JACKPOT! PF&R JUST NABBED A $2 MILLION GRANT

The Department of Homeland Security is giving the bureau cash for new SCBAs

All of PF&R’s SCBAs need to be replaced. SCBAs are one of the most critical pieces of equipment for any firefighter.

At this point, most of PF&R know that the bureau must replace all self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) and this will be a costly line item. But now, we got some good news: PF&R recently learned that it has received a significant grant from the Department of Homeland Security that will cover $2 million of the replacement cost. The Assistance for Firefighters Program is a very competitive grant process that is offered annually through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). In fiscal year 2017, there were 10,048 applications proposing approximately 16,000 projects. Of those, there were approximately 2,200 awards given.

PF&R last purchased SCBAs in 2002 and has updated several parts to remain in compliance with national standards, but upgrades to remain compliant are no longer an option due to both obsolescence and part failures. Various parts have experienced between a 10% and 30% failure rate, negatively impacting bureau response reliability and putting firefighters at risk of being exposed to airborne contaminants. The increased failure rates have cost additional staff time for equipment testing and for the relocation of equipment in environments and perform their duty as interior structural firefighters,” says Deputy Chief Boone. The grant gives us $2 million dollars and requires us to provide a 10% match at $200,000. The bureau received $1.7 million from the City’s general fund. While the grant application estimated the cost of SCBA replacement at $6,500 per unit based on replacement costs for the SCBAs was one of the bureau's main budget concerns during the FY 2018/19 session. "During our budget session with City Council, we were asked, ‘If this is such a critical asset, why didn’t you plan for it?’ But because we are a general fund bureau, the City requires that any remaining funds be returned at the end of the fiscal year, making it difficult to save for large equipment replacement costs such as SCBAs,” says Jay Guo, PF&R’s Senior Business Operations Manager. “But because of this request, the City Budget Office is looking at ways for us to seed money and this grant will help with that.”

The saga of the SCBAs has been going on for some time. A pivotal event occurred in Fall 2016 when a firefighter experienced an SCBA malfunction in a basement fire. That incident started a long investigative process of documenting and tracking SCBA malfunctions and performance failures. After initial baseline testing of the SCBAs showed no indications of equipment failure, this firefighter was still adamant that there was something wrong. He encouraged PF&R’s Safety Chief to look beyond the baseline testing and review other past incidents of SCBA malfunctions, including those outside of PF&R. This started a two-year journey working with the SCBA manufacturer, NIOSH, and NFPA, as well as, networking with neighboring and regional fire departments. PF&R also assessed SCBA maintenance records for the previous five years to identify any similar patterns of component parts malfunctions that were underlying causes to an SCBA’s overall quality of performance.

“There is nothing more critical than a firefighter’s personal protective gear (PPE) and their respiratory protective equipment. A firefighter’s PPE and SCBA are the only protection that allows them to enter into immediately dangerous to life or health environments and perform their duty as interior structural firefighters,” says Deputy Chief Boone. The grant gives us $2 million dollars and requires us to provide a 10% match at $200,000. The bureau received $1.7 million from the City’s general fund. While the grant application estimated the cost of SCBA replacement at $6,500 per unit based on replacement costs for the SCBAs was one of the bureau's main budget concerns during the FY 2018/19 session. "During our budget session with City Council, we were asked, ‘If this is such a critical asset, why didn’t you plan for it?’ But because we are a general fund bureau, the City requires that any remaining funds be returned at the end of the fiscal year, making it difficult to save for large equipment replacement costs such as SCBAs,” says Jay Guo, PF&R’s Senior Business Operations Manager. “But because of this request, the City Budget Office is looking at ways for us to seed money and this grant will help with that.”

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“The intent, again, with this, is to add some ‘train the trainer’ element so that we can move this information beyond just the specialty teams and into training blocks for everyone,” he says.

Hazard Mitigation Grant Program:

We are partnering with Portland Parks & Recreation to submit for this FEMA grant to target approximately 300 acres in Forest Park for hazardous fuel reduction. Hazardous fuel removal would reduce the risk of rapid wildfire spread to communities, businesses, and critical infrastructure. Fire-adapted ecosystems would be restored and create fire resilient landscapes in the wildland-urban interface as well as natural areas.

Amount: We will be applying for between $375,000 and $429,174 of federal funding. There is a match required of 25% of total project costs.

If awarded, this will be a 3-year project thru 2021. The application due date is January 18, 2019.