

Frequently Asked Questions Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant Program

The IAFF is working with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to establish the new guidelines for Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grants to make funding available to rehire fire fighters who were laid off, bring back positions that are not being filled and to prevent further reductions in staffing that have resulted from the current financial crisis.

The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) below provide the basics of what we know right now and a potential timeline for the new rules to be in place so your department can begin applying for the grants.

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What is SAFER?

The Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant program was created to provide funding to fire departments to hire additional fire fighters to help ensure compliance with staffing, response and operational standards established by NFPA and OSHA. For more information, visit www.iaff.org/Politics/Legislative/Safer.htm

What does the new SAFER bill do?

Under the original law, passed in 2004, communities could only receive a SAFER grant if they planned to increase fire department staffing levels, committed to retaining SAFER-funded hires for at least five years, and pledged not to reduce staffing levels during that period.

That is changing under the new law. The IAFF wrote and lobbied for the new provision that was included in HR 2346, the Supplemental Appropriation bill – which was initiated and supported by President Obama – to allow the use of SAFER grant funding to rehire laid-off fire fighters and prevent fire department staffing reductions that occurred as a result of the current financial crisis.

With its passage, the bill grants Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Janet Napolitano the discretion to waive the rules governing the current SAFER program and make funds available to save IAFF members' jobs. So if your department has had layoffs or reductions in force through attrition, you

should apply for SAFER funds once the new rules are written to get those fire fighters back on the job and fill the spots that were lost.

The IAFF is working with DHS to establish guidelines for how SAFER grants can be used to address the current wave of staffing cuts. The new guidelines will apply to the \$210 million that Congress approved for SAFER for Fiscal Year 2009, as well as the \$420 million that Congress is expected to approve for Fiscal Year 2010.

The old rules were too restrictive, how will the new rules help?

Keep in mind that our talks with DHS and the Office of Management and Budget on changing the rules are similar to negotiating a deal. We will work to make all of the changes possible that will enable struggling departments to get money quickly to bring back fire fighters, and we are working to fix the problems that prevented departments from applying for SAFER grants in the past. However, we won't have specifics on what exactly has changed until those talks are finished and the federal government issues the new rules.

That said, knowing that many departments didn't apply for SAFER grants under the old rules, we are focused on fixing the problems. In our discussions with Secretary Napolitano, we will be looking to accomplish a number of things:

- Foremost, we will work to significantly relax the rules and eliminate much of the bureaucracy to assist troubled departments in getting grants quickly to bring back laid-off fire fighters and fill staffing positions that have remained vacant.
- Additionally, we are focused on eliminating many of the issues that prevented departments from applying for SAFER grants under the old rules so that funds obtained to fix problems and grant money used to expand departments will be less encumbered, as well. To that end, we will discuss issues such as potentially eliminating the match requirement and the money jurisdictions were required to come up with for maintenance of the grant in the old rules, as well as possibly raising the cap, among a number of other issues.

Where does the bill stand now?

The bill is now on its way to the White House, and President Obama has promised that he will sign it. Once the act is signed into law, we expect a timeline of between 30-60 days (possibly by August 1) for DHS to issue the new guidelines for administering SAFER grants. The IAFF is meeting with DHS to help move this process along as quickly as possible.

When will the application period begin?

DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano agreed to postpone the 2009 application process for SAFER grants until the new waiver authority is in place. This assures that the \$210 million that Congress appropriated for SAFER can be applied to 2009 applications. The application period has historically opened in July, but it could be later this year. We expect the application process to be in early August, although that is not a certain date.

What should I do in the meantime?

Work with your fire chiefs and local lawmakers to prepare for the application process. Ultimately, management has to file for the grants, so start working with your department and city decision-makers to be ready to submit applications as soon as the application period is announced.

I already have a SAFER grant. How will the changes affect me?

The changes under the new law will not affect existing SAFER grants. The changes are not retroactive.

Where can I find updated information on the status of the bill and the application process?

The IAFF will post information about the application period on the IAFF web site as soon as it is available. Affiliates will also be kept informed via e-mail news blasts, so make sure you have set up an account at www.iaff.org.