 2010.

The application period for ARRA Assistance to Firefighters Fire Station Construction Grants (SCG) opened on June 11 and closed on July 10, 2009. DHS anticipates awarding approximately 100 grants. There is no cost share requirement for SCG grants.

Eligible applicants are non-federal fire departments that provide fire protection services to local communities. Ineligible applicants include federal fire departments, EMS or rescue organizations, airport fire departments, for-profit fire departments, fire training centers, emergency communications centers, auxiliaries and fire service organizations or associations, and search and rescue teams or similar organizations without fire suppression responsibilities. Details on eligible and ineligible items for funding, other allowable costs, and detailed application guidelines are available at <http://www.firegrantsupport.com/docs/2009AFSCGguidance.pdf>.

SAFER Grants

In response to concerns over the adequacy of firefighter staffing, the 108th Congress enacted the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Act as Section 1057 of the FY2004 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 108-136; signed into law November 24, 2003). The SAFER grant program is codified as Section 34 of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (15 U.S.C. 2229a). The SAFER Act authorizes grants to career, volunteer, and combination fire departments for the purpose of increasing the number of firefighters to help communities meet industry minimum standards and attain 24-hour staffing to provide adequate protection from fire and fire-related hazards. Also authorized are grants to volunteer fire departments for activities related to the recruitment and retention of volunteers. P.L. 108-136 authorizes over one billion dollars per year through FY2010 for SAFER.

Two types of grants are authorized by the SAFER Act: hiring grants and recruitment and retention grants. *Hiring grants* cover a four-year term and are cost-shared with the local jurisdiction. According to the statute, the federal share shall not exceed 90% in the first year of the grant, 80% in the second year, 50% in the third year, and 30% in the fourth year. The grantee must commit to retaining the firefighter or firefighters hired with the SAFER grant for at least one additional year after the federal money expires. Total federal funding for hiring a firefighter over the four-year grant period may not exceed \$100,000, although that total may be adjusted for inflation. While the majority of hiring grants will be awarded to career and combination fire departments, the SAFER Act specifies that 10% of the total SAFER appropriation be awarded to volunteer or majority-volunteer departments for the hiring of personnel.

Additionally, at least 10% of the total SAFER appropriation is set aside for *recruitment and retention grants*, which are available to volunteer and combination fire departments for activities related to the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. Also eligible for recruitment and retention grants are local and statewide organizations that represent the interests of volunteer firefighters. No local cost sharing is required for recruitment and retention grants.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (P.L. 111-5) included a provision (section 603) that waives the matching requirement for SAFER grants in fiscal years 2009 and 2010. Additionally, the FY2009 Supplemental Appropriations Act (P.L. 111-32) included a provision (section 605) giving the Secretary of Homeland Security authority to waive certain limitations and restrictions in the SAFER statute. For grants awarded in FY2009 and FY2010, waivers will permit grantees to use SAFER funds to rehire laid-off firefighters and fill positions eliminated through attrition, will allow grants to extend longer than the current five year duration, and will permit the amount of funding per position at levels exceeding the current limit of \$100,000.

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

Program Evaluation

On May 13, 2003, the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) released the first independent evaluation of the Assistance to Firefighters Program. Conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Leadership Development Academy Executive Potential Program, the survey study presented a number of recommendations and concluded overall that the program was "highly effective in improving the readiness and capabilities of firefighters across the nation."¹⁰ Another evaluation of the fire grant program was released by the DHS Office of Inspector General in September 2003. The report concluded that the program "succeeded in achieving a balanced distribution of funding through a competitive grant process,"¹¹ and made a number of specific recommendations for improving the program.

At the request of DHS, the National Academy of Public Administration conducted a study to help identify potential new strategic directions for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant program and to

¹⁰ For full report see <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/downloads/pdf/affgp-fy01-usda-report.pdf>.

¹¹ Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspections, Evaluations, and Special Reviews, "A Review of the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program," OIG-ISP-01-03, September 2003, p. 3. Available at http://www.dhs.gov/xoig/assets/mgmttrpts/OIG_Review_Fire_Assist.pdf.

provide advice on how to effectively plan, manage, and measure program accomplishments. Released in April 2007, the report recommended consideration of new strategic directions related to national preparedness, prevention vs. response, social equity, regional cooperation, and emergency medical response. According to the report, the “challenge for the AFG program will be to support a gradual shift in direction without losing major strengths of its current management approach—including industry driven priority setting and its well-respected peer review process.”¹²

The Administration’s FY2008 budget proposal was accompanied by program evaluations called the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART). For assessment year 2007, PART gave the fire grant program a rating of “Effective,” (an improvement from the previous rating of “Results Not Demonstrated”). The PART directed DHS to embark on an improvement plan encompassing three elements: establishing a continuing strategic planning process, improving program transparency, and increasing outreach.¹³

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-161), in the accompanying Joint Explanatory Statement, directed the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to review the application and award process for fire and SAFER grants. Additionally, FEMA was directed to peer review grant applications that best address the program’s priorities and criteria as established by FEMA and the fire service. Those criteria necessary for peer-review must be included in the grant application package. Applicants whose grant applications are not reviewed must receive an official notification detailing why the application did not meet the criteria for review. Applications must be rank-ordered, and funded following the rank order.

Distribution of Fire Grants

The FIRE Act statute prescribes 14 different purposes for which fire grant money *may* be used (see 15 U.S.C. 2229(b)(3)). These are: hiring firefighters; training firefighters; creating rapid intervention teams; certifying fire inspectors; establishing wellness and fitness programs; funding emergency medical services; acquiring firefighting vehicles; acquiring firefighting equipment; acquiring personal protective equipment; modifying fire stations for health and safety; enforcing fire codes; funding fire prevention programs; educating the public about arson prevention and detection; and providing incentives for the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. The DHS has the discretion to decide which of those purposes will be funded for a given grant year. Since the program commenced in FY2001, the majority of fire grant funding has been used by fire departments to purchase firefighting equipment, personal protective equipment, and firefighting vehicles.

Eligible applicants are limited primarily to fire departments (defined as an agency or organization that has a formally recognized arrangement with a state, local, or tribal authority to provide fire suppression, fire prevention and rescue services to a population within a fixed geographical area).

¹² National Academy of Public Administration, *Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program: Assessing Performance*, April 2007, p. xvii. Available at http://www.napawash.org/pc_management_studies/Fire_Grants_Report_April2007.pdf.

¹³ Office of Management and Budget, *ExpectMore.gov*, Detailed Information on the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Grants and Training Office Assistance to Firefighters Grants Assessment, Assessment Year 2007, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/expectmore/detail/10001071.2007.html>.

Emergency Medical Services (EMS) activities are eligible for fire grants, including a limited number (no more than 2% of funds allocated) to EMS organizations not affiliated with hospitals. Additionally, a separate competition is held for fire prevention and firefighter safety research and development grants, which are available to national, state, local, or community fire prevention or safety organizations (including, but not limited to, fire departments). For official program guidelines, frequently-asked-questions, the latest awards announcements, and other information, see the Assistance to Firefighters Grant program web page at <http://www.firegrantsupport.com/>.

The FIRE Act statute provides overall guidelines on how fire grant money will be distributed and administered. The law directs that volunteer departments receive a proportion of the total grant funding that is not less than the proportion of the U.S. population that those departments protect (currently 55%). The Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program Reauthorization Act of 2004 (Title XXXVI of P.L. 108-375) raised award caps and lowered nonfederal matching requirements (based on recipient community population), extended eligibility to nonaffiliated emergency medical services (i.e. ambulance services not affiliated with fire departments), and expanded the scope of grants to include firefighter safety R&D.

There is no set geographical formula for the distribution of fire grants—fire departments throughout the nation apply, and award decisions are made by a peer panel based on the merits of the application and the needs of the community. However, the law does require that fire grants should be distributed to a diverse mix of fire departments, with respect to type of department (paid, volunteer, or combination), geographic location, and type of community served (e.g. urban, suburban, or rural).¹⁴ The Fire Act's implementing regulation provides that:

In a few cases, to fulfill our obligations under the law to make grants to a variety of departments, we may also make funding decisions using rank order as the preliminary basis, and then analyze the type of fire department (paid, volunteer, or combination fire departments), the size and character of the community it serves (urban, suburban, or rural), and/or the geographic location of the fire department. In these instances where we are making decisions based on geographic location, we will use States as the basic geographic unit.¹⁵

According to the FY2009 Program Guidance for the Assistance to Firefighters Program, career (paid) departments will compete against other career departments for up to 45% of the available funding, while volunteer and combination departments will compete for at least 55% of the available funding.¹⁶ However, given that less than 10% of fire grant applications are historically received from career departments, funding levels are likely not to reach the 45% ceiling for career departments. Additionally, each fire department that applies is classified as either urban, suburban, or rural. In FY2006, 4.3% of the total number of fire grant awards went to urban areas, 17.8% to suburban areas, and 77.7% to rural areas. Of the total amount of federal funding awarded, 7.7% went to urban areas, 18.2% to suburban areas, and 73.9% to rural areas.¹⁷

¹⁴ 15 U.S.C. 2229(b)(9).

¹⁵ 44 CFR Part 152.6(c).

¹⁶ For the FY2008 round of awards, no less than 34% of AFG funds must be awarded to combination departments, and no less than 21% of AFG funds must be awarded to all-volunteer departments. See Department of Homeland Security, *Fiscal Year 2009 Assistance to Firefighters Grants: Guidance and Application Kit*, April 2009, p. 25.

¹⁷ Department of Homeland Security, Grant Programs Directorate, Grant Development and Administration Division, *Report on Fiscal Year 2006 Assistance to Firefighters Grants*, p. 11.

Finally, in an effort to maximize the diversity of awardees, the geographic location of an applicant (using states as the basic geographic unit) is used as a deciding factor in cases where applicants have similar qualifications. **Table 4** shows a state-by-state breakdown of fire grant funding for FY2001 through FY2008, while **Table 5** shows a state-by-state breakdown of SAFER grant funding for FY2005 through FY2008. **Table 6** provides an in-depth look at the FY2008 fire grants, showing, for each state, the number of fire departments in each state,¹⁸ the number of fire grant applications, the total amount requested, the total amount awarded, and the amount of funds awarded as a percentage of funds requested. As **Table 6** shows, the entire pool of fire department applicants received about 14% of the funds they requested in FY2008. This is down from 16% in FY2007, 21% in FY2006, 22% in FY2005, 28% in FY2004, and 34% in FY2003. This reflects the fact that the number of applications and federal funds requested have trended upward over these years, while appropriations for the fire grant program have declined over the same period.

Issues in the 111th Congress

The Obama Administration's FY2010 budget proposal for firefighter assistance is likely to receive heightened scrutiny from the fire community, given what was viewed as inadequate past budget proposals by the Bush Administration, and given the national economic downturn and local budgetary cutbacks that many fire departments are now facing. Concerns over local fire departments' budgetary problems may also frame debate of the assistance to firefighters grant program reauthorization bill, which is expected to be considered during the first session of the 111th Congress.

To date, no AFG reauthorization legislation has yet been introduced into the 111th Congress. Debate over the AFG reauthorization is likely to reflect a competition for funding between career/urban/suburban departments and volunteer/rural departments. The urgency of this debate will be heightened by the probable reduction of overall AFG funding in FY2010, and the economic downturn in many local communities increasingly hard pressed to allocate funding for their local fire departments.

¹⁸ The fire grant program sets a limit of up to three applications per fire department per year (a vehicle application, an application for operations and safety, and a regional application). Thus, the number of fire departments in a state plays a major factor in the number of fire grant applications submitted and the amount of total funding awarded within a given state. For example, because Pennsylvania has—by far—the largest number of fire departments, it is not surprising that it leads the nation in the number of fire grants applications and the amount of funding awarded.

**Table 4. State-by-State Distribution of Fire Grants,
FY2001-FY2008**
(millions of dollars)

	FY2001	FY2002	FY2003	FY2004	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	Total
AL	3.085	12.503	23.329	25.097	20.836	22.027	19.903	22.276	149.056
AK	1.303	2.641	5.242	2.522	3.111	0.754	2.454	0.990	19.017
AZ	1.37	3.6	7.490	9.808	7.905	4.041	4.932	4.793	43.939
AR	1.337	4.635	10.675	13.680	10.402	7.699	7.799	6.680	62.907
CA	5.905	18.978	30.060	29.793	25.631	17.856	18.730	24.071	171.024
CO	1.003	3.968	6.168	5.585	6.073	3.213	4.742	2.265	33.017
CT	1.828	4.675	10.841	9.991	7.287	5.479	6.630	6.781	53.512
DE	0.132	0.372	1.096	1.755	1.161	1.107	0.518	0.220	6.361
DC	0	0.22	0	0	0.453	0	0.376	1.171	2.22
FL	2.865	10.16	16.344	15.969	17.922	6.787	8.288	6.549	84.883
GA	2.375	6.079	13.791	11.857	10.168	8.887	9.068	7.669	69.894
HI	0	1.182	0.947	0.864	1.205	0.264	0.436	0.772	5.67
ID	0.916	2.744	6.001	4.828	4.684	2.712	4.297	2.428	28.61
IL	2.417	13.398	28.810	27.238	25.433	21.120	21.923	19.961	160.3
IN	2.703	8.739	20.456	18.646	15.779	14.447	13.831	12.134	106.735
IA	1.301	7.284	16.087	16.430	13.119	10.064	9.298	8.805	82.388
KS	1.153	5.118	10.850	10.211	7.165	4.984	5.502	3.624	48.607
KY	2.215	7.896	19.832	16.150	14.215	13.308	13.081	16.384	103.081
LA	3.344	10.084	12.248	11.101	11.630	6.935	5.473	5.978	66.793
ME	1.296	4.319	10.323	10.031	6.124	6.702	5.486	4.490	48.771
MD	0.739	4.08	8.153	10.227	8.771	10.368	7.712	5.393	55.443
MA	2.301	8.386	15.715	13.958	13.529	8.957	11.644	8.520	83.01
MI	2.815	8.948	17.247	20.005	15.088	15.798	15.399	13.895	109.195
MN	2.133	8.149	17.510	18.609	14.894	14.718	16.600	11.833	104.446
MS	1.763	6.755	15.679	11.329	9.856	7.885	8.052	7.480	68.799
MO	3.079	10.291	19.573	17.757	14.246	13.202	10.611	10.772	99.531
MT	1.164	3.726	8.361	7.271	6.656	5.839	7.330	4.112	44.459
NE	1.034	2.392	7.820	6.577	5.116	4.399	4.443	3.981	35.762
NV	0.282	1.446	3.312	1.405	1.946	0.857	1.530	0.687	11.465
NH	0.594	1.887	4.584	5.694	4.563	3.307	3.219	2.623	26.471
NJ	2.596	6.339	19.982	16.488	14.691	12.386	13.266	11.702	97.45
NM	1.455	3.463	5.048	3.653	2.259	1.461	1.367	0.912	19.618
NY	3.978	14.728	34.320	35.030	36.009	33.804	22.664	27.901	208.434
NC	1.949	10.239	22.864	22.360	19.315	18.309	20.031	16.806	131.873

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	FY2001	FY2002	FY2003	FY2004	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	Total
ND	0.546	2.613	5.105	3.391	2.673	2.459	3.100	2.944	22.831
OH	2.731	13.742	26.997	29.107	27.344	25.380	26.433	24.795	176.529
OK	1.864	4.939	10.540	10.393	8.757	10.852	7.220	6.278	60.843
OR	1.596	4.892	9.896	10.122	10.014	9.288	5.943	8.185	59.936
PA	2.89	16.97	45.179	47.898	39.233	41.259	43.610	37.401	274.44
RI	0.407	1.507	2.327	1.917	2.129	2.025	0.855	1.378	12.545
SC	1.554	5.257	11.832	14.150	10.544	8.028	10.470	10.257	72.092
SD	0.904	3.142	5.602	4.693	3.570	2.989	2.474	1.933	25.307
TN	2.46	11.509	19.306	18.686	15.047	11.209	12.955	15.529	106.701
TX	3.697	15.644	29.264	30.118	23.480	18.035	17.691	18.382	156.311
UT	0.9	2.754	4.628	3.880	2.188	2.213	3.378	0.909	20.85
VT	0.451	1.971	5.163	4.747	2.071	1.456	1.820	1.046	18.725
VA	2.066	8.79	15.816	16.668	14.357	8.317	10.403	7.738	84.155
WA	1.535	7.544	18.808	19.565	15.763	16.150	12.951	11.361	103.677
WV	1.067	3.966	9.942	9.133	10.143	5.838	7.164	6.642	53.895
WI	2.077	7.518	18.234	19.668	17.685	13.994	19.439	13.862	112.477
WY	1.09	1.612	3.507	1.811	2.032	1.197	1.645	1.023	13.917
PR	0.657	0.382	1.643	1.140	1.104	0.528	0.019	0.074	5.547
MP	0.145	0.225	0	0	0.220	0.172	0	0	0.762
GU	0	0.016	0	0	0	0.287	0	0	0.303
AS	0.164	0	0	0.284	0	0	0	0	0.448
VI	0.741	0	0.544	0	0	0	0	0	1.285
Tot	91.972	334.417	695.121	679.305	585.619	491.375	494.221	454.403	3826.433

Source: Department of Homeland Security. FY2008 awards data current as of June 10, 2009.

**Table 5. State-by-State Distribution of SAFER Grants,
FY2005-FY2008**
(millions of dollars)

	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	Total
Alabama	1.611	6.215	4.236	6.418	18.48
Alaska	1.051	0.205	0.418	1.438	3.112
Arizona	1.560	3.559	4.428	4.337	13.884
Arkansas	0.394	1.820	0.377	1.873	4.464
California	5.221	5.212	4.259	3.738	18.43
Colorado	1.584	3.479	1.730	1.642	8.435
Connecticut	0.130	0.191	0.856	0.949	2.126
Delaware	0	0.135	0	0.398	0.533
District of Columbia	0	0	0	0	0
Florida	6.576	9.329	6.217	18.378	40.5
Georgia	5.354	2.085	2.842	11.103	21.384
Hawaii	0	0	0	1.626	1.626
Idaho	0.063	0.621	0.626	0.309	1.619
Illinois	1.340	4.463	9.933	3.035	18.771
Indiana	0	0.099	2.687	4.877	7.663
Iowa	0.169	0.144	0.980	1.288	2.581
Kansas	0.667	0.045	1.029	1.465	3.206
Kentucky	0.152	2.890	0.429	1.335	4.806
Louisiana	3.430	3.078	4.728	3.743	14.979
Maine	0.081	0	0.316	0.535	0.932
Maryland	0.096	1.862	1.526	3.171	6.655
Massachusetts	1.300	2.079	4.372	1.823	9.574
Michigan	1.759	0.592	0	0.655	3.006
Minnesota	0.300	1.089	0.375	0.491	2.255
Mississippi	0.756	0.594	0.115	0.875	2.34
Missouri	1.467	3.547	4.551	1.549	11.114
Montana	0.034	0.255	2.635	2.748	5.672
Nebraska	0	0.873	0.632	1.951	3.456
Nevada	1.500	1.714	0.632	0	3.846
New Hampshire	0.400	1.035	1.528	0.008	2.971
New Jersey	6.374	3.971	2.953	3.724	17.022
New Mexico	0	3.123	1.309	0.108	4.54
New York	1.540	2.991	2.845	3.579	10.955
North Carolina	2.155	5.533	5.371	13.762	26.821

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	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	Total
North Dakota	0	0.609	0	1.518	2.127
Ohio	1.319	1.881	2.255	3.520	8.975
Oklahoma	0.147	0.699	0.531	0.622	1.999
Oregon	1.710	2.141	2.649	2.015	8.515
Pennsylvania	1.244	1.475	2.633	2.283	7.635
Rhode Island	0.400	0	0.105	0	0.505
South Carolina	0.456	0.863	3.218	5.373	9.91
South Dakota	0.063	0.311	0.211	0.048	0.633
Tennessee	2.700	2.719	3.683	1.176	10.278
Texas	0.951	10.961	8.779	12.575	33.266
Utah	0.900	3.312	2.098	4.512	10.822
Vermont	0	0.621	0.632	0	1.253
Virginia	2.091	3.554	0.782	1.374	7.801
Washington	2.298	2.897	7.340	8.336	20.871
West Virginia	0	0.187	0.681	0	0.868
Wisconsin	0	0.072	1.223	4.227	5.522
Wyoming	0	0	0.316	2.329	2.645
Puerto Rico	0	0	0	0	0
Northern Mariana Islands	0	0	0	0	0
Marshall Islands	0	0	0	0	0
Guam	0	0	0	0	0
American Samoa	0	0	0	0	0
Virgin Islands	0	0	0	0	0
Republic of Palau	0	0	0	0	0
Total	61.356	105.142	113.665	152.847	433.01

Source: Department of Homeland Security. FY2008 awards data current as of June 11, 2009.

Table 6. Requests and Awards for Fire Grant Funding, FY2008

State	Number of fire/EMS departments	Number of applications	Federal funds requested (\$millions)	Federal funds awarded (\$millions)	Funds awarded as a % of funds requested
Alabama	966	779	98.572	22.276	22.5%
Alaska	75	56	11.639	0.990	8.5%
Arizona	283	178	37.546	4.793	12.7%
Arkansas	826	420	57.787	6.680	11.5%
California	823	534	107.544	24.071	22.3%
Colorado	375	166	23.557	2.265	9.6%
Connecticut	401	253	48.993	6.781	13.8%
Delaware	77	34	6.658	0.220	3.3%
District of Columbia	18	1	1.171	1.171	100.0%
Florida	755	289	61.767	6.549	10.6%
Georgia	799	395	65.445	7.669	11.7%
Hawaii	20	3	0.790	0.772	9.7%
Idaho	212	116	17.866	2.428	13.5%
Illinois	1090	885	139.872	19.961	14.2%
Indiana	670	507	79.752	12.134	15.2%
Iowa	864	560	66.413	8.805	13.2%
Kansas	680	276	36.251	3.624	10.0%
Kentucky	796	630	93.814	16.384	17.4%
Louisiana	557	262	43.389	5.978	13.7%
Maine	431	307	42.884	4.490	10.4%
Maryland	418	205	39.909	5.393	13.5%
Massachusetts	408	349	70.441	8.520	12.1%
Michigan	865	776	110.679	13.895	12.5%
Minnesota	770	521	66.066	11.833	17.9%
Mississippi	756	435	58.775	7.480	12.7%
Missouri	865	520	67.270	10.772	16.0%
Montana	283	193	25.466	4.112	16.1%
Nebraska	486	180	25.167	3.981	15.8%
Nevada	161	32	6.619	0.687	10.3%
New Hampshire	256	145	22.804	2.623	11.5%
New Jersey	1044	618	95.824	11.702	12.2%
New Mexico	341	91	16.717	0.912	5.4%
New York	1894	1315	186.879	27.901	14.9%
North Carolina	1411	728	111.791	16.806	15.0%

State	Number of fire/EMS departments	Number of applications	Federal funds requested (\$millions)	Federal funds awarded (\$millions)	Funds awarded as a % of funds requested
North Dakota	322	153	21.491	2.944	13.6%
Ohio	1338	1062	171.359	24.795	14.4%
Oklahoma	772	397	52.973	6.278	11.8%
Oregon	360	231	37.603	8.185	21.7%
Pennsylvania	2635	2255	342.725	37.401	10.9%
Rhode Island	101	74	12.840	1.378	10.7%
South Carolina	592	419	59.058	10.257	17.3%
South Dakota	345	179	23.363	1.933	8.2%
Tennessee	649	660	92.595	15.529	16.7%
Texas	1883	775	132.007	18.382	13.9%
Utah	221	120	17.539	0.909	5.1%
Vermont	255	104	13.314	1.046	7.8%
Virginia	822	327	57.327	7.738	13.4%
Washington	543	357	67.575	11.361	16.8%
West Virginia	476	365	55.026	6.642	12.0%
Wisconsin	901	713	98.293	13.862	14.1%
Wyoming	135	51	7.779	1.023	13.1%
Puerto Rico	7	8	1.354	0.074	5.4
Northern Marianas	Not available	2	0.497	0	0
Virgin Islands	Not available	2	0.437	0	0
Guam	Not available	2	1.145	0	0
Total	30,185	21,015	3212.427	454.403	14.1%

Sources: Department of Homeland Security (FY2008 application and awards data as of 6/10/2009) and firehouse.com (number of firehouse/EMS departments, updated June 2009).

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