

Federal grants will help firefighters replace equipment

January 04, 2006 - The Walled Lake Fire department has received federal Homeland Security grants to help in the purchase of several new pieces of equipment.

Walled Lake Fire Department received \$78,997 from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) as part of the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFGP); it was one of six Michigan fire departments that received funding. This is the second consecutive year that the department sought Homeland Security funds for new equipment. Last year's request was denied.

Walled Lake Fire Chief Ken Van Sparrentak said that \$34,000 of the grant funding will be used to purchase a high-pressure breathing air compressor with an integrated fill station, while the remaining money will be used to purchase 14 air packs to replace units the department has had since 1981.

The breathing air compressor will have the capability to fill not only breathing air packs, which provide compressed air for firefighters to breathe when entering a fire situation, but also oxygen for medical patients in need of such treatment.

The current breathing air fill station also dates back to 1981, and is not capable of accommodating the medical oxygen fills, nor does it have the capability to contain a cylinder rupture.

"This will allow for quicker, much safer fills," said Van Sparrentak. He added that when the department had its current air filling station analyzed, it was reported to have a usable window of no more than three years of "proper functioning without the possibility of failure."

A quarter-century after its purchase, Van Sparrentak hinted that it's time to get a new fill unit.

The 14 new air packs that will be replaced are also considered by the department to be out-of-date.

"Parts are hard to come by, and they become obsolete," Van Sparrentak said of the department's old air packs. "(The replacements will be) more compatible with modern-day equipment."

Van Sparrentak said the department is "very happy" about the receipt of the grant funding.

"There's a lot of enthusiasm," he said.

Bids on the new equipment will have to be solicited from manufacturers, and once an appropriate product is found, the bids will have to go to the City Council for approval, according to Van Sparrentak.

The Wixom Fire Department also received a Homeland Security grant totaling around \$108,794. The award will help pay for the purchase of 20 Scott self-contained breathing apparatuses, at nearly \$68,934; and 24 new Paul Conway American Heritage fire helmets, totaling \$8,138. The breathing units will be purchased from Argus Supply Company, of Chesterfield, Mich., and the helmets will be purchased from Paul Conway Shields Company, of New Berlin, Wisc.

Wixom Director of Public Safety Clarence Goodlein could not be reached for comment prior to press time.