



St. George Fire Protection District

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MEDIA RELEASE

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The St. George Fire Protection District has been awarded a DHS/FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Program Grant in the amount of \$215,750. The Department will provide a local cash match of \$53,937 for the two projects covered by the grant.

The first of these projects to be funded is the purchase of 41 additional portable radios for field personnel. These radios, along with the 43 such radios included in our radio system upgrade, will bring us into full compliance with federal and state communications interoperability standards. This new system is part of the Louisiana Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan (SCIP) that has been formulated and has been approved by the Federal Department of Homeland Security.

Communications interoperability means that each agency has the ability to effectively communicate with, and thereby work with, other agencies that may be responding to the same emergency. Although that sounds relatively simple, a very exacting set of nation-wide standards needed to be agreed upon and put into place to make it happen. Communications interoperability is extremely important in any large-scale event or disaster to which numerous local, state, and federal agencies may join together in responding to the emergency. This was one of the lessons learned during the Hurricane Katrina response.

There is a national focus on response to large disasters. But, it is also important in day to day operations where numerous agencies, from fire to law enforcement to EMS may be on the same emergency scene. Members of each of these agencies need to be able to communicate effectively to do the best job possible. That is interoperability.

When these radios have been placed into service, St. George will have a portable radio that is fully compliant with the latest federal and state communications standards assigned to every riding position in each vehicle of our emergency response fleet. This will greatly improve firefighter safety as well as response capability.

The second project funded by this grant will install vehicle exhaust extraction systems in six of St. George's eight fire stations. The affected stations were built before 2003. Retro-fits for our two stations constructed after 2003 are to be included in our next fiscal year's budget.

Instead of merely venting harmful vapors to the atmosphere, these air filtration systems will remove 99.7% of airborne contaminants that are generated every time a Diesel engine is started. Engine start-up is the time at which Diesel exhaust emissions contain the highest level of pollutants, since Diesel engines become more efficient as they warm up. In 1999, the EPA moved Baton Rouge from the ozone air quality category of "serious" to "severe". This will help us to do our part to be in compliance with the Clean Air Act of 1990 and protect our community from the airborne contamination the fire apparatus generates.

These modifications will provide a healthier environment for our firefighters and the well over 500 members of the public (mostly children) who visit our stations every year.

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