

## **New AFG Format Present Challenges**

During the late summer of 2011, FEMA introduced a new and more “consumer friendly” format for fire departments and rescue and ambulance squads around the country. While this may be so, the administrators responsible for exacting responses to the six narratives contained in the new Assistance to Firefighters application were challenged on a number of fronts:

1. Severe character limitations on vital areas, such as program description and cost benefit
2. Lack of specificity for the information to be contained in each section
3. Inadequate preparation time

It was apparent that the number of entries that were submitted to FEMA close to the original cutoff date was not what they expected. Sure, there were contributing circumstances to the sparse initial returns, such as Hurricane Irene in the East and floods in the Southwest. Therefore, the closure date for grant submissions was extended twice so that everyone had a chance to submit their applications.

If FEMA is listening, we are extremely grateful for the opportunity to apply for the funding so that first responder departments can purchase needed equipment to protect our citizens and communities to the fullest extent. However, here are some suggestions to place under advisement for next year’s application:

1. Hold prep sessions at least a month before the opening of the grant period and have your representatives tell us what you are looking for in various application sections.
2. Extend the character limitations in the 4 narrative sections to 4000 characters.
3. Release the Guidance and tutorial for the application at least two weeks prior to the opening of the grant application period. Why keep the information a secret – we all have the same mission, don’t we?

In this way, departments that observe the deadlines and go to great lengths to meet them will not feel that they are getting penalized when deadline dates are extended time and again. With sufficient prep time, there will be no reason for extensions.