

# Funding for the Urban Search and Rescue Response Team

The IAFF supports increased funding for the Urban Search and Rescue Response System.

## BACKGROUND

The National Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) Response System was originally established by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in 1989 to provide adequate search and rescue capacity in the event of an earthquake. Since then, the US&R System has evolved into an invaluable federal, state and local resource capable of responding to both natural and manmade disasters, including earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, hazardous materials spills, acts of terrorism and catastrophic structure collapses. Notable recent deployments include Superstorm Sandy and the Haiti earthquake.

Today, the US&R System comprises 28 national task forces consisting of highly trained, equipped and exercised emergency response personnel, including many IAFF members.

In 2006, FEMA estimated the average cost to maintain a national US&R team at \$1.7 million. Today, in many jurisdictions the cost exceeds \$2 million. Annual appropriations through the Department of Homeland Security provide funding for training, exercises, communications and personal protective equipment, and medical monitoring for responder safety and health. Unfortunately, the federal government has historically underfunded the program, leaving the local governments that sponsor the 28 task forces responsible for filling the gap. With many localities facing budget shortfalls, sponsoring US&R teams has become a burden they are unable to afford. Congress provided \$45.33 million for US&R in Fiscal Year 2019, but this amount only covers a portion of the necessary costs. In addition, a portion of the funding was intended to be a one-time plus up to help recapitalize aging equipment.

## LEGISLATION

Funding for US&R for the upcoming fiscal year will be addressed as part of the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2020.

The House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Homeland Security will consider the Fiscal Year 2020 appropriations bill in the spring of 2019.