

# Funding for the Urban Search and Rescue Response System

The IAFF supports increased funding for the Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) Response System.

## BACKGROUND

The National Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) Response System was originally established by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in 1989 to provide adequate search and rescue capabilities in the event of an earthquake. Since then, the US&R Response System has evolved into an invaluable federal, state and local resource capable of responding to both natural and manmade disasters, including earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, hazardous materials spills, acts of terrorism and catastrophic structure collapses. Notable recent deployments include Hurricanes Matthew and Maria.

Today, the US&R Response System comprises 28 national task forces consisting of highly trained emergency response personnel, including many IAFF members.

In 2006, FEMA estimated the average cost to maintain a national US&R team at \$1.7

million. Today, in many jurisdictions, the cost exceeds \$2 million. Annual appropriations through the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) provide funding for training, exercises, communications and personal protective equipment, as well as medical monitoring for responder safety and health.

Unfortunately, the federal government has historically underfunded the program, leaving local governments that sponsor the 28 task forces responsible for filling the gap. With many localities facing budget shortfalls, sponsoring US&R teams has become a burden they are unable to afford.

Congress provided \$37.832 million for US&R in Fiscal Year 2020, and the president's budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2021 proposes the same, but this amount only covers a portion of the necessary costs.

## LEGISLATION

Funding for US&R for the upcoming fiscal year will be addressed as part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2021.

The House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Homeland Security will consider the Fiscal Year 2020 appropriations bills in the spring of 2020.