

Kansas Firefighter Recruitment and Safety Grant program

At the meeting of the Kansas State Firefighters Association this weekend, State Fire Marshal Doug Jorgensen announced the new Kansas Firefighter Recruitment and Safety Grant program. This program, made possible with the 2016 State of Kansas budget passed by the state Legislature and signed by Governor Sam Brownback, is aimed at assisting volunteer and part-time fire departments across the state with firefighter recruitment.

Grants issued through the Kansas Firefighter Recruitment and Safety Grant (KFRSG) program will cover the costs of safety gear for new firefighters and physical examinations for firefighters whose physicals are not covered by their departments. It will also provide funds for the purchase of new washer-extractor machines used to clean bunker gear following a fire, with further funds available for the creation of Explorer programs to attract youth volunteers into the fire service.

This grant program, administered by the Office of the State Fire Marshal, will include \$200,000 from the Fire Marshal Fee Fund. Volunteer and part-time fire departments face recruitment and retention challenges because they do not have the funding to provide safety equipment. Without new equipment provided by the recruiting fire department, potential volunteers are faced with not only donating their time but also providing their own safety gear, sharing gear with others, or doing without.

Safety gear which can be purchased through this grant program based on a proven and demonstrated need includes bunker gear, fire helmets, fire boots, and new masks for Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) units for both current and new department members.

This grant program not only addresses safety of firefighters, but their health as well. The OSFM will now be able to provide grants to local firefighters to assist in paying for physical examinations not otherwise covered by their departments. In the last year alone, the last four line-of-duty deaths in the Kansas Fire Service resulted from heart attacks before and after responses to fire calls, or during training. A physical examination by a doctor could identify underlying health issues and, hopefully, decrease the number of health-related deaths.

The OSFM will also use grant funds to purchase and strategically place washer-extractor machines throughout the state. It is vital to the health of firefighters to properly clean bunker gear following a fire to prevent the transfer of carcinogens, particulates and biohazards to firefighters, and those they serve. Further, as more and more particles attach to protective gear and chemicals remain on clothing, that gear gradually loses its effectiveness-putting firefighters at increased risk.

As the goal for the KFRSG grant program is firefighter recruitment, providing funding for the start of Explorer programs offers a great way for local fire departments to give the youth of their area an opportunity to explore both career and voluntary opportunities in the fire service. Volunteer and part-time fire departments will be able to apply for funding to cover the initiation fees for the Explorer program or the National Volunteer Fire Council National Junior Firefighter Program, plus a \$100 start-up fund.

Grant applicants must be established and recognized volunteer or part-time Kansas fire departments in good standing with OSFM or a firefighter in good standing with their local fire department. All

safety gear purchased through the program would become the property of the requesting department and not of the individual for which it was requested.

Applications are available at FireMarshal.ks.gov/KFRSG. The deadline for submission to receive funds during this budget year (July 1, 2016 - June 30, 2017) is October 3, 2016 and funding will be available on a first-come, first-serve basis. It is the hope of the Fire Marshal's office to make this grant program available each year.