

Project Requested to be Funded:

The Bay Leaf Volunteer Fire Department is submitting an application for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program, specifically in the program area of Operations and Firefighter Safety. Our request for this Grant is to provide us the means to furnish NFPA and OSHA compliant basic structural fire fighting PPE, consisting of coats, pants, boots, helmet, and hoods to 100% of our active firefighters!

The Bay Leaf Volunteer Fire Department is a combination Department. We have 12 staffed career firefighters weekdays at 3 stations, and a full time chief officer. The balance of the time, our 37 square mile, 20,500 population Fire District is manned entirely by volunteer firefighters. We currently have 78 active firefighters in our Department.

Fire fighting safety and effectiveness have always been a top priority of this Department. The Bay Leaf Volunteer Fire Department has attempted to keep all of its firefighters outfitted in safe, compliant turnout gear. Due to our tax revenue situation, we have not been able to do that, and find ourselves in the situation that only 7% of our current turnout gear is fully compliant. 60% of our turnout gear is over 11 years old. We have previously repaired this gear to maintain it in service. However, we recently had multiple samples of our turnout gear evaluated by Morning Pride, the manufacturer. They found serious damage to our sets, including quilt liner and PBI outer shell UV damage, outer shell worn and burn holes, moisture barrier failures that leak, moisture barriers with burn holes, and collar failures. The evaluation report concluded, "due to the age and condition of these garments, it is recommended that they be condemned"!

We have attempted to have a continuous replacement program to replace each set over a five to seven year period. We have had to use our funds to repair existing sets of turnout gear, and add new sets for our increased membership of volunteers as well as shifting funds to support other increased operating expenses. Over the last five years, our District has grown in size (from 27 square miles to a total of 37 square miles), population growth (from approximately 14,000 to 20,500) and increased incident call volume. Our incident call volume has more than doubled in the last five years from 420 calls per year to 860 calls per year. While operating expenses have risen to support the additional call volume and our volunteer membership has grown to support our increased District size and call volume – our fire tax income has remained essentially flat over the last five years! The state of our turnout gear has suffered the consequences.

How Grant Funds Will be Used:

The Grant funds and our applicant 10% matching share will be used to purchase fully compliant NFPA 1971 structural fire fighting turnout gear. The purchase will include 75 sets of coats, pants, boots, helmets, and hoods.

We have obtained several bids for the turnout gear, and based our Application on these bids. Upon implementation of a Grant Award, we have explored the ability to “ride” on the contract of major metropolitan turnout gear contracts. This will allow us to get the advantage of municipalities’ larger multi-year volume discount leverage rather than purchasing prices based solely on our Department needs. If this volume leverage purchasing results in any further price reductions from our received quotes, any excess funds will be processed per the Excess Funds clause, page 27, in the DHS Program Guidance for the 2004 Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program.

Our Application funding request is based upon costs of \$665 for coats, \$497.50 for pants, \$225 for helmets, \$30 for hoods, and \$225 for boots. The funds will purchase a complete set for 75 firefighters, and a second pair of bunker pants for each firefighter. Since the majority of our active firefighters are volunteers, the second set of pants will allow a set for bedside at their home. By being able to come to the station in the middle of the night already dressed in bunker pants, we will be able to get the apparatus responding out of the station sooner. Currently our volunteers get dressed at home in the middle of the night, then come to the station to man the apparatus and have to get fully dressed in turnout gear at the station. The second set of pants will allow a quicker response for our middle of the night residential structure calls. It also will provide a back-up set of dry, clean bunker pants for duty while the first set is being cleaned and dried per NFPA 1971 after major incident calls.

Why is this Program Beneficial to Community and/or Fire Department:

The absolute most important benefit of this Program is to provide all of our firefighters the most basic NFPA 1971 compliant structural fire fighting protection PPE. They currently do not have the minimum protection that should be provided. Our District’s growth, increased operating expenses, and fixed revenue over the last several years have created this health and safety issue for our Department. While the PPE is essential for structural fire fighting, it also provides basic safety and exposure protection for our firefighters during all our incidents. We are called to incidents beyond structural fires that include tornadoes, hurricanes, ice storms, vehicle accidents involving hazardous chemical exposures, vehicle fires, and small aircraft crashes.

The Bay Leaf Volunteer Fire Department is part of the Northern Region of Wake County, which consists of five independent volunteer Fire Departments. These Departments include Bay Leaf, Stony Hill, Falls, Durham Highway, and Wake Forest Fire Departments. These Departments coordinate training, SOG’s, equipment purchases, share specialized equipment, and have automatic mutual aid agreements for structural fires and other type incidents. Last year Bay Leaf Volunteer Fire Department shared in Mutual Aid calls with these Departments 120 times. Each time we are on a mutual aid call, the Departments are expecting our personnel to be adequately protected with appropriate PPE, so members from any of the Departments can work together and be confident that the firefighters can perform the required fire fighting tasks. Without the aid of this Grant, we can not provide adequate personnel with proper PPE protection when called upon to assist our neighboring community’s Fire Departments.

In addition to the Regional benefit of the Grant request, the Bay Leaf Volunteer Fire Department is on call with mutual aid assistance to the City of Raleigh Fire Department, since we have overlapping jurisdictional lines between our two Districts. The Bay Leaf Volunteer Fire Department is one of six Wake County Volunteer Fire Departments (out of a total of 19 County Departments) that is designated in the Raleigh Durham International Airport Mutual Aid Response for On-Airport Emergencies –Fire Response Support.

The awarding of this Grant Application will allow our firefighters to be compliant with NFPA and OSHA PPE Standards, as well as NFPA 1500 Standard on Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program, Protective Clothing section. It will allow our firefighters to participate in active fire fighting, and other hazardous duty incidents, not only in our home District, but also in these mutual aid responses. The Bay Leaf Volunteer Fire Department will be able to perform the necessary fire fighting tasks safely and be provided with the most basic structural fire fighting protection for all these Fire Departments' and Mutual Aid incidents.

Why Project Can Not be Funded Solely Through Local Funding:

The Bay Leaf Volunteer Fire Department's Operating Budget is funded through a Wake County Fire Use Tax. Repeated requests to increase our Operating Budget funding level have been unsuccessful! The Operating Budget funding for our Department from the Fire Tax has remained at or below the 1997 funded level – even though our fire load, district growth and essential operating items costs have increased. As such, we have not been able to accrue any funds to address this PPE shortfall. The current Fire Tax rate is \$0.10 per \$100 Assessed Property value. That is the maximum rate without requiring Wake County Commissioners to take legislative action to increase this rate. The newly elected majority of Wake County Commissioners have gone on record opposing any tax increase. Therefore, we see no tax revenue relief in the foreseeable future. Due to significant growth throughout Wake County over the last several years, the Fire Use Tax has been distributed throughout areas of the County disproportionately to their property assessed value. This has meant that over the last five years more than 50% of the Fire Use Tax that has been collected in our Fire District has gone into the County's general Fire Fund and used outside of our Fire District! Thus, Bay Leaf has experienced a flat revenue history.

Over the 1990-2000 period, Wake County's population grew 48.3%. Wake County is now the fourth most densely populated County out of the 100 counties in North Carolina. The Wake County Growth and Development Committee reported to the Wake County Commissioners last year that we have sustained this same growth rate since 2000, and they anticipate the growth rate to continue at nearly the same rate for the next several years.

This under funding by the Fire Use Tax distribution has caused the Bay Leaf Volunteer Fire Department to spend its reserve funds to meet day to day operating expenses. We are now at the minimum level of Reserve Funds required by our Contract with Wake County

to cover any emergency catastrophic apparatus or equipment repair. Thus, we have no local funding available to address this critical fire fighter safety PPE requirement.

Other Information for Consideration:

We have specifically requested Fire Use Tax funds for PPE replacement in the last two budget years, and it was cut from our request! Based upon our current funding level, and with no indication of any increase, it will take an additional 15 years to replace all of our existing turn out gear! That is based upon using our existing funding rate to replace approximately 5 sets of gear a year, and no further growth in membership requiring additional sets! That could make some of our gear over 20 years old that our firefighters would have to use!

We have exhausted all other avenues in an attempt to resolve this serious health and safety issue for our fire fighters. We have found no other source of funds to restore our PPE to basic structural fire fighting PPE Standards for all our members. We need assistance to get an initial correction of providing compliant PPE to ALL our active firefighters – and then work locally on continuously replacing/repairing a small amount each year to keep them compliant. Our last several years' growth and flat revenue has prevented us from accomplishing our goal of keeping all our fire fighters in safe, compliant turnout gear.