

**REPORT OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF FIRE PROGRAMS**

**Expenditures from the Staffing
for Adequate Fire and
Emergency Response (SAFER)
Matching Grant Fund**

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



HOUSE DOCUMENT NO. 16

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
RICHMOND
2006**

PREFACE

As requested in the 2005 Virginia Acts of Assembly, Chapter 951, please find the following reporting on expenditures from the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency (SAFER) Matching Grant Fund, which is being administered by the Virginia Department of Fire Programs (VD FP).

This report provides comprehensive information on the SAFER grant program at the federal and state levels. Subsequent reports will provide additional information on the impact of the SAFER grant program in Virginia.

This report was prepared by Christy King, MPA, VD FP Policy, Planning and Legislative Affairs Manager, who gratefully acknowledges the assistance of W. G. Shelton Jr., Tom Berry, Larry McAndrews, and Jennifer Wainright, Ph.D., and would like to thank Aubrey W. (Buddy) Hyde, Jr. and Scott Hechler at VD FP and members of the Virginia Fire Services Board for their support.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Staffing for Adequate Firefighters and Emergency Response (SAFER) Matching Grant Fund provides grants to help volunteer, career, and combination fire departments increase their active firefighter membership. SAFER grants may be used for 1) hiring of firefighters, and 2) recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters.

SAFER requires a non-federal match in years one through four of the grant (minimum of 10, 20, 50, and 70 percent, respectively). The 2005 Virginia Acts of Assembly, Chapter 951 created a SAFER Matching Grant Fund of \$250,000 from the general fund to serve as a state reimbursement to VA localities for the first year local matching requirement of 10 percent.

The SAFER application period was open from May 31, 2005 until June 28, 2005, and the first rounds of SAFER grant awards were announced October 1, 2005 and continue to be announced.

Nationwide, the total federal share that was requested was \$835,909,950 for hiring, \$147,738,352 for recruitment/retention, and \$158,204,896 for hiring and recruitment/retention. The average federal share requested was \$511,886 for hiring, \$146,711 for recruitment/retention, and \$503,837 for hiring and recruitment/retention.

As of January 9, 2006, SAFER grants for three Virginia fire departments have been announced, with \$800,000 granted to Arlington County for hiring (\$80,000 VA match) and \$305,000 granted for recruitment/retention to Occoquan-Woodbridge-Lorton Volunteer Fire Department (\$75,000; no VA match) and Loudoun County Fire Advisory Council, Inc. (\$230,000; no VA match).

Virginia Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Matching Grant Fund

As promulgated in the 2005 Virginia Acts of Assembly, Chapter 951

- A.1. There is hereby created on the books of the Comptroller a special fund that shall be known as the Staffing for Adequate Firefighters and Emergency Response (SAFER) Matching Grant Fund. Included within this appropriation is \$250,000 the first year from the general fund, which shall be deposited into this fund.
2. The Department of Fire Programs shall develop a plan to allocate these funds to localities in the form of a reimbursement for the first year local matching requirement for federal grants, which may be made available to fire departments in Virginia under the SAFER program.
3. The state reimbursement to localities shall be limited to the first year matching requirement of 10 percent, after which the participating localities shall assume the matching costs as specified by the federal grant requirements.
4. The Department shall provide a report on expected expenditures from this Fund to the Chairmen of the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committees prior to the 2006 Session of the General Assembly.

SAFER BACKGROUND

The National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) issued the first minimum staffing standard for safe fire ground operations referred to as NFPA 1710. This standard mandates at least four firefighters per apparatus. Currently, most jurisdictions operate with 1-3 firefighters per apparatus¹. Responding to emergency incidents with fewer than four firefighters prevents the first responding unit from complying with OSHA 1910.134 standard also referred to as "Two-in, Two-out"², which requires the assembly of at least four firefighters before entering a hazardous environment wearing Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) to provide an immediate back-up rescue team if the initial entrants become incapacitated.

NFPA and the United States Fire Administration (USFA) estimate that 75,000 to 85,000 new firefighters are needed to comply with NFPA 1710, nationwide. As a result, the SAFER Act passed by the U.S. Congress was appropriated at \$65 million in federal fiscal year 2005 and \$110 million in federal fiscal year 2006. In January 2004, the Virginia Department of Fire Programs (VDFP) conducted a phone survey of the 75 career/combo fire departments in Virginia and the

¹ Virginia Department of Fire Programs (2006). *Assessing the Needs of Virginia's Fire Service*, Vol. 2. Richmond, VA.

² NFPA 1710. *A Standard for Every Professional Fire Department*.

results indicated that an estimated 3,492 firefighters were needed to meet staffing levels set by NFPA 1710 and OSHA 1910.134.

SAFER PROGRAM GUIDANCE

SAFER awards 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 attain 24-hour staffing and thus assure that 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.

SAFER requires an overall non-federal match minimum (10, 20, 50 and 70 percent) in years one through four of the grant.

Program guidance for SAFER was released in May of 2005 in conjunction with the opening of the application period, which was open from May 31, 2005 through June 28, 2005. Appendix I summarizes activity priorities for the hiring of firefighters and recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters.

NATIONAL SAFER APPLICATION PROCESS

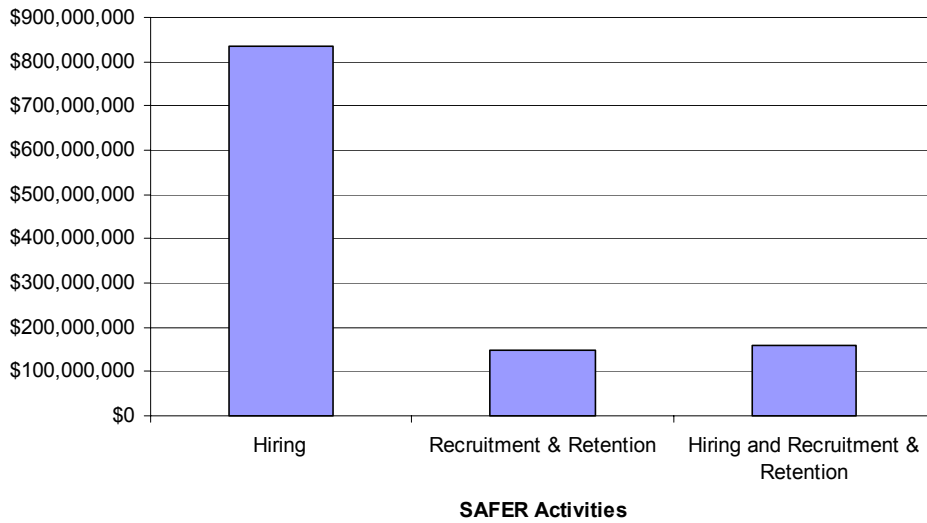
The SAFER application period was open from May 31, 2005 until June 28, 2005 and the application was accessible via electronic means at www.firegrantsupport.com. All applications were required to be submitted electronically. Once the application period was closed, applications were scored and underwent a peer review process. The application, scoring, and peer review processes mirrored that of the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program.

The first rounds of SAFER grant awards were announced October 1, 2005 and continue to be announced at frequent intervals. As of January 4, 2006, SAFER grant awards continue to be announced.

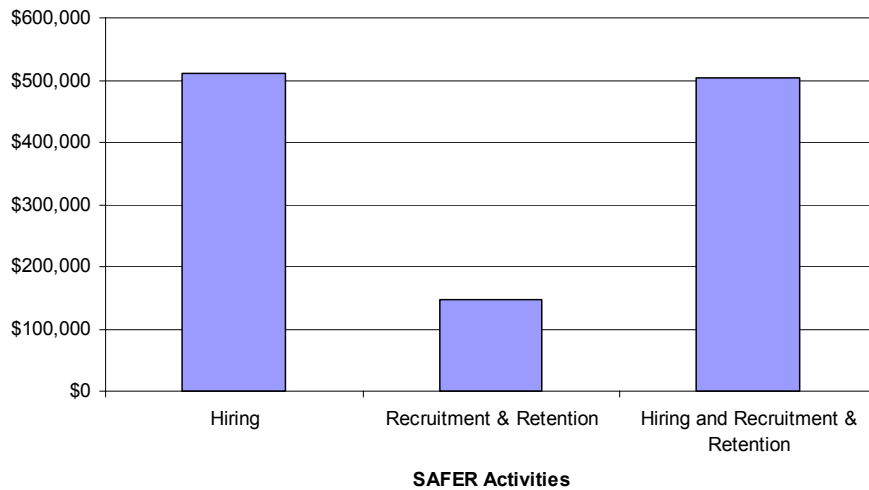
NATIONAL SAFER APPLICATION STATISTICS

As previously mentioned, \$65 million was allocated in FFY05. The following graphs illustrate the total federal dollars requested for the SAFER program activities, as well as the average amount requested.

2005 SAFER Activities - Total Federal Share Requested



2005 SAFER - Average Federal Share Requested



VIRGINIA SAFER APPLICATION PROCESS

The 2005 Virginia Acts of Assembly, Chapter 951 creates a SAFER Matching Grant Fund, to include \$250,000 from the general fund to serve as a state reimbursement to localities for the first year local matching requirement of 10 percent.

The Virginia Department of Fire Programs (VDFP) was charged with developing a plan for allocation of these funds. As a result, VDFP created a *Virginia Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response 10% Match Request Form* for localities successful in receiving a SAFER grant to receive their 10% match (a copy of the form is found in Appendix II). VDFP also implemented a SAFER marketing campaign to inform localities of the 10% match availability and to encourage them to apply for SAFER.

VIRGINIA SAFER APPLICATION PROCESS

As reported by the United States Fire Administration (USFA), 59 Virginia Fire Departments applied for SAFER grants in FY 05, totaling \$86.8 million (\$38.8 million Federal share, \$48 million local share). The USFA reports that Virginia will receive four awards totaling \$2.091 million. It is essential to note that as January 4, 2006 only three awards have been announced. They are as follows:

Name of Organization	City	Program	Federal Share	VA Match Share
Arlington County	Arlington	Hiring	\$800,000.00	\$80,000.00
Occoquan-Woodbridge-Lorton Volunteer Fire Department	Woodbridge	Recruitment	\$75,000.00	NA
Loudoun County Fire Advisory Council, Inc.	Leesburg	Recruitment	\$230,000.00	NA

To date no expenditures have been made from the SAFER Matching Grant Fund. Payment to the current recipient for SAFER Hiring activities from the matching fund is scheduled for February 2006.

APPENDIX I – Activity Priorities

Hiring of firefighters' activity priorities (list is not all inclusive):

- Volunteer, combination, and career firefighters were eligible to apply.
- Municipalities and fire districts may submit applications on behalf of fire departments when the fire departments lack the legal status to do so.
- Federal fire departments, airport/port authority fire departments, local and statewide organizations, and for-profit fire departments are not eligible for assistance under SAFER Hiring of Firefighters Activity (for more specifics please see page 11 of the program guidance).
- Award recipients must commit to a five-year period of performance.
- Awards are for salary and benefits only.
- Highest priority would be to provide funding to departments that are not in compliance with the NFPA 1710 (more information on page 12 of the program guidance). Applicants who will achieve the greatest percentage increase in compliance with the identified sections will receive greater consideration than applicants who are closer to compliance.
- Applicants who are newly hired firefighters will be certified at the FFI level within the first six months of employment AND who will have the new recruits trained to FFII within the first two years of the grant period will be afforded higher consideration. Applicants who will have trained their new recruits to have EMS certification to the minimum level established by local fire department will also receive higher consideration.
- Department call volume is considered. Departments that respond to a high number of incidents will receive higher consideration.
- Applications who indicate that their newly hired firefighters will undergo an entry-level physical and receive immunizations will receive higher consideration.
- Applicants who will come into compliance with the minimum four-person staffing standard for the first arriving engine or vehicle capable of initiating suppression activities with the fewest requested additional personnel will receive higher consideration than will applicants seeking a larger number of additional personnel in order to comply.
- Higher consideration will be given to those applicants whose request is based on a staffing needs assessment.
- Only full-time positions will be funded.
- A recruitment period of ninety days will be provided to grantees. The five year period of performance will start 90 days after the grantee is notified of their award.

Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters Activity Priorities (list is not all inclusive):

- Primary focus is recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters.
- There is no local matching requirement.
- Volunteer, paid-on-call, and combination fire departments, as well as local and statewide organizations that represent the interests of volunteer firefighters, such as the State Volunteer Fire Association are eligible to apply. In addition, any individual fire department may serve as a “host applicant” and apply for a regional project on behalf of itself and any number of neighboring fire departments.
- Career fire departments, federal fire departments, and for-profit fire departments are not eligible to apply (for more specifics please see page 14 of the program guidance).
- Examples of the types of initiatives that may receive assistance include, but are not limited to the following:
 - Accidental death and dismemberment insurance
 - College education cost reimbursement
 - Reimbursement for attending required training
 - Marketing costs to recruit new volunteer members
 - Staffing needs assessment
 - Explorer, cadet, and/or mentoring programs
 - Entry-level and/or periodic physicals and minimum training requirements
 - Tuition assistance for higher education and professional certifications
 - Length of service awards and other retirement benefits
- Applicants whose membership is substantially volunteer will receive higher consideration than will departments with a low percentage of volunteers.
- Highest priority is to assist departments that have been experiencing a high rate of turnover. As such, they will strive to fund departments with the lowest retention rate. (Retention rate is calculated by dividing the number of volunteer firefighting personnel by the total years of service).
- Applicants for recruitment and/or retention programs that are based on a formal plan will receive higher consideration.
- Requests that include a coordinator’s position and a marketing plan will receive higher consideration.
- Higher competitive ranking will be given to applications where the recruitment and/or retention plans include accident and/or injury insurance and loss wage for members.
- Applicants who indicate that their newly recruited firefighters will undergo an entry-level physical and receive immunizations will receive higher consideration.
- Requests for recruitment and/or retention activities that have a regional impact will receive a higher competitive ranking.

APPENDIX II – Virginia SAFER 10% Match Request Form

**Virginia Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER)
10% Match Request Form**

Authority: 2005 Virginia Acts of Assembly, Chapter 951

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3. The state reimbursement to localities shall be limited to the first year matching requirement of 10 percent, after which the participating localities shall assume the matching costs as specified by the federal grant requirements.

4. The Department shall provide a report on expected expenditures from this Fund to the Chairmen of the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committees prior to the 2004 Session of the General Assembly.

Legal title of jurisdiction:	
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EIN (9-digit IRS Employer ID Number)									
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FIPS Code				Award Date	
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Amount Awarded		Match Amount (10% for 1 st year Match)	
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Number of Firefighters Hired by this Grant	
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Number of Career Firefighters Prior to this Grant Award	
--	--

Number of Volunteers in your Department	
--	--

Population	
-------------------	--

Department Type (please circle only one)	Combination	Career
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Average Number of Calls Per Year	
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What was your minimum staffing average on an engine prior to this grant?	
What is your minimum staffing average on an engine upon receipt of this grant?	
How many engine companies met NFPA 1710 and/or had 4 people minimum over the course of a shift prior to receipt of this grant?	
How many engine companies now meet NFPA 1710 and/or have 4 people minimum over the course of a shift since receipt of this grant?	
What was your minimum staffing average on an aerial/quint prior to this grant?	
What is your minimum staffing average on an aerial/quint upon receipt of this grant?	

**Virginia Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER)
10% Match Acceptance Form**

DIRECTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A certified copy of your grant award letter from the Department of Homeland Security/United States Fire Administration MUST be included. • Completed acceptance statements must be received by VDFP not later than <i>(insert date)</i>. VDFP assumes no responsibility for lost, delayed, or incomplete paperwork. Properly completed acceptances not otherwise received timely may result in the award having then expired. In the foregoing it is highly recommended that completed paperwork be returned via USPS Certified Mail RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED – or – through the use of a private transfer service such as OPS, FedEx, or the like. • It is solely the recipient’s responsibility to assure that all FIN, FIPS, and EFT information is complete and accurate. Be sure that if a transfer (EFT) into other than your jurisdiction’s ATL allocation receiving account is used that the proper account information is listed and returned on or before the deadline. • All entries must be made in ink or type-written.
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STIPULATIONS	<p><i>(insert jurisdiction name)</i></p> <p>Shall receive <i>(insert 10% match amount)</i> from the SAFER Matching Grant Fund for the purpose of hiring <i>(insert number)</i> firefighters.</p>
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This offer shall expire *(insert date)*, if not otherwise accepted by that time. In accepting this award the recipient agrees to use such funds only for the specific purpose(s) granted and further agrees, in the event of non-compliance, to the full repayment of all monies received.

↓ Mark only one – failure to complete this entry may result in expiration of the award

The award is ...	<input type="checkbox"/> Accepted <input type="checkbox"/> Declined
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(signature)

(date)

(typed/printed name)

(title)

FORM MUST BE SIGNED BY: County Administrator/Executive, City Manager, Town Mayor/Town Administrator, Deputy – or – other duly authorized official whereby the application is accompanied by a copy of an ‘Ordinance’ or other such formal instrument clearly granting that party such authority.

State of Virginia

City/County of _____

On this ____ day of _____ in 2005, before me, the undersigned a Notary Public for the Commonwealth of Virginia, personally appeared _____ to me known (or to me proved) to be the identical person named herein and having in my presence executed the above, and acknowledged that they executed same as their voluntary act and deed.

My Commission expires: _____

(Notary Public)

(Seal)