

Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response: The SAFER Grant Program

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September 29, 2014

Congressional Research Service

7-5700

www.crs.gov

RL33375

Summary

In response to concerns over the adequacy of firefighter staffing, the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Act, known as the SAFER Act, was enacted by the 108th Congress as Section 1057 of the FY2004 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 108-136). The SAFER Act authorizes grants to career, volunteer, and combination local 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 recruitment and retention of volunteers. SAFER is administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

With the economic downturn adversely affecting budgets of local governments, concerns arose that modifications to the SAFER statute may be necessary to enable fire departments to more effectively and affordably participate in the program. Since FY2009, annual appropriations bills have contained provisions that waive certain provisions of the SAFER statute. The waivers served to reduce the financial obligation on SAFER grant recipients, and allowed SAFER grants to be used to rehire laid-off firefighters and to fill positions lost through attrition.

The 112th Congress enacted the Fire Grants Reauthorization Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-239), which reauthorized SAFER through FY2017; altered the grant distribution formula among career, volunteer, combination, and paid-on-call fire departments; raised available funding for higher population areas; and addressed waiver issues previously addressed in annual appropriations legislation.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014 (P.L. 113-76), signed into law on January 17, 2014, funded SAFER at \$340 million and AFG at \$340 million. The Administration's FY2015 budget proposed \$670 million for firefighter assistance, including \$335 million for SAFER and \$335 million for AFG.

The Administration requested that all previous SAFER waiver authority again be enacted for FY2015. Both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees recommended \$680 million for firefighter assistance in FY2015, including \$340 million for SAFER and \$340 million for AFG. Both the House and Senate bills would also enact SAFER waiver authority in FY2015. The FY2015 Continuing Resolution (P.L. 113-164) funds SAFER and AFG at the FY2014 levels (minus a 0.0554% across-the-board reduction) through December 11, 2014.

The 113th Congress is considering FY2015 budget appropriations for SAFER. As is the case with many federal programs, concerns over the federal budget deficit could impact budget levels. At the same time, firefighter assistance budgets will likely receive heightened scrutiny from the fire community, given the local budgetary cutbacks that many fire departments are now facing. The 113th Congress will also likely examine the impact of new SAFER hiring grant guidelines mandated by P.L. 112-239, the Fire Grants Reauthorization Act of 2012. The continuing issue is how effectively grants are being distributed and used to protect the health and safety of the public and firefighting personnel against fire and fire-related hazards.

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Background and Genesis of SAFER

Firefighting and the provision of fire protection services to the public is traditionally a local responsibility, funded primarily by state, county, and municipal governments. During the 1990s, however, shortfalls in state and local budgets—coupled with increased responsibilities (i.e., counterterrorism) of local fire departments—led many in the fire community to call for additional financial support from the federal government. Since enactment of the FIRE Act¹ in the 106th Congress, the Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) program (also known as “fire grants” and “FIRE Act grants”) has provided funding for equipment and training directly from the federal government to local fire departments.²

Since the fire grant program commenced in FY2001, funding has been used by fire departments to purchase firefighting equipment, personal protective equipment, and firefighting vehicles. Many in the fire-service community argued that notwithstanding the fire grant program, there remained a pressing need for an additional federal grant program to assist fire departments in the hiring of firefighters and the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. They asserted that without federal assistance, many local fire departments would continue to be unable to meet national consensus standards for minimum staffing levels, which specify at least four firefighters per responding fire vehicle (or five or six firefighters in hazardous or high-risk areas).³ Fire-service advocates also pointed to the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program⁴ as a compelling precedent of federal assistance for the hiring of local public safety personnel.

In support of SAFER, fire-service advocates cited studies performed by the U.S. Fire Administration and the National Fire Protection Association,⁵ the *Boston Globe*,⁶ and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)⁷ which concluded that many fire departments fall below minimum standards for personnel levels. According to these studies, the result of this shortfall can lead to inadequate response to different types of emergency incidents, substandard response times, and an increased risk of firefighter fatalities.

¹ Title XVII of the FY2001 Floyd D. Spence National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 106-398).

² For more information, see CRS Report RL32341, *Assistance to Firefighters Program: Distribution of Fire Grant Funding*, by Lennard G. Kruger.

³ These refer to consensus standards developed by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA): NFPA 1710 (“Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments”), and NFPA 1720 (“Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire Departments”). NFPA standards are voluntary unless adopted as law by governments at the local, state, or federal level, and are also often considered by insurance companies when establishing rates. Another applicable standard to this debate is the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standard on respiratory protection in structural firefighting situations (29 C.F.R. 1910.134(g)), which requires at least four firefighters (two in and two for backup) before entering a hazardous environment wearing a Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus.

⁴ For more information on the COPS program, see CRS Report RL33308, *Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS): Background and Funding*, by Nathan James.

⁵ National Fire Protection Association, *Third Needs Assessment of the U.S. Fire Service*, June 2011, available at <http://www.nfpa.org/assets/files//2011NeedsAssessment.pdf>.

⁶ Dedman, Bill, “Deadly Delays: The Decline of Fire Response,” *Boston Globe Special Report*, January 30, 2005. Available at <http://www.boston.com/news/specials/fires/>.

⁷ National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, “National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program, 1998 - 2005,” March 2006, 16 p. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/fire/pdfs/progress.pdf>.

On the other hand, those opposed to SAFER grants have contended that funding for basic local government functions—such as paying for firefighter salaries—should not be assumed by the federal government, particularly at a time of high budget deficits. Also, some SAFER opponents disagree that below-standard levels in firefighting personnel are necessarily problematic, and point to statistics indicating that the number of structural fires in the United States has continued to decline over the past 20 years.⁸

The SAFER Act

In response to concerns over the adequacy of firefighter staffing, the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Act—popularly called the “SAFER Act”—was introduced into the 107th and 108th Congresses.⁹ The 108th Congress enacted the SAFER Act as Section 1057 of the FY2004 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 108-136; signed into law November 24, 2003). The SAFER provision was added as an amendment to S. 1050 on the Senate floor (S.Amdt. 785, sponsored by Senator Dodd) and modified in the FY2004 Defense Authorization conference report (H.Rept. 108-354). 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.

SAFER Reauthorization

On January 2, 2013, the President signed P.L. 112-239, the FY2013 National Defense Authorization Act. Title XVIII, Subtitle A is the Fire Grants Reauthorization Act of 2012, which significantly amends the SAFER statute (15 U.S.C. 2229a) and authorizes the SAFER program through FY2017. **Table 1** provides a summary of key SAFER provisions in the 2012 reauthorization, and provides a comparison with the previous version of the SAFER statute.

Two types of grants are authorized by the SAFER Act: hiring grants and recruitment and retention grants. *Hiring grants* cover a three-year term and are cost shared with the local jurisdiction. According to the amended statute, the federal share shall not exceed 75% in the first year of the grant, 75% in the second year, and 35% in the third year. 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.

⁸ See Lehrer, Eli, “Do We Need More Firefighters?” *Weekly Standard*, April 12, 2004, pp. 21-22. Available at <http://www.sipr.org/default.aspx?action=PublicationDetails&id=44>. See also Easterbrook, Gregg, “Where’s the Fire?” *New Republic Online*, August 9, 2004. Available at <http://www.tnr.com/doc.mhtml?i=express&s=easterbrook080904>.

⁹ 107th Congress: S. 1617 (Dodd), H.R. 3992 (Boehlert), H.R. 3185 (Green, Gene). 108th Congress: S. 544 (Dodd), H.R. 1118 (Boehlert).

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.

Table 1. Key SAFER Provisions of Fire Grant Reauthorization

Previous Statute (15 U.S.C. 2229a)	Fire Grant Reauthorization Act of 2012 (Title XVIII of P.L. 112-239)
grant period is 4 years, grantees are required to retain for at least 1 year beyond the termination of their grants those firefighter positions hired under the grant	shortens the grant period to three years, with no requirement that fire departments must retain SAFER funded firefighters for an extra year
year 1—10% local match year 2—20% local match year 3—50% local match year 4—70% local match	year 1—25% local match year 2—25% local match year 3—65% local match
total funding over 4 years for hiring a firefighter may not exceed \$100K, adjusted annually for inflation	for the first year, the amount of funding provided for hiring a firefighter may not exceed 75% of the usual annual cost of a first-year firefighter in that department at the time the grant application was submitted for the second year, the amount of funding provided for hiring a firefighter may not exceed 75% of the usual annual cost of a first-year firefighter in that department at the time the grant application was submitted for the third year, the amount of funding provided for hiring a firefighter may not exceed 35% of the usual annual cost of a first-year firefighter in that department at the time the grant application was submitted
state, local, and Indian tribal governments eligible for recruitment and retention funds	additionally makes national organizations eligible for recruitment and retention funds
no provision for economic hardship waivers	allows FEMA, in the case of economic hardship, to waive cost share requirements, as well as the prohibition on supplanting local funds and maintenance of expenditure requirements (which would allow grants to be used for retention and rehiring laid-off firefighters)
authorized for 7 years starting at \$1 billion in FY2004, ending at \$1.194 billion in FY2010	reauthorizes the SAFER grant program at \$750 million for FY2013; for each of FY2014-FY2017, an amount equal to the amount authorized the previous fiscal year, increased by the percentage by which the Consumer Price Index for the previous fiscal year exceeds the preceding year
no provision on congressionally directed spending	no funds may be used for any congressionally directed spending item (as defined under the rules of the Senate and the House of Representatives)
authority to make grants shall lapse 10 years from November 24, 2003	the authority to award assistance and grants shall expire five years after the date of enactment

Source: Fire Grants Reauthorization Act of 2012, Title VIII, Subtitle A of FY2013 National Defense Authorization Act, P.L. 112-239.

P.L. 112-239 mandates studies and reports on the effectiveness of the SAFER grant program. Specifically:

- FEMA is directed to develop a performance assessment system to evaluate SAFER (as well as AFG) grants. Not later than September 30, 2014, FEMA shall submit a report to Congress concerning the effectiveness of SAFER grants.
- The Comptroller General is directed to submit a report to Congress assessing the effect of the amendments to the SAFER statute made by the Fire Grants Reauthorization of 2012.

Appropriations

The SAFER grant program receives its annual appropriation through the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Homeland Security. Within the appropriations bills, SAFER is listed under the line item, “Firefighter Assistance Grants,” which is located in Title III—Protection, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery. “Firefighter Assistance Grants” also includes the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program.

Although authorized for FY2004, SAFER did not receive an appropriation in FY2004. **Table 2** shows the appropriations history for firefighter assistance, including SAFER, AFG, and the Fire Station Construction Grants (SCG) grants provided in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). **Table 3** shows recent and proposed appropriated funding for the SAFER and AFG grant programs.

Table 2. Appropriations for Firefighter Assistance, FY2001-FY2014

	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
FY2010	\$390 million	\$420 million		\$810 million
FY2011	\$405 million	\$405 million		\$810 million
FY2012	\$337.5 million	\$337.5 million		\$675 million
FY2013	\$321 million	\$321 million		\$642 million
FY2014	\$340 million	\$340 million		\$680 million
Total	\$6.60 billion	\$2.51 billion	\$210 million	\$9.32 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)

	FY2013 (P.L. 113- 6)	FY2014 (Admin. request)	FY2014 (P.L. 113- 76)	FY2015 (Admin. request)	FY2015 (H.R. 4903)	FY2015 (S. 2534)
FIRE Grants (AFG)	321 ^a	335	340	335	340	340
SAFER Grants	321 ^a	335	340	335	340	340
Total	642^a	670	680	670	680	680

a. Post-sequester level according to U.S. Department of Homeland Security Fiscal Year 2013 Post-Sequestration Operating Plan.

FY2013

The Administration's FY2013 budget proposed \$670 million for firefighter assistance, including \$335 million for SAFER and \$335 million for AFG. The Administration requested that all previous SAFER waivers again be enacted for FY2013. The Administration has estimated that the requested SAFER budget would fund more than 1,700 firefighter positions in FY2013.¹⁰

Also, in the budget proposal, FEMA strongly encouraged applying fire departments to seek, recruit, and hire post-9/11 veterans to increase their ranks within their department in order to take advantage of the provisions of the VOW To Hire Heroes Act of 2011 (Title II of P.L. 112-56). In FY2013, according to the budget proposal, "FEMA anticipates a preference for all SAFER applicants to have a policy in place addressing their intent to implement strategies to support this Act and have recruiting efforts aimed at post-9/11 veterans."

On May 16, 2012, the House Appropriations Committee approved its version of the FY2013 Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill. The committee mark is identical to the Administration requested level—\$335 million for SAFER and \$335 million for AFG. By voice vote, the full committee adopted an amendment during the committee markup specifying that SAFER restrictions will not apply to the FY2013 SAFER grants.

The committee report (H.Rept. 112-492) stated that the committee "is perplexed" as to why FEMA has not already given preference to post-9/11 veterans for SAFER hiring grants, and directed FEMA to report to the committee quarterly on implementation efforts on the hiring of veterans, including the number of hirings. Meanwhile, H.R. 6455, the Veterans Jobs Corps Act of 2012 (introduced September 20, 2012) would direct DHS to award SAFER grants to hire veterans as firefighters.

During floor action on June 6, 2012, an amendment was offered by Representative Runyan to increase funding for SAFER and AFG by \$2.5 million each, taking its \$5 million offset from the Office of the Under Secretary for Management. The amendment passed by voice vote, bringing the firefighter assistance account to \$675 million (\$337.5 million for SAFER and \$337.5 million for AFG), which is identical to the FY2012 level. H.R. 5855 was passed by the House on June 7, 2012.

¹⁰ Testimony of the Honorable Janet Napolitano, Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, before the Senate Subcommittee on Homeland Security Appropriations, March 8, 2012.

On May 22, 2012, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved \$675 million for firefighter assistance for FY2013. This level included \$337.5 million for SAFER and \$337.5 million for AFG. The Senate level is identical to the FY2012 level. The Senate Committee bill (S. 3216) also included SAFER waiver authority language, including a provision which allows grants to be used to retain firefighters, instead of only for increasing the number of firefighters. The committee report (S.Rept. 112-169) directed DHS to continue the practice of funding applications according to local priorities and those established by the USFA, and to continue direct funding to fire departments and the peer review process. Regarding the SAFER waivers, the committee stated its expectation that DHS will take into consideration economic hardship when exercising the waiver authority.

The Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013 (P.L. 113-6), funded SAFER and AFG at \$337 million each (equal to the FY2012 level minus a 0.1% across-the-board reduction). Additionally, SAFER and AFG were subject to sequestration. Both programs are part of the State and Local Programs budget account within FEMA, which was subject to a 5.0% cut from the FY2013 level. According to DHS, SAFER and AFG were cut by 5%, which yields FY2013 budget levels of \$320.92 million for AFG and \$320.92 million for SAFER.¹¹ However, the amount of grant money available for SAFER and AFG is expected to be virtually unchanged from FY2012. This is because the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013, provided that administrative costs are to be derived from the FEMA Salaries and Expense account, rather than (as is typically the case) from a 5% carve-out from the firefighter assistance (SAFER and AFG) appropriations account.

FY2014

The Administration's FY2014 budget proposed \$670 million for firefighter assistance, including \$335 million for SAFER and \$335 million for AFG. Funding for management and administration would be drawn from a separate FEMA account (Salaries and Expenses). The Firefighter Assistance Grants would be categorized under First Responder Assistance Programs (FRAP), one of three activities under FEMA's State and Local Programs (SLP) appropriation.

On May 29, 2013, the House Appropriations Committee approved its version of the FY2014 Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill (H.R. 2217; H.Rept. 113-91). The committee recommended \$675 million for firefighter assistance (\$337.5 million for SAFER, \$337.5 million for AFG). The committee again denied the Administration's request to shift SAFER and AFG into the State and Local Programs account. By voice vote, the full committee adopted an amendment during the committee markup that continues waivers to various SAFER restrictions and limitations.

During floor action on June 5, 2013, an amendment was offered by Representative Runyan to increase funding for SAFER and AFG by \$2.5 million each, taking its \$5 million offset from the Office of the Under Secretary for Management. The amendment passed by voice vote, bringing the firefighter assistance account to \$680 million (\$340 million SAFER, \$340 million AFG). H.R. 2217 was passed by the House on June 6, 2013.

¹¹ Department of Homeland Security, *U.S. Department of Homeland Security Fiscal Year 2013 Post-Sequestration Operating Plan*, April 26, 2013, p. 17.

On July 18, 2013, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved \$675 million for firefighter assistance for FY2014 (S.Rept. 113-77). This level included \$337.5 million for SAFER and \$337.5 million for AFG. As did the House, the Senate Appropriations Committee denied the Administration's request to shift SAFER and AFG into the State and Local Programs account, and included language that continues waivers to various SAFER restrictions and limitations. The committee directed DHS to continue the present practice of funding applications according to local priorities and those established by the USFA, and to continue direct funding to fire departments and the peer review process. The committee also stated its expectation that funding for rural fire departments remain consistent with their previous five-year history, and that FEMA shall brief the committee if there is an anticipated fluctuation.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014 (P.L. 113-76), signed into law on January 17, 2014, funds SAFER at \$340 million and AFG at \$340 million. P.L. 113-76 continues to grant DHS waiver authority from SAFER requirements in FY2014.

FY2015

The Administration's FY2015 budget proposed \$670 million for firefighter assistance, including \$335 million for SAFER and \$335 million for AFG. The Administration requested that all previous SAFER waivers again be enacted for FY2015. Also in the budget proposal, FEMA "strongly encourages applicants, to the extent practicable, to seek, recruit, and hire post-9/11 veterans to increase their ranks within their department in order to take advantage of the provisions of the Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) to Hire Heroes Act of 2011."

On June 11, 2014, the House Appropriations Committee approved H.R. 4903, the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2015. The bill would provide \$680 million in firefighter assistance, including \$340 million for SAFER and \$340 million for AFG. The bill also would continue to grant DHS waiver authority from SAFER requirements in FY2015. In the accompanying report (H.Rept. 113-481), the committee noted that this annual waiver authority has been available since FY2009, and that the reauthorization of the SAFER program by the 112th Congress (P.L. 112-239) provided FEMA with permanent authority to waive certain matching and non-supplantation requirements for grantees based on a determination that a grantee meets economic hardship criteria. Given that FEMA has been working with stakeholders to develop these criteria and that the agency hopes to soon be able to implement its new waiver authority, the committee expects that FY2015 should be the last instance in which annual waiver authority will be provided, and that any waivers in future fiscal years will be limited to the authorization provided in P.L. 112-239.

On June 26, 2014, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved S. 2534, its version of the Department of Homeland Security Act, 2015. As did the House Committee, the Senate bill would provide \$680 million in firefighter assistance, including \$340 million for SAFER and \$340 million for AFG. The Senate bill would also continue to grant DHS waiver authority from SAFER requirements in FY2015. In the accompanying report (S.Rept. 113-198), the committee expressed its expectation that DHS will take into consideration economic hardship when exercising the waiver authority.

The FY2015 Continuing Resolution (P.L. 113-164) funds SAFER and AFG at the FY2014 levels (minus a 0.0554% across-the-board reduction) through December 11, 2014.

SAFER Provisions in Jobs Legislation

During the 112th Congress, numerous bills were introduced (but not enacted) seeking to create public sector jobs; many contained provisions that would expand the SAFER grant program. In the 113th Congress, H.R. 1617, the Emergency Jobs to Restore the American Dream Act, would provide an additional \$1.2 billion per year to SAFER for the hiring and rehiring of 12,000 additional firefighters.

Waiver of SAFER Requirements

With the economic downturn adversely affecting budgets of local governments, concerns arose that modifications to the SAFER statute may be necessary to enable fire departments to more effectively participate in the program. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (P.L. 111-5) included a provision (§603) that waived the matching requirements for SAFER grants awarded in FY2009 and FY2010.

Subsequently, the FY2009 Supplemental Appropriations Act (P.L. 111-32) included a provision (§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 permitted grantees to use SAFER funds to rehire laid-off firefighters and fill positions eliminated through attrition, allow grants to extend longer than the five-year duration, and permit the amount of funding per position at levels exceeding the limit of \$100,000.

The Department of Defense and Continuing Appropriations Act, 2011 (P.L. 112-10) contained language that removed cost-share requirements and allowed SAFER grants to be used to rehire laid-off firefighters and fill positions eliminated through attrition. However, the law did not remove the requirement that SAFER grants fund a firefighter position for four years, with the fifth year funded wholly by the grant recipient. P.L. 112-10 also did not waive the cap of \$100,000 per firefighter hired by a SAFER grant. According to fire service advocates, these unwaived SAFER requirements (the mandatory five-year position duration, the \$100,000 cap) would be a disincentive for many communities to apply for SAFER grants, because localities would be reluctant to apply for grants that would require future expenditure of local funds.¹²

P.L. 112-74, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, FY2012, included language (§561) prohibiting using any funds to enforce all of the SAFER restrictions that have been lifted since FY2009. Additionally, Section 562 of P.L. 112-74 reinstated DHS waiver authority for the restrictions that were not lifted in the FY2011 appropriations bill (P.L. 112-10).

Meanwhile, the SAFER reauthorization language in the Fire Grants Reauthorization Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-239) removed the \$100,000 cap per firefighter hired, shortened the grant period from four to three years, removed the requirement to retain SAFER-hired firefighters for one year past the termination of federal grant support, and provided economic hardship waivers that will give DHS the authority to waive matching requirements and prohibitions on using SAFER funds for rehiring laid-off firefighters and filling positions eliminated through attrition.

¹² International Association of Fire Fighters, *News Release*, “Budget: Agreement Retains Level Funding for FIRE Act and SAFER grants, But Restricts Flexibility on SAFER Grants,” April 14, 2011, available at <http://www.iaff.org/11News/041311Waivers.htm>.

The Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013 (P.L. 113-6) and the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014 (P.L. 113-76) continue to grant DHS waiver authority from SAFER requirements. Specifically, DHS may waive cost sharing requirements, the three year grant term, cost limits per firefighter hired, and the prohibition on using SAFER funds for rehiring laid-off firefighters and filling positions eliminated through attrition.

The same SAFER waiver authority is included in the Administration's FY2015 budget proposal and in the FY2015 House and Senate Department of Homeland Security Appropriations bills. In the bill report accompanying H.R. 4903 (H.Rept. 113-481), the House Appropriations Committee noted that this annual waiver authority has been available since FY2009, and that the reauthorization of the SAFER program by the 112th Congress (P.L. 112-239) provided FEMA with permanent authority to waive certain matching and non-supplantation requirements for grantees based on a determination that a grantee meets economic hardship criteria. Given that FEMA has been working with stakeholders to develop these criteria and that the agency hopes to soon be able to implement its new waiver authority, the Committee expects that FY2015 should be the last instance in which annual waiver authority will be provided, and that any waivers in future fiscal years will be limited to the authorization provided in P.L. 112-239.

Implementation of the SAFER Program

Prior to FY2007, the SAFER grant program was administered by the Office of Grants and Training within the Preparedness Directorate of DHS. However, Title VI of the Conference Agreement on the DHS appropriations bill (P.L. 109-295; H.Rept. 109-699), the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006, transferred most of the existing Preparedness Directorate (including SAFER and fire grants) back to an enhanced FEMA.

Table 4 shows the state-by-state distribution of SAFER grant funds, from FY2005 through FY2012. Of the total federal share requested for FY2009, 54.6% was requested by all paid/career departments, 9.3% by all volunteer, 14.7% by combination (majority paid/career), and 19% by combination (majority volunteer).¹³ Of the FY2012 SAFER awards, grants for hiring accounted for 91% of the total federal share of dollars awarded. For the latest information and updates on the application for and awarding of SAFER grants, see the official SAFER grant program website at <http://www.fema.gov/firegrants/safer/index.shtm>.

Issues in the 113th Congress

The 113th Congress is considering FY2015 budget appropriations for SAFER. As is the case with many federal programs, concerns over the federal budget deficit could impact budget levels. At the same time, firefighter assistance budgets will likely receive heightened scrutiny from the fire community, given the local budgetary cutbacks that many fire departments are now facing.

The 113th Congress will also likely examine the impact of new SAFER hiring grant guidelines mandated by P.L. 112-239, the Fire Grants Reauthorization Act of 2012. The continuing issue is

¹³ Latest SAFER application statistics are available at <http://www.fema.gov/firegrants/safer/statistics.shtm>.

how effectively grants are being distributed and used to protect the health and safety of the public and firefighting personnel against fire and fire-related hazards.

Table 4. State-by-State Distribution of SAFER Grants, FY2005-FY2012

(millions of dollars)

	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010	FY2011	FY2012	Total
Alabama	1.611	6.215	4.236	7.314	4.288	8.531	1.293	6.923	40.411
Alaska	1.051	0.205	0.418	1.438	0.328	6.072	0.074	0.951	10.537
Arizona	1.560	3.559	4.428	6.613	6.768	10.357	2.809	7.895	43.989
Arkansas	0.394	1.820	0.377	3.834	0.976	2.206	1.136	1.019	11.762
California	5.221	5.212	4.259	4.212	31.501	63.13	56.356	49.992	219.883
Colorado	1.584	3.479	1.730	2.02	0.955	3.384	5.432	1.636	20.22
Connecticut	0.130	0.191	0.856	3.92	2.214	1.312	5.099	4.474	18.196
Delaware	0	0.135	0	0.398	0	1.723	0	0.946	3.202
District of Columbia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3.468	3.468
Florida	6.576	9.329	6.217	17.185	24.105	17.721	30.494	26.243	137.87
Georgia	5.354	2.085	2.842	17.438	4.844	10.384	1.273	4.606	48.826
Hawaii	0	0	0	1.626	0	0.1	0	0	1.726
Idaho	0.063	0.621	0.626	0.774	1.336	2.897	4.068	1.323	11.708
Illinois	1.340	4.463	9.933	5.85	2.496	10.848	2.456	5.704	43.09
Indiana	0	0.099	2.687	4.577	8.295	9.931	4.587	6.777	36.953
Iowa	0.169	0.144	0.980	1.288	1.045	0.081	1.604	0.08	5.391
Kansas	0.667	0.045	1.029	1.872	2.806	2.285	0.381	1.991	11.076
Kentucky	0.152	2.890	0.429	2.466	0.338	0.893	0.155	1.164	8.487
Louisiana	3.430	3.078	4.728	8.62	10.515	0.182	1.672	3.509	35.734
Maine	0.081	0	0.316	0.951	0.739	1.047	0.518	1.183	4.835
Maryland	0.096	1.862	1.526	3.171	4.429	2.145	4.299	2.488	20.016
Massachusetts	1.300	2.079	4.372	2.690	18.385	34.422	23.127	4.955	91.33
Michigan	1.759	0.592	0	0.628	13.286	22.493	47.646	25.161	111.565
Minnesota	0.300	1.089	0.375	3.246	1.256	0.789	4.463	0.797	12.315
Mississippi	0.756	0.594	0.115	1.608	0	1.209	0.488	0.093	4.863
Missouri	1.467	3.547	4.551	2.381	1.474	5.618	10.619	2.86	32.517
Montana	0.034	0.255	2.635	2.955	0.458	0.973	1.252	1.046	9.608
Nebraska	0	0.873	0.632	1.951	0.802	0.493	0	0.37	5.121
Nevada	1.500	1.714	0.632	0.086	0.577	2.459	13.438	2.702	23.108
New Hampshire	0.400	1.035	1.528	0.225	0	0.353	1.479	0.976	5.996
New Jersey	6.374	3.971	2.953	4.389	0.556	56.648	18.073	34.462	127.426
New Mexico	0	3.123	1.309	0.108	0.499	1.854	0	0	6.893

	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010	FY2011	FY2012	Total
New York	1.540	2.991	2.845	4.412	8.227	18.239	6.142	8.949	53.345
North Carolina	2.155	5.533	5.371	18.183	2.256	6.375	5.833	2.472	48.178
North Dakota	0	0.609	0	1.518	1.517	2.139	0.048	0.066	5.897
Ohio	1.319	1.881	2.255	3.737	29.606	21.04	18.654	18.266	96.758
Oklahoma	0.147	0.699	0.531	2.782	0	9.127	1.435	0.676	15.397
Oregon	1.710	2.141	2.649	2.071	0.677	6.814	8.354	4.437	28.205
Pennsylvania	1.244	1.475	2.633	3.515	1.176	7.926	13.831	27.608	59.408
Rhode Island	0.400	0	0.105	0	1.561	4.249	3.108	8.716	18.139
South Carolina	0.456	0.863	3.218	8.158	2.41	2.064	2.147	4.757	24.073
South Dakota	0.063	0.311	0.211	0.552	0	0.648	0.255	0	2.04
Tennessee	2.700	2.719	3.683	1.856	1.148	7.374	0.993	3.034	23.507
Texas	0.951	10.961	8.779	19.06	3.158	12.65	2.881	5.225	63.665
Utah	0.900	3.312	2.098	3.955	1.824	4.583	0.208	0.598	17.478
Vermont	0	0.621	0.632	0	0.119	0	0	0	1.372
Virginia	2.091	3.554	0.782	1.849	4.891	8.995	4.978	9.883	37.023
Washington	2.298	2.897	7.340	9.476	2.847	13.779	16.139	13.293	68.069
West Virginia	0	0.187	0.681	0.16	0.287	0.398	0	0.46	2.173
Wisconsin	0	0.072	1.223	4.502	0	0.12	3.101	2.205	11.223
Wyoming	0	0	0.316	2.329	0.263	0.997	1.148	0	5.053
Puerto Rico	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northern Mariana Islands	0	0	0	0	0	1.404	0	0	1.404
Marshall Islands	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Guam	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
American Samoa	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.474	0	0.474
Virgin Islands	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Republic of Palau	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	61.356	105.142	113.665	203.964	207.258	410.833	334.03	316.439	1751.003

Source: Department of Homeland Security.

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