

East Fork Fire Protection District

OFFICIAL PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Tod F. Carlini, District Fire Chief

775-582-9048

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East Fork Fire Protection District Officially Submits 1.8 Million Dollar SAFER Grant

Minden – The East Fork Fire Protection District, has officially submitted a 1.8 million dollar grant application to the United States Fire Administration and FEMA and under the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Program. The Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant was created to provide funding directly to fire departments to help them increase the number of trained, "*front line*" firefighters available in their communities. The goal of SAFER is to enhance a local fire departments' abilities to comply with staffing, response, and operational standards established by the National Fire Protection Association Standard 1710. \$345 million dollars are available. The grants are highly sought after and are very competitive. It is estimated that 300 grant awards will be made nationally.

The Fire District is hoping to be able to hire 5 additional Firefighter/Medics if awarded the grant. The grant period covers three years. The district would be obligated to retain the positions after the third year. Funding for the first two years is covered at 75% by the grant and 35% for the last year.

District Fire Chief Tod Carlini, who was the grant author, stated, "*SAFER is a good program and allows agencies to phase in the costs of hiring additional personnel. We need additional personnel.*" The East Fork Fire Protection District has not added a single new firefighter position for over ten years, yet the District calls for service have increased almost 40% during that same time period. Funding has been extremely tight over the past ten years, due in part to the great recession and a lack of economic growth. Adding to the staffing challenge has been a continued loss of volunteer personnel. Over that same time period, the district's volunteer ranks dropped from over 100 volunteers to its current day number of 50. The Great Recession also had an impact on volunteer numbers, as many volunteers were part of the construction industry, also hit hard by the recession. The older demographic of the District also is a contributing factor.

The district has revamped its volunteer program, focusing effort on training volunteers for logistical and wildland firefighting tasks. Under this revised effort, the District has managed to recruit and train 21 new logistical and support volunteers.

While the volunteer commitment is critical to the overall mission, the bottom line is that the District needs additional career staff. East Fork provides one of the most comprehensive emergency services programs in the state and is considered to be an "all hazard" response agency. East Fork's daily staffing is 19 personnel per day to cover the 675 square miles of the district.

Emergency medical calls account for 87% of the total calls. Last year the district responded to 6,600 calls for service or an average of 18 calls per day. On more frequent occasions the District is responding to 24 to 30 calls a day. The Chief noted that his department is challenged by the geography, transport distances to medical facilities, and certainly the wildland fire threats that exist. Long patient transport times reduce the availability of staff by 12% for each ambulance that is in service. When all three staffed ambulances are committed to calls, which is a frequent occurrence, staffing for fire response and other medical responses is reduced 35% or down to 10 to 11 personnel for approximately 30% of each day. The District, during the days of the week are only able to muster 2-3 volunteers due to their having to work. Weekends tend to see more volunteer availability, but there are no guarantees.

The District did modify its deployment model several years ago and is now staffing each Engine with a paramedic. The district increased its Advanced Life Support units from 4 to 7 under this deployment model. Data proves that having a firefighter/paramedic at the patient's side saves lives, regardless if they arrive on an Engine or in an ambulance. The first arriving crews, which always include a paramedic certified firefighter, can treat the patient and have the patient ready for transport when the ambulance arrives. The East Fork Fire Protection District's Standard of Cover is available on the District's website at eastforkfire.org. for those who want more information about deployment and operational objectives.

The District Board approved the administration's request to apply for the SAFER Grant in January of this year. The District is expecting to hear the results of the application sometime between July and September.