

Today, Ben chaired a House Science and Technology Committee's Technology and Innovation Subcommittee hearing that reviewed grants for firefighters and first responders. The hearing discussed the reauthorization of grants that will provide local communities, first responders and firefighters with equipment, training and personnel.

From the [Committee on Science and Technology](#) :

Today, the House Science and Technology Committee's Technology and Innovation Subcommittee held [a hearing](#) to review fire grant programs that assist firefighters, first responders, and local communities nationwide with the equipment, training, and personnel needed to protect the public. The Assistance to Firefighter Grant (AFG) and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grants programs, together referred to as the FIRE grants, will expire in FY 2009 and FY 2010 respectively. This hearing was held in preparation for their reauthorization. These grants were created by Congress to improve the safety of the public and firefighters from fire hazards.

"The FIRE grants were created to help local communities keep up with the needed manpower and equipment to handle the increasing array of tasks falling to local fire departments. The growing duties include emergency medical services, fighting fires at the wildland-urban interface, and serving as first responders to terrorist attacks and natural disasters," said Subcommittee Vice Chairman Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM). "These grant programs provide funding for local fire departments, ones in every state and every district, to obtain equipment and training, and to increase their ranks of firefighters."

"The FIRE grants support local fire departments in a variety of manners. They offer support for training, provide firefighters with personal protective equipment and firefighting gear, and help keep staffing levels at a necessary level to protect our communities. Fire Prevention and Safety Grants, part of the AFG program, aim fire education and awareness messages at groups who suffer the highest fire casualties, such as the young, the elderly, firefighters, and others," stated Subcommittee Chairman David Wu (D-OR).

The AFG program was originally established in 2000, through H.R. 1168, the *Firefighter Investment and Response Act*

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[P.L. 106-398](#)

), to respond to concerns over local budget shortfalls. The SAFER program was created in 2003, through H.R. 3992 and later enacted in section 1057 of the FY 2004 National Defense Authorization Act (

[P.L. 108-136](#)

), to assist local fire department in hiring, recruiting, and retaining enough volunteer firefighters to meet the minimum staffing level standard.

Fires remain a serious problem in America. More people die in fires in the U.S. than from all other natural disasters combined. On average, 3,700 citizens die in structure fires each year, and over 100 firefighters are killed in the line of duty. In addition to these fatalities, there are thousands of injuries and over \$10 billion in property lost each year.

“In this economy, maintaining the equipment, training, and personnel to safely and swiftly respond to all calls is increasingly difficult, or impossible, in many jurisdictions. Fire departments around the country have been forced to lay-off firefighters and forego needed equipment and training. Therefore, the over \$6 billion of grants that have gone to fire departments since 2000 has been integral to maintaining public safety in many communities,” added Lujan.

Take a look at some pictures from the hearing: