



***International Association of Fire Fighters
AFL-CIO, CLC***

*The IAFF Hazardous Materials Training
for First Responders Program*

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International Association of Fire Fighters Hazardous Materials Training for First Responders

Background

With funding support from several U.S. Government departments, thousands of fire fighters and other emergency response workers in the United States receive comprehensive hazardous materials (haz-mat) training through the International Association of Fire Fighters Hazardous Materials for First Responders Training Program. Due to funding support from the U.S. federal government, this critically-important training is offered at no cost to fire departments.

As the funding for the program comes from the U.S. government, Canadian first responders are prevented from participating in the program.

Who is the IAFF?

The IAFF is the largest employee representative for fire fighters in North America, representing 245,000 career fire fighters. Career fire fighters staff 83% of the fire departments serving populations of 25,000 or more. The IAFF represents 17,000 professional fire fighters and emergency medical personnel in approximately 170 cities and towns across Canada.

Fire Fighters and hazardous materials response teams are typically among those who are first at the scene of incidents involving uncontrolled releases of hazardous materials – whether or not criminal or terrorist factions are involved. With more than 14 years of experience providing hazardous materials training, the IAFF is uniquely positioned to reach fire/rescue and allied emergency response professionals with timely and effective hazardous materials response training.

IAFF Haz-Mat Training History

Through 2001, the IAFF has directly trained almost 30,000 emergency responders in the United States with IAFF haz-mat curriculum. More than 5,000 of these students were instructor trainees. One element that separates these trainees from other IAFF trainees is the fact that they receive extensive education in adult learning techniques as well as complete training kits. As a result, these students are able to return to their communities and immediately deliver training to fellow emergency responders. In essence, they exponentially increase the overall number of emergency responders educated as their training activity continues into the future. In total, well over 500,000 emergency response personnel have been educated with IAFF training materials.

The IAFF has become a leader in the hazardous materials emergency response training community. This success is based on the model: those who *respond* together should *train* together. So, the ‘typical’ IAFF class includes fire fighters, police, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel, utilities employees and medical care workers.

Non-IAFF personnel represent almost 750 of the students each year. Students are able to share their experiences, gain insight from others and better prepare themselves for the potential incident at which they may rely on each others' ability.

The IAFF's Hazardous Materials Training Program provides several unique advantages over other courses. Trainees learn common-sense strategies to recognize hazardous materials, prevent or minimize exposure and defensively control the incident. These strategies can help lower disability and workers' compensation costs.

Additionally, the IAFF provides a team of professional [instructors](#) from across the country who are active fire fighters, EMS personnel and Haz-Mat Team Members. The curriculum is taught *to* fire fighters *by* fire fighters. Current United States grant restrictions limit training delivery to responders within the U.S.

Training Programs

The IAFF Haz-Mat program consists of a wide variety of modules that are designed to address the current realities of emergency response. Topics available include hazardous materials training for first responders, for EMS, confined space rescue, incident management, surviving a haz-mat incident, haz-mat responders' responsibilities and rights, radiation incident response, pesticide incident response, the chemical industry, clandestine drug labs and infectious diseases.

Cost Efficiencies

Because of funding from the U.S. government, the course is offered at no cost to fire departments. The IAFF has begun development of training materials in CD-ROM format, as well as web-based learning modules, to minimize course production and distribution costs. Under the current haz-mat project, the IAFF is able to educate and equip a fire service instructor for under \$1,400. If that instructor only delivers two classes per year, the average cost to provide Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)-required haz-mat training to a first responder drops to \$27. This figure continues to decrease as the instructor delivers more courses in subsequent years.

Current U.S. Government Funding

- National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health: \$1.7 million per year
- National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences: \$1.25 million per year
- U.S. Department Of Transportation: \$250,000 per year
- U.S. Department Of Justice: \$680,000 project funding through December 2002.

Total: \$3.88 million U.S. per year

Current Level of Haz-Mat Training Activity

The IAFF delivers approximately 300 training courses to 5,000 students each year in the U.S. More than 2,000 complete training kits are distributed to instructor trainees, as well as another 1,000 to fire service organizations throughout the country.

IAFF Haz-Mat Department Staffing

- Assistant to the General President for Education and Training
- Director of haz-mat Training
- Deputy Director of haz-mat Training
- (4) Training Coordinators
- Curricula Development Coordinator
- Finance Coordinator
- Equipment Technician
- Office Manager
- (2) Administrative Assistant

Total: (12) Full-time staff, plus the Assistant to the General President

Developing a Canadian Program: Taking Advantage of Existing Structure

- The IAFF already has the professional grant staff in place to conduct and evaluate the training. With more than 14 years of federal grant project administration, the IAFF is prepared to effectively manage expanded operations in Canada.
- The curriculum needed to train emergency responders is already developed.
- The IAFF already has a stable of professional instructors who are available to conduct initial training, and the training of Canadian instructors.
- Since IAFF grant operations are already in place, the impact of Canadian government funding would be maximized, focusing on training only and not administration. The development of an equivalent Canadian program would not necessitate a new office, new staff, additional curriculum development and other costs associated with program development.

Developing a Canadian Program: Cost Estimates

With a single 24-hour course costing approximately \$5,000, an annual federal grant of \$500,000 would easily achieve the following:

- One hundred 24-hour courses per year across Canada
- 40,000 contact hours
- The training of 1,660 students

Conclusion

The infrastructure to train a significant number of Canadian emergency response personnel in hazardous materials response already exists. All that is required is the funding.

By taking advantage of an existing administration and program structure through the IAFF, the federal government could significantly enhance national hazardous materials response with an annual \$500,000 funding allocation. It is potentially possible that with the exponential benefits of the IAFF program, as instructors are trained, Canada's emergency response community could be saturated with the appropriate training within five to ten years.

For more information about the IAFF's Haz-Mat Training Program for First Responders, visit www.iaff.org/academy/content/hazmat.html.