

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

This project, included under the Personal Protective Equipment and the Equipment Acquisition Activities of the Operations and Firefighter Safety Program Area of the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program, would enable the Gratiot Volunteer Fire Department to purchase 25 complete sets of turnout gear, six sets of self contained breathing apparatus, 10 pagers and five multi-channel portable radios for its members. By acquiring the turnout gear, self-contained breathing apparatus, pagers and portable radios, our department's firefighters would have much needed protection in compliance with the current NFPA, ISO and OSHA standards for firefighter protection.

Under the Operations and Firefighters Safety activity, the requested funds will be used to purchase 25 sets of turnout gear to provide all members of the department with their own set of turnout gear that fits them properly, along with three spare sets. This gear would include 25 turnout coats – complete with radio pocket, semi-bellow pockets, breathable thermal liner and vapor barrier, triple trim and leather reinforcements – at \$620 each; 25 name panels with 2-inch reflective lettering stating “GRATIOT VFD” sewn on the back of the coats at \$30 per panel; 25 turnout pants – consisting of full bellow pockets, triple trim, breathable thermal liner and moisture barrier, and leather reinforcements – at \$470 each; 25 Carins 1010 FD traditional helmets (one white, two yellow and 22 black) with deluxe liner system, 4-inch face shield and chinstrap at \$255 each; 25 pairs of firefighters goggles at \$40 per pair; 25 pairs of firefighter elk skin gauntlet-style gloves at \$40 per pair; 25 Lifeliners carbon hoods at \$28 each; 25 pairs of Servus 1408 lightweight bunker boots at \$110 per pair; 25 pair of red “H” style suspenders at \$30 each; and 25 glove straps at \$6 each. The five best sets of turnout gear that we now possess would be issued to new members and those who are less active in the department.

The Gratiot Volunteer Fire Department has a severe need to replace its outdated Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) used by our entry personnel since this gear is no longer reliable. We request funding to purchase six new MSA, 30-minute SCBAs (2216 psi) with integrated PASS device, and six 30-minute lightweight air bottles (2216 psi) for use as spares for the SCBAs. The cost is \$2,650 for each SCBA and \$464 for each spare bottle.

Under the Equipment Acquisition activity, the department requests the purchase of 10 pagers at \$400 each to be used by members who do not have pagers, as well as the purchase of five multi-channel portable radios at \$525 each to enable rapid and effective communications between mutual-aid units and our firefighters. This would allow our department to also comply with ISO requirements.

The total funding requested from the Personal Protective Equipment Category is \$66,034.

FINANCIAL NEED:

Providing personal protective equipment, self-contained breathing apparatus, pagers and portable radios for our members is well beyond our department's budget for the foreseeable future. Our department receives approximately \$1,500 per year for fire insurance rebate; \$16,800 per year from the Township of Gratiot; and \$4,200 from the Village of Gratiot for the operation of the fire department and EMS. The township and village also have five more annual payments of \$18,500 to pay off the loan for the department's pumper truck. By the time we pay for training, insurance, fuel, utilities and maintenance on the building and vehicles from our operating budget, there is no money remaining for other items, and as such we are unable to save any funds for the purchase of new personal protective equipment. In addition, our department conducts three fund-raising events each year, and in the past four years we have used these funds to acquire 30 used 2½-inch hoses, 15 new 1¾-inch hoses, five complete sets of turnout gear, two new self contained breathing apparatus and a 500-gallon per minute portable pump to refill tankers with water from streams and ponds. At this rate, it will take our department between 10 to 12 years to obtain new turnout gear for each member of the department. We believe this to be an unacceptable amount of time to acquire this needed and necessary protective equipment.

We have approached the boards of both the village and town of Gratiot for assistance to purchase these items. Due to the implementation of the use-value land assessment method for assessing property taxes in Wisconsin, our township and village, which are mostly rural, have experienced a reduction in tax funds available, and there is no industry in our fire protection district that could provide an increased tax base. Currently our department consumes 20% of the township's tax revenue and 24% of the village's tax revenue. The funds to provide personal protective equipment to our firefighters just aren't there. Both boards have stated, however, that they would be willing to fund the department's portion of the grant, if this request were to be approved.

COST BENEFIT OF THE REQUEST:

We value what small amount of equipment our department has – which is not very much – and we are fortunate to have a dedicated group of volunteers, some of whom have the ability to fabricate, repair and maintain our equipment at a minimum of cost to the community. Our department has always had the ability to make the most out of what it does possess and has continually operated with only the bare minimum of what it needs to function.

Turnout Gear

The Gratiot Volunteer Fire Department has obtained some used turnout gear from neighboring departments but it is more than 15 years old. Those departments parted with this equipment because it was not up to NFPA, ISO and OSHA standards, but the equipment was better than what we had been using. It is, however, no longer cost

effective to repair this turnout gear. To add to our problems, the turnout gear we have is contaminated with residue from fires and farm chemicals, does not repel liquids, most have holes, badly worn stress points and the thermal protection does not exist. In our rural community, we place our firefighters using inferior equipment at an unnecessary risk until mutual-aid units arrive on-scene. Our officers try to limit our firefighters to exterior work, drivers, and tanker refill points. Entry work is only done when absolutely necessary until the arrival of mutual-aid units. This is as long as 15 to 20 minutes. The funding for this personal protective equipment will benefit the department by providing our firefighters with the highest level of protection without the burden of extra weight, loss of mobility and added stress as they perform their tasks.

We do not have the resources to provide multiple garments for our members as they respond without knowing what hazards await them on-scene. The proposed personal protective equipment would optimize our firefighters' protection for all emergency responses, including structural fires, search and rescue operations, and initial hazardous or biological material incidents. This is the type of effective protective gear they must have while at the scene of a fire, rescue or accident. It would also greatly enhance our support capabilities to our six mutual-aid departments as the Gratiot department would be able to provide manpower that is properly equipped and protected to assist those departments.

Self Contained Breathing Apparatus

The need for properly functioning self contained breathing apparatus increases with each incident we respond to where our firefighters could inhale hazardous and possibly toxic fumes or smoke. We must be able to provide our firefighters with increased protection while working within an extremely hazardous or toxic atmosphere. Our outdated breathing apparatus does not provide reliable respiratory protection for our firefighters while they perform critical rescue and fire suppression activities. It has become increasingly more difficult to obtain repair parts for these out dated units. It is very difficult and exhausting to climb up the side of a 50-foot silo to rescue an individual overcome by silo gas or extinguish the burning contents of a silo while they wear an inadequate breathing apparatus with steel air bottles. The funding and purchase of modern breathing apparatus would provide our firefighters with the life-sustaining air they need to rescue anything and everything from trapped humans to trapped cattle. It will provide them with a safety net when they approach leaking liquid petroleum gas or 500-gallon anhydrous ammonia tanks that are so prevalent within our rural area. Our personnel would be able to provide a highly increased level of support to our six mutual-aid departments, would eliminate the need to wait for mutual-aid to arrive and increase firefighter safety on the scene.

Pagers

The department currently has 25 pagers that work for use among a total of 45 firefighters and EMS first responders. Many of our members reside in the countryside where they cannot hear the fire-warning sirens in the village, and, as a result, they must either

purchase their own personal scanner or rely on telephone contact to inform them of an incident. Since several of these individuals are part of husband-and-wife teams and are able to share a pager, we have only a need for 10 additional pagers to ensure that each member or family has access to a pager on a 24-hour basis.

Portable Radios

The Gratiot Volunteer Fire Department currently has one portable, multi-channel radio, which has been issued to the chief. We request the purchase of five additional portable, multi-channel radios so that one radio can be placed in each of our vehicles to help bring us into compliance with ISO requirements. This would also enable our officers to communicate with our entry teams or hose-line personnel in a more effective manner, and it would permit instantaneous communication between our firefighters and mutual-aid units. The unnecessary and preventable delay in communications often results in misunderstandings and confusion at the scene and could result in a serious injury or fatality to a firefighter or civilian.

STATEMENT OF EFFECT:

Our department is located in southwest Wisconsin, seven miles north of the Illinois state line. We are in the center of a mutual-aid area with six other departments that provide fire protection for a population of more than 8,000 people in a region of more than 275 square miles – 90% of which is rural. Our fire protection and mutual-aid area also includes 75 miles of state highways and 14 miles of a single track railroad line that are heavily used by vehicles transporting various types of hazardous materials, as well as 27 miles of six inch Propane/Natural Gas Transmission Pipeline of which 12 miles runs through our protection district, meaning the necessity of having proper personal protective equipment is ever increasing.

The Village of Gratiot is a small community of about 285 residents, while the Township of Gratiot has roughly 1,275 residents spread out over 56 square miles. Our department operates from one station house within the village and its inventory includes: a 1974 750-gallon per minute pumper, a 1999 1000-gallon per minute pumper, a 1987 1,650 gallon tanker with a 500-gallon per minute pump, a locally fabricated 1991 Quick Attack brush truck with a 250-gallon per minute pump, and a 1991 rescue/EMS truck.

The Gratiot Volunteer Fire Department receives guidance and oversight from a fire district board that consists of elected officials from both the township and village boards. These officials understand the department's concerns with firefighter safety and the ability to protect our firefighters when they engage in rescue efforts at the scene of structural fires and accidents both on and off the roadway. They support this project 100%.

Our officers and firefighters understand the risks they take when they enter a hazardous situation without the proper personal protective equipment. It is with a great deal of pride that we note there has not been a loss of a civilian or a firefighter life from a fire since

1975, and it is only through great personal risk and courageous dedication by the firefighters that other fatalities or serious injuries to civilians or fellow firefighters have not occurred.

The funding included in this request will have a permanent and positive affect on the Gratiot Volunteer Fire Department and the citizens it serves. Implementation of this project will directly benefit the citizens of our community, address fundamental safety and operational concerns within the department, and benefit the six adjoining mutual-aid departments.

Advances in regulatory standards have fueled the development of personal protective equipment technology that has increased protection for firefighters who must work in extremely hazardous conditions, but our department's outdated and badly worn-out personal protective equipment does not provide adequate protection when our firefighters must perform critical rescue and fire suppression activities. The purchase of modern personal protective equipment can change this situation by giving our firefighters the protection they need and deserve when they perform their duties. Without the financial assistance provided through the Assistance to Firefighters Act grant program, however, we simply cannot afford to purchase this lifesaving technology on our own.

Our membership strongly believes that we are only asking for what we need, and the funding of this project would resolve the deficiencies identified. It will also enhance our department and community's emergency preparedness in the face of increasing threats of Weapons of Mass Destruction, and the discovery of illegal Methamphetamine labs within our protection district and other incidents where firefighters must wear proper protective equipment as mandated and in accordance with a Homeland Security priority.

The Gratiot Volunteer Fire Department has come a long way during the past 10 years. Our firefighters have dedicated their personal time to attend every local, county, regional, and state training opportunity they can. We are proud to have 97% of our firefighters certified at Wisconsin Firefighter Level 1 and that we have implemented an aggressive fire prevention and controlled burn campaign which has resulted in a large reduction of structure and grass fires over the past two years. We are growing better and stronger, but we need the assistance that this grant program provides in our efforts to protect property and save lives.

We believe that our department is the type of fire department that the Assistance to Firefighters Act grant program was developed to help. The demands on our department are increasing much faster than the tax revenues that support it, and we do not have the financial resources to provide our firefighters with the vital personal protective equipment they need. We thank you for the on-going support and express our appreciation for the opportunity this grant could provide to our small-town, rural fire department.