



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 housed within the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The objective of the USFA 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. The United States Fire Administration Reauthorization Act of 2008 (H.R. 4847/S. 2606) was signed into law on October 8, 2008 (P.L. 110-376).

P.L. 111-83, the FY2010 Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill, provided \$45.588 million for USFA, the same level as the Administration's proposal. The Administration's FY2011 budget proposal requested \$45.930 million for USFA, an increase of 0.7% from the FY2010 level. The House Appropriations Subcommittee and the Senate Appropriations Committee both matched the Administration request for the USFA. The Continuing Appropriations and Surface Transportation Extension Act, 2011 (P.L. 111-322) funds USFA at FY2010 levels through March 4, 2011.

The FY2012 budget proposal requested \$42.538 million for USFA, about 7% under current levels. The budget proposal reflects an overall \$1.72 million program reduction.

As is the case with many federal programs, concerns in the 112th Congress over the federal budget deficit could impact budget levels for the USFA. Debate over the USFA budget has focused on whether the USFA is receiving an appropriate level of funding to accomplish its mission, given that appropriations for USFA have consistently been well below the agency's authorized level. An ongoing issue is the viability and status of the USFA and National Fire Academy within the Department of Homeland Security.

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Background

The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) is currently an entity within the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) 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 United States remains serious. The United States still has one of the highest fire death rates in the industrialized world. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), in 2009 there were 3,010 civilian fire deaths, 17,050 civilian fire injuries, and an estimated \$12.5 billion in property damage.¹ According to the NFPA, there were 82 on-duty firefighter deaths in 2009.²

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

¹ Karter, Michael J., National Fire Protection Association, *Fire Loss in the United States During 2009*, August 2010, available at <http://nfpaweb2.gvpi.net:8089/assets/files/PDF/OS.fireloss.pdf>.

² National Fire Protection Association, *Firefighter Fatalities in the United States – 2009*, June 2010, available at <http://www.nfpa.org/assets/files/PDF/osfff.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.*

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.

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).

Research and 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. **Table 1** shows recent and proposed appropriated funding for USFA.

Table 1. Appropriations, U.S. Fire Administration
(millions of dollars)

	FY2010 Admin. Request	FY2010 (P.L. 111-83)	FY2011 Admin. Request	FY2011 (P.L. 111-322)	FY2012 Admin. Request
U.S. Fire Administration	45.588	45.588	45.930	^a	\$42.538

a. The Continuing Appropriations and Surface Transportation Extension Act, 2011 (P.L. 111-322) funds AFG and SAFER at FY2010 levels through March 4, 2011.

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, then-DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff announced a restructuring of DHS, effective October 1, 2005. USFA was removed from the PMRR account and received a separate appropriation (its own line item) under the new DHS Directorate for Preparedness. The FY2007 Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill (P.L. 109-295) transferred the USFA back to the Federal Emergency Management Agency within DHS.

FY2010

The Obama Administration's FY2010 budget proposal requested \$45.588 million for USFA, an increase of 1.3% from the FY2009 level. The increase would be used for pay inflation and an increased contribution to the DHS Working Capital Fund.

Both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees approved \$45.588 million for USFA, the same level as the Administration's proposal. The House Appropriations Committee (H.R. 2892; H.Rept. 111-157) designated \$9.304 million for the National Fire Academy and \$1.419 million to continue implementation of the National Fire Information Reporting System (NFIRS). The Senate Appropriations Committee (S. 1298; S.Rept. 111-31) directed USFA to work with the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior to ensure that compatible data on wildfires is available, and directed USFA to brief the Committee on the status of the NFIRS upgrade.

The House passed H.R. 2892, the Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill, on June 24, 2009. The Senate passed H.R. 2892 on July 9, 2009. The Conference Report for the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2010 (H.Rept. 111-298) provided \$45.588 million for USFA, identical to the levels in both the House- and Senate-passed H.R. 2892. The Conferees directed USFA to work with the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior to ensure that compatible data on wildfires is available, and directed USFA to provide a briefing within 30 days on the status of the NFIRS upgrade, including future milestones for measuring progress. The Conference Report was passed by the House on October 15, by the Senate on October 20, and signed into law, P.L. 111-83, on October 28, 2009.

FY2011

The Administration's FY2011 budget proposal requested \$45.930 million for USFA, an increase of 0.7% from the FY2010 level. The increase of \$342,000 would be used for pay inflation. On July 14, 2010, the House Subcommittee on Homeland Security Appropriations approved \$45.930 million, the same level proposed by the Administration. On July 19, 2010, the Senate Appropriations Committee also approved \$45.930 for the USFA (S. 3607; S.Rept. 111-222).

The Continuing Appropriations and Surface Transportation Extension Act, 2011 (P.L. 111-322) funds USFA at FY2010 levels through March 4, 2011.

FY2012

The FY2012 budget proposal requested \$42.538 million for USFA, about 7% under current levels. The budget proposal reflects an overall \$1.72 million program reduction. Specific decreases include reducing National Fire Academy class deliveries with the result that, according to the budget justification, 13,500 fewer students will be trained. Another decrease would eliminate TV studio/broadcast capabilities that deliver critical information and training to all first responders on the campus site and across the nation. According to the budget justification, such a reduction would affect USFA's capability to transmit critical information and just-in-time training during national and regional disasters, and would require USFA to rely upon private sources to be accessed (if available) in order to reach first-wave responders. Other program reductions include eliminating USFA citizen and fire and life prevention research efforts, reducing response efforts, and eliminating wireless capabilities provided to 25,000 resident students and special group participants in the National Emergency Training Center (NETC) dormitories.

Authorizations

The U.S. Fire Administration Reauthorization Act of 2003 (P.L. 108-169) was signed into law on December 6, 2003. The act reauthorized 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 reestablished 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 directed 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 required that equipment purchased with fire grant money meet or exceed voluntary consensus standards when feasible.

The United States Fire Administration Reauthorization Act of 2008 was signed into law on October 8, 2008 (P.L. 110-376). P.L. 110-376 authorizes the USFA at \$70 million for FY2009, \$72.1 million for FY2010, \$74.263 million for FY2011, and \$76.491 million for FY2012. Provisions include authorizing National Fire Academy training program modifications and reports; directing the National Fire Academy to provide training on incidents occurring in the wildfire-urban interface, multi-jurisdictional fires, hazardous materials incidents, and advanced emergency medical services; authorizing USFA to enter into contracts with one or more nationally recognized third-party organizations to deliver training; a report on the feasibility of providing incident command training for fires at ports and in marine environments; national fire incident reporting system upgrades; sponsoring and disseminating research on fire prevention and control at the wildland-urban interface; encouraging adoption of national voluntary consensus standards for firefighter health and safety; establishing a state and local fire service position at the National Operations Center within DHS; providing coordination regarding fire prevention and control and emergency medical services; and expressing congressional support for USFA recommendations for adoption and education regarding sprinklers in commercial and residential buildings.

Assistance to Firefighters Program (FIRE Act Grants)⁵

The Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Program, also known as the FIRE Act grant program, was established by Title XVII of the FY2001 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 106-398). 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.⁶

Since its inception, the fire grant program has been administered by FEMA/USFA (FY2001-FY2003), the Office for Domestic Preparedness (FY2004), the Office of State and Local Government Coordination Preparedness (FY2005), and the Office of Grants and Training in the DHS Directorate for Preparedness (FY2006). Congressional appropriations reports have consistently instructed DHS to maintain USFA involvement in the grant administration process for fire and SAFER grants. The FY2007 DHS appropriations bill (P.L. 109-295) transferred USFA to FEMA and the fire and SAFER grants to the Grants Program Directorate in FEMA.

Issues in the 112th Congress

As is the case with many federal programs, concerns in the 112th Congress over the federal budget deficit could impact budget levels for the USFA. Debate over the USFA budget has focused on whether the USFA is receiving an appropriate level of funding to accomplish its mission, given that appropriations for USFA have consistently been well below the agency's authorized level. An ongoing issue is the viability and status of the USFA and National Fire Academy within the Department of Homeland Security. While 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 of 2003); 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.

⁵ For more information on the fire grant program, see CRS Report RL32341, *Assistance to Firefighters Program: Distribution of Fire Grant Funding*, 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.

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