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FEMA awards Flagler County $3.26 million SAFER grant to fund 15 additional firefighters for 3 years, no non-federal match required

September 16, 2020 – Flagler County will indeed be safer, as FEMA awarded it a $3.26 million Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant to fund 15 additional firefighters for the next three years.

“The really good news is that FEMA has waived the cost share requirement for this grant award,” County Administrator Jerry Cameron said. “We were notified this morning (Wednesday) that we are not required to contribute non-Federal funds for this grant award, and are only responsible for any costs that exceed the Federal funding provided for this grant award. This is a first big step towards getting our fire department where it needs to be.”

The award will bring the number of paid frontline firefighters up to the industry standards.

“This is great all the way around,” said firefighter-paramedic and Flagler County Professional Firefighters’ Local 4337 President Adam Holyko. “It’s a real morale booster for our firefighters to have this much needed staff, and it’s great for our taxpayers to be spared this additional expense.”

Fifteen additional firefighters (rank below battalion chief) represents a 17% increase to the current staffing level of 87 frontline firefighters, said Fire Rescue Chief Joe King.

“This will enable us to put a minimum of three firefighters on all of our suppression apparatus,” King said. “This is the ideal – it’s much safer for the crew. I am so thankful for this grant, and all the support we had from our federal representatives to get it.”

U.S. Representative Michael Waltz and U.S. Senator Marco Rubio both wrote letters to FEMA in support of Flagler County’s application. Each noted Fire Rescue serves more than 571 square miles, with most of its fire suppression units staffed with two personnel.

“As such, it is well short of meeting the national average for firefighter personnel, and existing staffing levels continue to be strained to meet minimum standards,” Waltz wrote. “Given the important role of the Flagler County Fire Rescue, and the necessity of increasing its fire fighter personnel, I respectfully request your full
consideration of Flagler County Fire Rescue’s application for grant funding under the Federal Emergency Management Agency SAFER Program.”

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