

2007 TOP FOUR LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

As business leaders involved in the fire and emergency equipment and services industry we are unified in our concern for ongoing federal support for the safety of first responders and the vitality of our businesses. As such, we have identified the following as FAMA/FEMSA legislative priorities for 2007. These key issues are also identified as priorities for our Home Day alliance partners, the IAFC, NVFC and CFSI.

I. Educating Congress on the Importance of the Fire Grants Program to the Nation's 1.1 Million Firefighters

The Fire Grants program serves the network of first responders all across the country and equips them to "save lives" in the event of daily tragedies, natural disasters, and catastrophic events. It is supported by the host of firefighting and local government organizations because it works and provides the "dual purpose" of needed equipment for daily public safety and response to both natural disasters and terrorism events.

The Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (Fire Act) has consistently been funded (appropriated) at levels far below the authorization levels. In the FY 2008 budget, the president has proposed funding at \$300 million of the \$1 billion authorized. This is far below the FY 2007 funding level of \$547 million.

FISCAL YEAR	AUTHORIZATION	APPROPRIATION	
		PROPOSED	ACTUAL
2005	\$900,000,000		\$650,000,000
2006	\$950,000,000		\$545,000,000
2007	\$1,000,000,000	\$293,000,000	\$547,000,000
2008	\$1,000,000,000	\$300,000,000	

The Fire Grants program is:

1. The most efficiently administered program within DHS, with an administrative cost of only 5%;
2. Awarded directly to fire departments based on need and most effective use of grant funds; and
3. Judged by peers and experts in the fire service

Congress can rest assured that these funds are spent on giving first responders the tools they need. For example, 57,000 first responders lack sufficient personal protective clothing and one-third are not equipped with self-contained breathing apparatus.

Half of all fire trucks are 15 years and older and the majority of the U.S. fire departments do not have an apparatus replacement plan. This poses a threat to not only the safety of our firefighters, but impairs their ability to perform their job of saving lives and property. Older vehicles lack critical safety features such as anti-lock brakes and enclosed cabs. By upgrading to equipment that meets the latest NFPA standards, the risk of serious injury or death resulting from injuries sustained in accidents or operations of these vehicles can be significantly reduced.

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In addition to active involvement of FAMA in apparatus safety standards, FEMSA has taken an active role in promoting safety for our first responders through the implementation of a Personal Responsibility Code (PRC) for users of all firefighting and emergency equipment.

In summary, the Fire Grants program it is one of the most successful federal programs in existence. It is efficient, based on need, judged by peers, and equips first responders to save lives on a daily basis as well as respond to natural and catastrophic disasters.

II. **Educating Congress on the Importance of the U.S. Fire Administration**

The U.S. Fire Administration has a core mission of building and maintaining the nation's fire service and its first responder functions. FEMSA/FAMA support the recent DHS restructuring which placed USFA in FEMA, where it can better do its job. The U.S. Fire Administration was funded at only \$46.85 million in 2007. The White House has proposed \$43.3 million for USFA in FY 2008. Both levels are well below the authorized level of \$64.5 million.

III. **Support for the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Program**

The purpose of the SAFER program is to award grants directly to volunteer, combination, and career fire departments to help the departments increase their cadre of firefighters. Ultimately, the goal is for SAFER grantees to enhance their ability to attain 24-hour staffing and thus assuring their communities have adequate protection from fire and fire-related hazards. The SAFER grants have two activities that will help grantees attain this goal: 1) hiring of firefighters and 2) recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters.

While the SAFER Act has been authorized at levels in excess of \$1 billion, appropriations for 2005 and 2006 came directly from the Fire Act Grant, effectively reducing the available Fire Grant program by \$175 million.

FISCAL YEAR	AUTHORIZATION	APPROPRIATION	
		PROPOSED	ACTUAL
2005	\$1,030,000,000		\$65,000,000
2006	\$1,061,000,000		\$110,000,000
2007	\$1,093,000,000	\$0	\$115,000,000
2008	\$1,126,000,000	\$0	

The Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters Activity provides assistance to awardees for periods of up to four years. The purpose of these grants is to assist with the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. Volunteer departments, combination departments, and local or statewide organizations that represent the interests of volunteer firefighters are eligible to apply for assistance under this activity.

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IV. Clarity and Communication within the Grant Process

The uncertainty of the timing of the Fire Grant review and release process has had an adverse impact on municipal budget planning cycles and production efficiency of the equipment manufacturers supporting our first responders. This lack of efficiency in the Fire Grant administrative process has resulted in the deferral of fire department purchasing decisions based upon a “wait and see” attitude in anticipation of grant application approval. The result for manufacturers and distributors of equipment is that production planning cycles are disrupted, which can result in the layoff of the employees necessary to fill the demand. We would therefore recommend a well-structured, set schedule for the administration of the grant process to enable fire departments and manufactures to accurately predict the timing of the approval process.