Congressional Research Service
Informing the legislative debate since 1914

United States Fire Administration: An Overview

Updated April 25, 2019

Congressional Research Service
https://crsreports.congress.gov
RS20071

Summary

The United States Fire Administration (USFA)—which includes the National Fire Academy (NFA)—is currently housed within the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The objective of the USFA is to significantly reduce the nation's loss of life from fire, while also achieving a reduction in property loss and nonfatal injury due to fire.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019 (P.L. 116-6) provided $45.679 million for USFA, including $1.5 million in the FEMA Procurement, Construction, and Improvements account for the National Emergency Training Center. For FY2020, the Administration requested $46.605 million, which includes $1.5 million transferred from the Procurement, Construction, and Improvements account for NETC campus renovations. The budget proposal would be a $1 million increase over the FY2019 level; the increase would fund further improvements to NETC facilities. The budget proposal does not include funding for State Fire Training Assistance.

On January 3, 2018, the President signed the United States Fire Administration, AFG, and SAFER Program Reauthorization Act of 2017 (P.L. 115-98). P.L. 115-98 extends the USFA authorization through FY2023. The authorization levels are the same as in the previous authorization: $76,490,890 each year for FY2017 through FY2023.

Meanwhile, concerns over the federal budget deficit could impact future funding levels for the USFA. Debate over the USFA budget has focused on whether the USFA is receiving an appropriate level of funding to accomplish its mission, given that appropriations for USFA have consistently been well below the agency's authorized level. Additionally, an ongoing issue is the viability and status of the USFA and the National Fire Academy within the Department of Homeland Security.

Contents

Tables

Contacts

Background

The United States Fire Administration (USFA) is currently an entity within the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Its mission is to provide leadership, coordination, and support for the nation's fire prevention and control, fire training and education, and emergency medical services activities, and to prepare first responders and health care leaders to react to hazard and terrorism emergencies of all kinds. One of USFA's key objectives is to significantly reduce the nation's loss of life from fire, while also achieving a reduction in property loss and nonfatal injury due to fire. Although fire loss has improved significantly over the past 25 years, the fire problem in the United States remains serious. The United States still has one of the highest fire death rates in the industrialized world. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), in 2015 there were 1,345,500 total fires reported, 3,280 civilian fire deaths, 15,700 civilian fire injuries, and an estimated $14.3 billion in direct property loss.[1] There were 69 on-duty firefighter deaths in 2016.[2]

The genesis of USFA and FEMA's fire prevention and control activities can be found in the landmark 1973 report of the National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control,[3] entitled *America Burning*. The commission recommended the creation of a federal fire agency which would provide support to state and local governments and private fire organizations in their efforts to reduce fire deaths, injuries, and property loss. The commission recommended that this new agency be placed within the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Congress instead opted to place the agency in the Department of Commerce, and with the passage of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (P.L. 93-498),[4] the National Fire Prevention and Control Administration (NFPCA) was established. In 1978, Congress changed the name of NFPCA to USFA (P.L. 95-422), and in 1979, President Carter's Reorganization Plan No. 3 placed the USFA within the newly created FEMA. Also in 1979, the National Fire Academy (NFA) in Emmitsburg, MD, was opened, offering courses and training to fire service personnel and other persons engaged in fire prevention and control.

During the early 1980s, the Reagan Administration proposed the elimination of the USFA (while preserving the Fire Academy). Although Congress did not allow the termination of the USFA, the agency suffered severe staff reductions and the Fire Academy was separated from the USFA and housed organizationally with other FEMA emergency training programs. In 1991, the NFA was subsequently reorganized back into the USFA, where it remains today.

Currently, the USFA is located on the grounds of the National Emergency Training Center in Emmitsburg, MD. USFA programs include the following:

Data Collection—USFA's National Fire Data Center (NFDC) administers a national system (the National Fire Incident Reporting System or NFIRS) used for collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data and information on fire and other emergency incidents to state and local governments and the fire community. The NFDC provides a national analysis of the fire problem, identifying problem areas for which prevention and mitigation strategies are needed.

---

[1] National Fire Protection Association, *Fire Loss in the United States During 2015*, September 2016, available at http://www.nfpa.org/news-and-research/fire-statistics-and-reports/fire-statistics/fires-in-the-us/overall-fire-problem/fire-loss-in-the-united-states.

[2] National Fire Protection Association, *Firefighter Fatalities in the United States—2016*, June 2017, available at http://www.nfpa.org/news-and-research/fire-statistics-and-reports/fire-statistics/the-fire-service/fatalities-and-injuries/firefighter-fatalities-in-the-united-states.

[3] The commission was created by P.L. 90-259, the Fire Research and Safety Act of 1968.

[4] 15 U.S.C. 2201 et seq.

Public Education and Awareness—Through partnerships and special initiatives, USFA involves the fire service, the media, other federal agencies, and safety interest groups in the development and delivery of fire safety awareness and education programs. These programs are targeted at those groups most vulnerable to the hazards of fire, including the young, elderly, and disabled.

Training—USFA's National Fire Academy (NFA) offers educational opportunities for the advanced professional development of the mid-level and senior fire/EMS officers and allied professionals involved in fire prevention and life safety activities. The academy develops and delivers educational and training programs with a national focus that supplement and support state and local fire service training. The NFA also offers training to support the National Incident Management System Integration Center (NIC) and nationwide implementation of the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

Research and Technology—Through research, testing, and evaluation, USFA works with public and private entities to promote and improve fire and life safety. Research and special studies are conducted on fire detection, suppression, and notification systems, as well as issues related to firefighter and emergency responder health and safety. Research results are published and made available to the public free of charge through the USFA Publications Center.

In fulfilling its mission, the USFA uses the assets of the National Fire Academy, the National Emergency Training Center (NETC) Facilities and Support Services, and the National Fire Programs Division.

On May 18, 2017, President Trump announced his intention to appoint Chief G. Keith Bryant as the USFA Administrator.[5] G. Keith Bryant was sworn in as the U.S. Fire Administrator on August 4, 2017.

Budget

The USFA receives its annual appropriation through the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Homeland Security. **Table 1** shows recent and proposed appropriated funding for USFA.

[5] The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "President Donald J. Trump Announces Key Additions to His Administration," May 18, 2017, available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/president-donald-j-trump-announces-key-additions-administration-19/.

Table 1. Appropriations, U.S. Fire Administration

(millions of dollars)

	FY2017 (P.L. 115-31)	FY2018 (Admin. request)	FY2018 (P.L. 115-141)	FY2019 (Admin. request)	FY2019 (P.L. 116-6)	FY2020 (Admin. request)
USFA	44[a]	43.4[b]	44.4[c]	45[d]	45.7[e]	46.6

a. Includes $42.5 million for USFA under the Federal Assistance account and $1.5 million under the Procurement, Construction, and Improvements account.

b. Includes $41.9 million for USFA under the Federal Assistance account and $1.5 million under the Procurement, Construction, and Improvements account.

c. Includes $42.9 million for USFA under the Federal Assistance account and $1.5 million under the Procurement, Construction, and Improvements account.

d. Includes $43.5 million for USFA under the Federal Assistance account and $1.5 million under the Procurement, Construction, and Improvements account.

e. Includes $44.2 million for USFA under the Federal Assistance account and $1.5 million under the Procurement, Construction, and Improvements account.

Appropriations

Beginning in FY2004, the USFA was funded through the Preparedness, Mitigation, Response, and Recovery (PMRR) account within the Emergency Preparedness and Response Directorate of the Department of Homeland Security. On July 13, 2005, then-DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff announced a restructuring of DHS, effective October 1, 2005. USFA was removed from the PMRR account and received a separate appropriation (its own line item) under the new DHS Directorate for Preparedness. The FY2007 Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill (P.L. 109-295) transferred the USFA back to the Federal Emergency Management Agency within DHS.

FY2017

The Administration's FY2017 budget proposed $42.3 million for USFA, a 3.8% decrease from the FY2016 level. The request included $1.5 million for facilities improvement under the Procurement, Construction, and Improvements account. The budget proposal included $500,000 for distance learning capability and reductions of $1 million each for NFIRS and state fire training grants. The budget request would also transfer the stand-alone USFA budget account into the Preparedness and Protection activity under FEMA's broader Federal Assistance account.

On May 26, 2016, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved S. 3001, the Department of Homeland Security Act, 2017. The Senate bill would provide $44 million for USFA, which matches the FY2016 level and is $1.688 million above the request. In the accompanying report (S.Rept. 114-68), the committee stated that the increase over the Administration request should allow for the continued development of NFIRS and support for the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial. The committee maintained a separate budget account for USFA and did not transfer the USFA budget account to the Federal Assistance account as proposed in the Administration budget request.

On June 22, 2016, the House Appropriations Committee approved its version of the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2017. Unlike the Senate, the House committee transferred the USFA budget account into a broader "Federal Assistance" account in FEMA. The bill provided $42.5 million for USFA under the Federal Assistance account and $1.5 million under Procurement, Construction, and Improvements for National Fire Academy facility costs.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017 (P.L. 115-31) funded USFA at a total level of $44 million in FY2017. This consisted of $42.5 million under Education, Training, and Exercises in the Federal Assistance account, and $1.5 million under the Procurement, Construction, and Improvements account.

FY2018

For FY2018, the Administration requested $43.41 million for USFA, slightly below the FY2017 level of $44 million. The FY2018 level consists of $41.913 million under Education, Training, and Exercises in the Federal Assistance account, and $1.497 million under the Procurement, Construction, and Improvements account. According to the FY2018 budget proposal, the request reflects a $1 million reduction to the State Fire Training Assistance grants.

On July 18, 2017, the House Appropriations Committee approved the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2018 (H.R. 3355; H.Rept. 115-239). The bill provided the same level as the Administration request: $41.913 million under Education, Training, and Exercises in the Federal Assistance account, and $1.497 million under the Procurement, Construction, and Improvements account.

On September 14, 2017, the House passed H.R. 3354, a FY2018 omnibus appropriations bill that includes funding for USFA. During floor consideration, the House adopted an amendment offered by Representative Pascrell that added $1 million for USFA's State Fire Training Assistance grants, thereby restoring the Administration's proposed reduction. H.R. 3354 would provide a total of $44.41 million for USFA.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018 (P.L. 115-141) provided $44.397 million for USFA. This total included $1.497 million in the FEMA Procurement, Construction, and Improvements account for the National Emergency Training Center. State Fire Training Assistance grants continued to be funded by USFA.

FY2019

For FY2019, the Administration requested $44.993 million for USFA. The FY2019 level consisted of $43.493 million under Education, Training, and Exercises in the Federal Assistance account, and $1.5 million for annual capital improvement of the National Emergency Training Center under the Procurement, Construction, and Improvements account.

On June 21, 2018, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved S. 3109, the Department of Homeland Security Act, 2019 (S.Rept. 115-283). The Senate bill would provide $44 million to USFA in the Federal Assistance account, $507,000 above the budget request, to ensure the National Fire Academy can fulfill its mission of providing training and professional development without reducing its ability to carry out other important responsibilities. The bill report directed FEMA to continue its traditional funding for the congressionally mandated National Fallen Firefighters Memorial. S. 3109 would also provide $1.5 million for annual capital improvement of the National Emergency Training Center under the Procurement, Construction, and Improvements account.

On July 25, 2018, the House Appropriations Committee approved its version of the FY2019 Homeland Security bill. Identical to the Administration's budget request, the House bill would provide $43.493 million under Education, Training, and Exercises in the Federal Assistance account, and $1.5 million under the Procurement, Construction, and Improvements account.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019 (P.L. 116-6) provided $45.679 million for USFA, including $1.5 million in the FEMA Procurement, Construction, and Improvements account for the National Emergency Training Center.

FY2020

For FY2020, the Administration requested $46.605 million for USFA, which includes $1.5 million transferred from the Procurement, Construction, and Improvements account for NETC campus renovations. The budget proposal would be a $1 million increase over the FY2019 level; the increase would fund further improvements to NETC facilities. The budget proposal does not include funding for State Fire Training Assistance.

Authorizations

The U.S. Fire Administration Reauthorization Act of 2003 (P.L. 108-169) was signed into law on December 6, 2003. The act reauthorized the USFA through FY2008 at the following levels: $63 million for FY2005, $64.85 million for FY2006, $66.796 million for FY2007, and $68.8 million for FY2008. P.L. 108-169 also reestablished the presidentially appointed position of the U.S. Fire Administrator, which had been statutorily abolished by the Homeland Security Act of 2002. Additionally, the legislation directed the USFA to develop new firefighting technologies and standards in coordination with private sector standards groups and federal, state, and local agencies. P.L. 108-169 required that equipment purchased with fire grant money meet or exceed voluntary consensus standards when feasible.

The U.S. Fire Administration Reauthorization Act of 2008 was signed into law on October 8, 2008 (P.L. 110-376). P.L. 110-376 authorized the USFA at $70 million for FY2009, $72.1 million for FY2010, $74.263 million for FY2011, and $76.491 million for FY2012. Provisions included authorizing National Fire Academy training program modifications and reports; directing the National Fire Academy to provide training on incidents occurring in the wildfire-urban interface, multijurisdictional fires, hazardous materials incidents, and advanced emergency medical services; authorizing USFA to enter into contracts with one or more nationally recognized third-party organizations to deliver training; a report on the feasibility of providing incident command training for fires at ports and in marine environments; national fire incident reporting system upgrades; sponsoring and disseminating research on fire prevention and control at the wildland-urban interface; encouraging adoption of national voluntary consensus standards for firefighter health and safety; establishing a state and local fire service position at the National Operations Center within DHS; providing coordination regarding fire prevention and control and emergency medical services; and expressing congressional support for USFA recommendations for adoption and education regarding sprinklers in commercial and residential buildings.

On January 2, 2013, the President signed P.L. 112-239, the FY2013 National Defense Authorization Act. Title XVIII, Subtitle B was the U.S. Fire Administration Reauthorization Act of 2012, which authorized USFA through FY2017. P.L. 112-239 included the following provisions:

- reauthorized USFA at an annual level of $76,490,890 for FY2013 through FY2017, and for each fiscal year sets aside $2,753,672 to be used to carry out Section 8(f) of the Fire Prevention and Control Act (15 U.S.C. 2207) related to evaluation of technology and development of standards;
- authorized the USFA Administrator to appoint a Deputy Administrator;

- authorized the Administrator to take such steps as the Administrator considers appropriate to educate the public and overcome public indifference as to fire, fire prevention, and individual preparedness; and
- removed the limitation on funding levels for updating the National Fire Incident Reporting System.

In the 115th Congress, on July 12, 2017, the House Subcommittee on Research and Technology, Committee on Science, Space and Technology, held a hearing entitled *U.S. Fire Administration and Fire Grant Programs Reauthorization: Examining Effectiveness and Priorities*. Testimony was heard from the USFA acting administrator and from fire service organizations.[6]

On December 15, 2017, H.R. 4661, the United States Fire Administration, AFG, and SAFER Program Reauthorization Act of 2017, was introduced by Representative Comstock, which sought to reauthorize the USFA through FY2023. On December 18, 2017, the House passed H.R. 4661 by voice vote under suspension of the rules. On December 21, 2017, the Senate passed H.R. 4661 without amendment by unanimous consent.

On January 3, 2018, the President signed the United States Fire Administration, AFG, and SAFER Program Reauthorization Act of 2017 (P.L. 115-98). P.L. 115-98 extends the USFA authorization through FY2023. The authorization levels are the same as in the previous authorization: $76,490,890 each year for FY2017 through FY2023, of which $2,753,672 each fiscal year is to be used to carry out Section 8(f) of the Fire Prevention and Control Act (15 U.S.C. 2207) related to evaluation of technology and development of standards.

Assistance to Firefighters Program (FIRE Act Grants)

The Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Program,[7] also known as the FIRE Act grant program, was established by Title XVII of the FY2001 Floyd D. Spence National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 106-398). The program provides federal grants directly to local fire departments and unaffiliated Emergency Medical Services (EMS) organizations to help address a variety of equipment, training, and other firefighter-related and EMS needs. A related program is the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters (SAFER) program, which provides grants for hiring, recruiting, and retaining firefighters.[8]

Since its inception, the fire grant program has been administered by FEMA/USFA (FY2001-FY2003), the Office for Domestic Preparedness (FY2004), the Office of State and Local Government Coordination Preparedness (FY2005), and the Office of Grants and Training in the DHS Directorate for Preparedness (FY2006). The FY2007 DHS Appropriations Act (P.L. 109-295) transferred USFA to FEMA and the fire and SAFER grants to the Grants Programs Directorate in FEMA. Congressional appropriations reports have consistently instructed DHS to maintain USFA involvement in the grant administration process for AFG and SAFER grants.

[6] Testimony is available at https://science.house.gov/legislation/hearings/subcommittee-research-and-technology-hearing-us-fire-administration-and-fire.

[7] For more information on the fire grant program, see CRS Report RL32341, *Assistance to Firefighters Program: Distribution of Fire Grant Funding*, by Lennard G. Kruger.

[8] For more details on the SAFER grant program, see CRS Report RL33375, *Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response: The SAFER Grant Program*, by Lennard G. Kruger.

In September 2016, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report entitled *Fire Grants: FEMA Could Enhance Program Administration and Performance Assessment.* Among its findings, GAO concluded that FEMA has not defined and documented USFA's specific role or responsibilities with the fire grants program, and that there is no formalized relationship or policy regarding how the two organizations' programs could work together. According to GAO

> Although a level of informal coordination exists between GPD [Grant Programs Directorate] and USFA, enhancing these efforts by using collaborative mechanisms that our work across the federal government has identified as key features and issues to consider during implementation—such as clearly defining and agreeing upon USFA's role and responsibilities and documenting agreement regarding how they will be collaborating—could help GPD further leverage USFA expertise and resources in support of the fire grants programs, which could also help GPD manage the integration of fire grants into broader national preparedness efforts.[9]

In December 2016, the USFA signed an agreement with FEMA's Grant Programs Directorate to provide a framework for each entity's roles and responsibilities for improving the management of the fire grants.[10]

Issues in the 116th Congress

Concerns over the federal budget deficit could impact future funding levels for the USFA. Debate over the USFA budget has focused on whether the USFA is receiving an appropriate level of funding to accomplish its mission, given that appropriations for USFA have consistently been well below the agency's authorized level, and given that USFA's budget has remained flat over recent years.

The 116th Congress may also consider whether the role of USFA might be expanded. For example, H.R. 1646, the Helping Emergency Responders Overcome Act of 2019 (the HERO Act), introduced by Representative Bera on March 8, 2019, would direct USFA, in coordination with the Secretary of Health and Human Services, to develop and make publicly available resources that may be used by the federal government and other entities to educate mental health professionals about the mental health issues and challenges faced by firefighters and emergency medical services personnel.

Finally, an ongoing issue is the viability and status of the USFA and National Fire Academy within the Department of Homeland Security. While supportive of the reorganization of FEMA into DHS, many in the fire service community have cautioned that USFA and NFA programs—which address the day-to-day challenges faced by fire departments—should not be overshadowed in an organization which focuses on homeland security and counterterrorism. Since the establishment of DHS in March 2003, fire service groups have opposed a number of actions DHS has taken with respect to the USFA and NFA. These included the abolishment of the presidentially appointed position of U.S. Fire Administrator (subsequently reestablished by enactment of the USFA Reauthorization Act of 2003); proposed cancellations of some NFA courses in 2003 due to an across-the-board FEMA budget cut (those NFA courses were

---

[9] Government Accountability Office, *Fire Grants: FEMA Could Enhance Program Administration and Performance Assessment*, GAO-16-744, September 2016, p. 31, available at http://gao.gov/assets/680/679787.pdf.

[10] Testimony of Denis Onieal, Acting U.S. Fire Administrator, before the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology, Subcommittee on Research and Technology, July 12, 2017, available at https://science.house.gov/sites/republicans.science.house.gov/files/documents/HHRG-115-SY15-WState-DOnieal-20170712.pdf.

subsequently restored after fire service protests); and the transfer of the fire grant program from the USFA to the DHS Office for Domestic Preparedness.

Author Information

Lennard G. Kruger
Specialist in Science and Technology Policy

Jill C. Gallagher
Analyst in Telecommunications Policy

Disclaimer