

An hourglass-shaped graphic with a globe of the Earth inside. The top bulb is dark blue, and the bottom bulb is light blue. The hourglass is centered on the page.

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United States Fire Administration: An Overview

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CRS Report for Congress

United States Fire Administration: An Overview

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Summary

The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) — which includes the National Fire Academy (NFA) — is currently an entity 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 non-fatal injury due to fire. The Administration's FY2009 budget proposal requested \$40.9 million for USFA, a reduction of 5.5% from the FY2008 level. For FY2009, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved \$43.3 million for USFA, while the House Appropriations Committee approved \$44.979 million. The Consolidated Security, Disaster Assistance, and Continuing Appropriations Act, 2009 (P.L. 110-329) — which contains the FY2009 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act — provided \$44.979 million for USFA. Meanwhile, the United States Fire Administration Reauthorization Act of 2008 (H.R. 4847/S. 2606) was signed into law on October 8, 2008 (P.L. 110-376). This report will be updated as events warrant.

Background

The U.S. 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 all 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 non-fatal 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, in 2006 there were 3,245 civilian fire deaths, 16,400

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civilian fire injuries, and an estimated \$11.307 billion in direct property loss.¹ According to the U.S. Fire Administration, there were 115 firefighter on-duty deaths in 2007.²

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, Maryland 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, Maryland. USFA programs include the following:

Data Collection — USFA's National Fire Data Center (NFDC) administers a national system 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.

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.

¹ Karter, Michael J., National Fire Protection Association, *Fire Loss in the United States During 2006*, September 2007, available at [<http://www.nfpa.org/assets/files/PDF/OS.fireloss.pdf>].

² U.S. Fire Administration, *On-Duty Firefighter Fatalities in the United States*, available at [<http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/pdf/07-fatality-summary.pdf>].

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.*

Training — USFA’s National Fire Academy (NFA) offers educational opportunities for the advanced professional development of the mid-level and senior fire/EMS officer 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.

Budget

In previous years, the USFA, through FEMA, received its yearly appropriation through the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on VA, HUD, and Independent Agencies. Beginning in FY2004, the USFA received its appropriation through the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Homeland Security. **Table 1** shows recent and proposed appropriated funding for USFA.

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, 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.

FY2008. The Administration’s FY2008 budget request for USFA was \$43.3 million. Proposed increases for the USFA included \$300,000 for expansion of a distance learning program and \$1 million to develop curriculum for the Preparedness Leadership Institute. On December 26, 2007, the President signed the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-161), which provided \$43.3 million for the USFA. Additionally, as stated in the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying P.L. 110-161, the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations provided \$1 million for development of a web-based version of the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS), an initiative to be led by the USFA.

FY2009. The Administration’s FY2009 budget proposal requested \$40.9 million for USFA, a reduction of 5.5% from the FY2008 level. As in past years, the budget documents do not provide a breakdown of funding for the National Fire Academy. According to the budget proposal, the reduction is based on several factors including “the substantial level of funding over the past five years and a reprioritization of FEMA resources.” The budget proposal further stated that “the reduction in funding will result in a minimal impact” on USFA program performance. Additionally, the Administration

FY2009 budget transferred the USFA budget from a stand-alone FEMA line item to the Operations, Management, and Administration (OMA) account within FEMA.

On June 19, 2008, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved the FY2009 appropriations bill for the Department of Homeland Security (S. 3181; S.Rept. 110-396). The bill provided \$43.3 million for USFA, the same level as was appropriated for FY2008. The Committee maintained a separate line item account for USFA, and stated its disagreement with the Administration's request to merge USFA funding into FEMA's Management and Administration account. The Committee directed FEMA to submit a maintenance and modernization plan for the USFA and Emergency Management Institute campuses, and directed USFA to provide a briefing on the status of upgrades to the National Fire Information Reporting System (NFIRS).

On June 24, 2008, the House Appropriations Committee approved its version of the FY2009 appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security, and reported its bill on September 18, 2008 (H.R. 6947; H.Rept. 110-862). The Committee provided \$44.979 million for USFA, an increase of \$1.679 million over the FY2008 level. The Committee also maintained a separate line item account for USFA, and did not agree with the Administration's request to merge USFA funding into FEMA's Management and Administration account. The Committee included \$1.179 million to continue implementation of NFIRS upgrades and stated that NFIRS should continue to be managed and operated by USFA. The Committee also included \$500,000 for buildings maintenance on the USFA campus.

The Consolidated Security, Disaster Assistance, and Continuing Appropriations Act, 2009 (P.L. 110-329) — which contains the FY2009 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act — provided \$44.979 million for USFA. The DHS explanatory statement directed FEMA to submit a facilities master plan as detailed in the Senate report, and to allocate \$500,000 to maintenance needs on the USFA campus and \$1.179 million to implementation of the National Fire Incident Report System.

Table 1. Appropriations, U.S. Fire Administration
(\$ millions)

	FY2008 (P.L. 110-161)	FY2009 (Admin. request)	FY2009 (H.Rept. 110-862)	FY2009 (S.Rept. 110-396)	FY2009 (P.L. 110-329)
U.S. Fire Administration	43.300	40.913	44.979	43.000	44.979

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 United States Fire Administration Reauthorization Act of 2008 (H.R. 4847/S. 2606) was signed into law on October 8, 2008 (P.L. 110-376). P.L. 110-376 authorizes the USFA at \$70 million for FY2009, \$72.1 million for FY2010, \$74.263 million for FY2011, and \$76.491 million for FY2012. Provisions include: 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, multi-jurisdictional 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.

Assistance to Firefighters Program (FIRE Act Grants)⁵

The Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Program, also known as the FIRE Act grant program, was established by Title XVII of the FY2001 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.⁶

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). Congressional appropriations reports have consistently instructed DHS to maintain USFA involvement in the grant administration process for fire and SAFER grants. The FY2007 DHS appropriations bill (P.L. 109-295) transferred USFA to FEMA and the fire and SAFER grants to the Grants Program Directorate in FEMA.

Issues

Debate over the USFA budget focuses on whether the USFA is receiving sufficient funding to accomplish its mission and to enable the USFA to assume an enhanced role within DHS. Other legislation introduced into the 110th Congress would expand USFA's

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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.

role. H.R. 1351, the Firefighters Special Operation Task Force Act, would authorize USFA to award grants to firefighter task forces for equipment, training, and personnel. H.R. 4846, the First Line of Defense Infrastructure Improvement Act, would establish a new grant program within USFA that would primarily fund repairs and renovations to fire stations located near critical infrastructure. H.R. 6112, the Healthy Firefighters Act, would authorize USFA to contract with medical research universities to conduct long-term health monitoring of firefighters who have responded to emergencies in disaster areas and to consult with the Secretary of Health and Human Services to provide for the treatment of those firefighters.

Meanwhile, an ongoing issue is the viability and status of the USFA and National Fire Academy within the Department of Homeland Security. While initially 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 include 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 subsequently restored after fire service protests); and the transfer of the fire grants program from the USFA to the Office for Domestic Preparedness. On July 13, 2005, DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff announced a restructuring of DHS, effective October 1, 2005. Under this restructuring, USFA was removed from FEMA and located under the new DHS Directorate for Preparedness. However, in the 109th Congress, Title VI of the Conference Agreement on the DHS appropriations bill (P.L. 109-295; H.Rept. 109-699), the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006, transferred most of the existing Preparedness Directorate (including the USFA) back to an enhanced FEMA. Additionally, P.L. 109-295 directed that the Administrator of the USFA remain an assistant secretary-level position.