

# Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives

## Initiative #10



**Grant programs should support the implementation of safe practices and procedures and/or mandate safe practices as an eligibility requirement.**

Throughout the 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives, there are opportunities for both organizational and personal change. As your department moves toward adopting a safety-minded culture, use the tools offered in the 16 initiatives as guiding documents.

Ensuring that grant programs support the implementation of safe practices and/or mandate safe practices, as an eligibility requirement for emergency responders, may seem like a logical step forward. Life Safety Initiative #10 strives to institutionalize a connection between grant funding and safety. Because grants intersect as so many areas within the fire service, we must also remember that in order to change how grants are allocated, we must also focus on the important areas of culture, technology, and safety-related training.

Questioning the efficacy of grants, especially the billions of dollars that have come to the fire service since 9-11 is entirely appropriate. Have we spent this money well? Has the government been clear enough on how program monies should be spent? Has any effort been made to evaluate where we have come so far? Have these funds come too late? Should we have made the connection between dollars and safety years ago? Why don't we know what's good for us, and have grants made any difference? Finally, what impedes our progress and can grants impact change regarding firefighter line-of-duty injuries and deaths?

Twenty years ago, one of the most feared standards in the fire service, NFPA 1500, [Standard on Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program (1987)] was developed because, "there was no consensus standard for an occupational safety and health program for the fire service," while fire service organizations were being increasingly subject to regulations that were "developed for general industry and that did not provide for many of the specific needs and concerns of an organization involved in the delivery of emergency services" (NFPA, 2006).

Whether all the apprehension associated with 1500 was warranted or not, it is certainly true that it had the effect of forcing most fire departments to change their safety practices over the last two decades. The 1500 Standard was a far reaching and revolutionary document that many departments still struggle to implement in its entirety. In its wake, the NFPA has introduced other standards to support safety dealing with apparatus, protective equipment and training. To this day, many fire service organizations seek grants to implement the 1500 Standard; it is even included as a worthy goal in the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) guidance process. The point here is that even though many grants were applied for in light of the 1500 Standard, the Standard was the impetus for the grant writing increase.

As a fire service we should constantly strive to improve firefighter health and safety, one way to do this is by mandating all grants improve health and safety.

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In light of the durability and longevity of national consensus safety standards like 1500, it seems logical to ask whether there is a relationship between grants and increased safety. In other words, can we accurately claim that funding will increase safety for firefighters? Are we improving our safety profile, or are we wasting precious dollars that could be spent elsewhere. We are constantly reminded of safe practices in magazines, websites, and in training, yet we do not seem to reach a continued reduction in firefighter deaths and injuries. Does money solve the problem or do we need to mandate additional policies as part of the approval for a grant? Even the creation of a standard such as 1500 did not change the fire service but with grant money AND a standard we may go a long way towards progress that will be seen in future results.

## CONCLUSION

It is entirely appropriate to support firefighter safety through strategic grant seeking and funding. But, it will be much more difficult to get to a point where safety practices are mandated requirements in order to obtain a grant. Until that time we must each adopt a personal mandate to live the 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives and challenge each firefighter we meet to do the same. We must change the mindset of every American firefighter to one of personal accountability, to where getting injured on the job is a rare event. Grants can be used to support culture change by strictly supporting initiatives which have a strong probability of supporting firefighter safety.

## Final Thoughts

Consider a department or organizational requirement that all grant proposals you seek will have a safety dimension as a high priority.

Mandating of safe practices is important but it is difficult to measure the true outcome, so do not expect to have immediate measurable outcomes; continue to develop data collection systems to support grant re-funding.

Encourage fire service manufacturers to give grants to departments and organizations for testing their products, especially PPE along with fire apparatus and equipment.

Has your department received any grants? Did they involve health and safety issue?

Does your department try to meet NFPA 1500 standards through acquiring grants?

Who is in charge of writing your departments grants? Do they have the members overall safety in mind?



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