

Assistance to Firefighters Grant for Richville Fire Department

Emily Brown

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Saginaw Valley State University

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Introduction

For my proposal, I am appealing to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), through the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG), for funding for my local fire department: The Richville Fire Department. The Richville Fire Department is a volunteer fire department that serves a rural community of 3,170 people in the Tuscola County-Denmark Township. They have thirty-five square miles of first due response area where 30% of the area is protected by fire hydrants. They protect critical infrastructure such as the Huron Eastern railroad and Michigan Highways M-46, M-81, and M-15. In addition, they also protect a vast expanse of farmland which makes up 89% of their primary response area.

The only businesses in the area that are a safety hazard for fire and life safety are the Star of the West Milling Company, Weber Steel, and the LeBudde Group a pet food company. They have twenty-one active firefighters who perform firefighting duties, however only eighteen of these men have been trained in Firefighter I and II—the three firemen who are not trained, are currently attending the fire academy. In 2015, the Richville Fire Department responded to thirty-three calls, eleven of which were structure fires and ten of which were calls where they provided auto/mutual aid. Lastly, the fire department provides services to one school, that has two-hundred and three students and one daycare.

The Richville Fire Department is made up of a group of people who are constantly giving back to their community by making sure they are always up to date on every requirement and standard that they should follow. They are expected to fulfill the requirements of The Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA) annual training, the recommended training of the Michigan Firefighters Training Council, and any other training expectations of the

Chief that he implements. They attend all of this training, with no compensation, because they are dedicated and committed to their community and they want to keep their family, friends, and fellow residents as safe as they can.

The fire department needs new air packs, or self-contained breathing apparatuses (SCBA) and they do not have the money for the new gear because they are a volunteer fire department and their budget is too low to afford it. This could cause a lot of problems, not only for the firemen, but for the community as well.

Current Situation

Problem

The Richville Fire Department is my local fire department, and I thought it would be beneficial for me to help my community out, by helping them. I met with the Fire Chief to see if there was anything I could do to help his department and he told me they need new air packs, or self-contained breathing apparatuses (SCBA). Because they are a volunteer fire department, their annual budget is based upon the township millage. The township is small and poor, and their budget is too low to afford costly, but vital, new equipment. The problem Richville Fire Department is facing at this time is that their air packs are so out of date, they are unsafe to use. Not only that, but the fire department needs to meet the standards of the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA), The Occupational Safety and Health Agency (OSHA), and the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Agency (MIOSHA) and their air packs currently are not up to date with these standards. Finally, the air packs they have now are so out of date, as I mentioned earlier, they don't make parts for the department to repair them, therefore they will eventually not pass the yearly testing.

Causes of the Problem

Low Budget

The air packs include: the pack themselves, two cylinders (one in the pack and a spare), an integrated thermal imager and pass device, and testing equipment to make sure the pack is working correctly and that the firefighters are wearing them correctly. The current dollar amount

they are requesting from FEMA is \$103,977. Richville Fire Department's

Low Budget Causes:

- Millage based department with a small township population
- Township will vote down millages, if brought to the polls

annual budget is only \$65,000 so they can't afford to pay for replacements on

top of all the other expenses they have throughout the year. It's pertinent that

they have safe gear that they can rely on when they go into a burning building,

but due to their volunteer status as a department they can't afford it. The reason

their budget is low, is because they are a millage based fire department. Due to

the fact that the township population is small (3,170 people), they have low

property taxes, which funds 99% of the department's budget—the other 1% of

their budget is covered by fees for services. Of course, the fire department can propose a millage

increase, to increase their budget, but the township cannot afford it; Tuscola County-Denmark

Township has a poverty rate of 15% (United States Census Bureau). So, even if they did propose

a millage increase and brought it to the polls, the township would most likely vote it down.

Impacts if the Problem is Ignored

If the Richville Fire Department cannot get the funding they will need to replace the air packs, it could eventually spell disaster for the township. I do not think that it is ethical or logical to send any firefighters, volunteer or not, into a burning building without gear that works properly and that's what is going to happen if they cannot get the new air packs. It is also

important to me, and other township members, that these men are safe when they are fighting the fires because we have friends and family on the department—for me, my brother and my father, who is also the Fire Chief, volunteer their time and dedication to this department. We also cannot forget that ignoring the problem could cause potential property damage, due to the fire department not being able to put out the fire because they do not have the proper equipment.

Assistance to Firefighters Grant

Solution to the Problem

Since the township is so small, and because they really cannot afford a higher tax rate, the Richville Fire Department can't afford new air packs. Not having the proper equipment puts the

firefighters in grave danger that could cause serious injury, even death. It is

• The RFD needs the funds from FEMA to make sure their air packs are compliant with the safety standards of many different organizations and to keep their firefighters safe while on scene

directly stated that FEMA holds the safety of our nations citizens, and the safety of the brave men and women whose jobs are to keep us safe, in the utmost regard in their mission statement. This is what I am trying to do for my community—without the proper air packs, the Richville firefighters could get extremely injured or die on scene because they have such poor equipment. The air packs do not meet the recognized standards of the NFPA, MIOSHA, and OSHA. So, they need to get the funding from an agency with enough money to donate and

FEMA, through the AFG, is the best option for that. If FEMA grants the RFD

with the money needed, they will be able to meet the standards of NFPA, OSHA, and MIOSHA.

Not only that, but the fire department will be able to ensure the safety of their firefighters,

keeping our friends and family of the community safe, and it will make them more efficient

when fighting the fires so that property damage can stay at a minimum.

If this funding is granted, it will also benefit other fire departments in the area. The Richville Fire Department, and other area fire departments, rely heavily upon mutual aid. If they are granted the money for new air packs, they will be able to ensure the safety of their firemen on scene because all of their gear will fit properly. This will benefit other departments because they will be able to provide their assistance in a more timely manner. In addition, they will not lose valuable on scene time due to one of the firefighters' air packs malfunctioning and having to borrow another from a department they are assisting.

Requested Equipment

RIT Pack/Cylinder

The Richville Fire Department is requesting one RIT Pack/Cylinder. A RIT pack is the Rapid Intervention Pack that is designed to give the firefighters breathable air when they are in an environment that is immediately dangerous to life or health. The RIT bag rescue system with RIC fittings and can be used with high or low pressure cylinders of any time of duration. The unit uses the universal fittings, to fit any kind of air pack, and the system can be attached to the new air packs and remain attached so that the cylinder automatically refills if needed. The cost of the equipment is \$2,500 and will bring them up to the standards of NFPA, OSHA, and MIOSHA.

FIT Tester

The Richville Fire Department is requesting one FIT Tester. The county provides a FIT Test machine that any department can use at any time, to make sure they are in compliance with standards during yearly testing. However, the fire department doesn't own the adaptors that are needed to test the equipment—they are requesting adaptors only so they can use the county FIT machine. They are requesting this item so that they can make sure the mask fits the firefighter

properly, so that they do not accidentally inhale carbon monoxide on scene. The cost of the equipment is \$1,600 and will bring them up to the standards of NFPA, OSHA, and MIOSHA.

Cascade Cylinders

The Richville Fire Department is requesting three cascade cylinders at 6,000 psi. They need the new cylinders to replace the equipment that can no longer meet the standards, because they are twenty-one years old. They want the larger cylinders due to the fact that they will not need to send their current cylinders out for inspection and hydro testing within the next year or two. Purchasing the new cylinders with the grant funds, will save them money that comes so limited to them because they will not need to be tested for several years. In addition, the larger capacity cylinders will allow the air packs to be completely filled. When the air packs are filled completely, firefighters are able to use their work time properly when they are on scene—when the air packs have low psi, the fire department cannot continue fire operations and would have to call for mutual aid for man power. Their current air packs need continuous filling on scene, due to their psi being 2216, which causes frequent firefighter rotations, which hinders their fire suppression efforts. The cost of the equipment is \$1,700 each, totaling \$5,100, and will bring them up to the standards of NFPA, OSHA, and MIOSHA.

Personal Protective Equipment—SCBA

The Richville Fire Department is requesting sixteen SCBA units. An SCBA unit includes: harness/backpack, a face piece—with mask and protective bag, and two 4,500 psi cylinders. They are requesting new SCBA units because they currently have sixteen units (and 32 cylinders) that are nineteen years old, so they want to replace them due to them being unable to be repaired. Their current SCBA and cylinders are compliant with the 2002 edition, or older,

but none of them are considered damaged or obsolete. The new air packs will be lighter and have a higher voice amplification in the speakers, making it easier for the firefighters to communicate and get the job done more efficiently. The cost of the equipment is \$6,050 each, totaling \$96,800, and will bring them up to the standards of NFPA, OSHA, and MIOSHA.

Personal Protective Equipment—Face Pieces

The Richville Fire Department is requesting five face pieces that are not associated with the SCBA requests. The department has more firefighters than seated positions, so this request is for the number of firefighters that exceed the SCBA seated positions. The cost includes the mask and protective storage bag at \$650 apiece, totaling \$3,250.

Additional Information About Requested Equipment

Each of these pieces of equipment do not require any further training of the firefighters, because they have completed Firefighting I and II. However, because this equipment is new, they will have some differences to the old equipment they have now. The Chief is requiring all firefighters to be trained to use the new equipment, but is not requesting training funds from FEMA and will obtain the training through another source.

Budget

The Richville Fire Department Community Risk and Needs Assessment determined that the highest priority need is to replace the SCBA. The safety of the firefighters is the number one priority of the department, so it is important to them, and the community, that they get the proper equipment to reduce the risk of severe injury or death on scene.

In order to meet the needs of the department, the standards of NFPA, OSHA, and MIOSHA, and to reduce the risk of on-scene injury or death, the Richville Fire Department is requesting \$103,977 from FEMA to replace the SCBA units, cascade cylinders, RITT pack, and FITT Test equipment. Below is a breakdown of the total budget based on competitive quotes the Fire Chief received.

SCBA—sixteen total	At \$6,050 each, totaling \$96,800
Extra masks—five total	At \$650 each, totaling \$3,250
6,000 psi Cascade Cylinders—three total	At \$1,700 each, totaling \$5,100
RIT Pack	\$2,500
FIT Test equipment	\$1,600
Fire Department Match	\$5,273 (FD contribution of own money)
Total Budget Requested	\$103,977

Cost and Benefit

The new SCBA units are only going to help the fire department in the long run. Their current air packs are no longer useful because they are old, worn out, unrepairable, and unreliable. With the help from FEMA, the new air packs will help reduce the risk of cancer in the firefighters—the proper equipment will prevent accidental inhalation of carbon monoxide when on scene, without proper air packs the risk of developing cancer is much greater. The new air packs will help the firemen operate better on scene, will reduce repair costs for several years, and they will no longer have to continuously refill their cylinders, because they will be bigger, and rotate firemen so often which will help them distinguish the fire faster.

The department has training every other week and during their training, their SCBA units

are used and trained with at least twelve times a year. During an average year,

New SCBA units
will:

- Improve safety for firemen
 - Improve firemen's work on scene
 - Improve mutual aid assistance
-

they make about twenty-three fire calls and ten mutual aid calls. If you add those calls together and add in the twelve times a year they test their equipment, you can determine that the SCBA units are used at least forty-five times a year—if not more. The SCBA units have a minimum life span of ten years and, using those figures, the cost per use to keep our firefighters safe is a little over \$13. For about the same cost as a couple meals from McDonald's, we can give the firemen on the department the peace of mind that they are using safe and reliable

breathing equipment as they run into a burning building to save the lives of those

who lived there and the building itself.

Final Thoughts

The SCBA units the firefighters need are a required and vital portion of their turnout gear. Without the units, the firemen have no way to breathe when they are fighting a fire; if the units are unreliable and outdated, they are willingly putting themselves in an environment that is immediately dangerous to life and health with equipment that they cannot be sure will protect them. With the new units, the fire department will be purchasing not only up to date and reliable equipment, but peace of mind as well. The new SCBA units will reduce the risk of the firemen suffering from trauma of a severe injury and death itself. This is not only important to the fire department, but to the community as well. Most of the community members know a person who is on the fire department and in some cases, they are family to them. With the new SCBA units, the Richville Fire Department will meet the requirements of the NFPA, OSHA, and MIOSHA standards that their SCBA units do not meet now.

Residents and business owners will also be able to rest easy, knowing that the firemen are equipped with fully functioning gear that will help improve their ability to put out a fire, if one occurs, at a faster speed. The SCBA units then in turn, will help reduce property damage caused by the fire. Additionally, the mutual aid departments will be able to share and interchange air supplies with our SCBA units because they are universal which adds additional safety and support to those departments.

The safety and protection of the Richville firemen, the residents, mutual aid departments, any visitors, community members, and their property is of the utmost importance to the fire department. Funding this grant will be able to ensure that the Richville Fire Department can continue to serve and protect everyone and everything in our community. As it is stated, the goal of the AFG also holds these qualities to the utmost importance as well: “The primary goal of the Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) is to enhance the safety of the public and firefighters with respect to fire-related hazards by providing direct financial assistance to eligible fire departments...” (Welcome). If this grant is funded, the Richville Fire Department will follow the AFG policies and standards when buying the equipment and assigning it to the firefighters.

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