



Fact Sheet U.S. Fire Service Needs Assessment Main Page

There has been substantial progress in reducing many U.S. fire department needs, particularly needs for **personal protective and firefighting equipment**. The 2010 percentage of departments without enough equipment to equip all personnel (or all personnel on a shift, as appropriate) was:

- 52% for **self-contained breathing apparatus** (SCBA), down from 70% in 2001 and 60% in 2005;
- 39% for **personal alert safety system devices** (PASS), down from 62% in 2001 and 48% in 2005;
- 9% for **personal protective clothing**, down from 15% in 2001 and 11% in 2005; and
- 51% for **portable radios**, down from 77% in 2001 and 65% in 2005.

The progress in reducing needs for equipment may in part reflect the influence of the equipment portions of the **Assistance to Firefighters Grants** program. For grants during 2001-2004, grants to purchase firefighting or personal protective equipment accounted for an estimated 71% of total grants and 64% of total dollars granted for all grant recipient departments.¹

In most U.S. fire departments, **not all involved personnel have been formally trained** in their emergency response duties. The 2010 percentage of departments in which not all involved personnel have been formally trained was:

- 46% for **structural firefighting**, down from 55% in 2001 and 53% in 2005;
- 48% for **emergency medical service** (EMS), down from 54% in 2001 and 53% in 2005;
- 65% for **hazardous material response**, down from 73% in 2001 and 71% in 2005;
- 68% for **wildland firefighting**, down from 75% in 2001 and 74% in 2005; and
- 85% for **technical rescue**, down from 88% in 2001 and 2005.

In addition, the 2010 percentage of departments in which there was **no program to maintain basic firefighter fitness and health** was:

- 70%, down from 80% in 2001 and 76% in 2005.

The slight progress in reducing needs for training may in part reflect the influence of the training portions of the Assistance to Firefighters Grants program.

There has been little or no progress in increasing the ability of U.S. fire departments to handle **various unusually challenging incidents** with local trained personnel and specialized equipment alone:

- Provide technical rescue and EMS at a **structural collapse** involving 50 occupants; and
- Provide hazardous material response and EMS at an incident involving **chemical or biological agents** and with 10 injuries.
- **Wildland/urban interface (WUI) fire** affecting 500 acres; and
- Mitigation of a **major developing flood**.

¹ *Matching Assistance to Firefighters Grants to the Reported Needs of the U.S. Fire Service*, FA-304, U.S. Fire Administration, October 2006.

However, there has been progress in the percentage of departments having written agreements for working with others. The 2010 percentage of departments with *no* such written agreement was:

- 55% for structural collapse, down from 67% in 2001 and 60% in 2005;
- 51% for chem/bio incident, down from 64% in 2001 and 57% in 2005;
- 39% for wildland/urban interface fires, down from 53% in 2001 and 45% in 2005; and
- 50% for developing major flood, down from 72% in 2001 and 62% in 2005.

It is clear that success lies in the direction of more complete development and implementation of regional and national written agreements, in which each participating department and community knows its role, provides the resources required to play its role, and participates in rehearsals and simulations designed to test the plan.

Nearly half (46%) of fire department engines and pumpers are at least 30 years old, very slightly down from 51% in 2001 and 50% in 2005. This represents holding the line on **aging apparatus**.

Needs related to stations are of several types:

- **Some stations lack specific features**, which are required by current standards but were not required when stations were constructed. Nearly half (44%) of all fire departments do not have backup power for their fire stations, down from 57% in 2001 and 54% in 2005. Two-thirds (66%) of all fire departments do not have exhaust emission control for their fire stations, down from 78% in 2001 and 72% in 2005.
- Most communities (63-82% of departments, depending on size of community protected) need **more stations** – and the companies to staff them – in order to comply with Insurance Service Office guidance on response times.
- Some stations are old enough that a variety of persistent or recurring problems are to be expected and replacement might be better and even cheaper.

The percentage of U.S. fire departments *lacking* various fire prevention or code enforcement programs has declined or remained essentially steady.

- The largest decline was in need for **programs to distribute free smoke alarms to needy households**, down from 69% of departments in 2001 to 52% of departments in 2010.
- Second was need for **plans review**, down from 62% of departments in 2001 to 49% of departments in 2010.
- Third was need for **school programs**, down from 47% of departments in 2001 to 35% in 2010.

One-quarter of fire departments (24%) *do not have anyone* conducting **fire code inspections** in the community, almost unchanged from 27% in 2001 and 25% in 2005.