

AFG FY2016 Grant (Narratives)

Oak Park, IL Fire Department (Wellness and Fitness Program)

***Describe Critical Infrastructure Protected*** – The Oak Park Fire Department, a career urban fire department in a community of approximately 52,000 residents, is responsible for protecting numerous critical infrastructures within the jurisdiction. Among these protected entities are: Approximately 1.5 miles of Interstate I-290 which links suburbs west of Chicago with the city itself, a Metropolitan Regional Transit Authority (METRA) station on the Union Pacific West line that had ridership of over 8,000,000 passengers in 2015. The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) has two transit elevated train lines (Blue Line and Green Line) which stop in the village. In 2015 over 1,000,000 riders used the CTA train lines in Oak Park to travel to and from Chicago. The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) District 1 Traffic Control Center, which monitors and controls all traffic control equipment in Cook County is located in the community. The Union Pacific Rail Road Freight Line and the Canadian National Rail Road Freight Line run through the village. Two hospitals, Rush Oak Park Hospital and West Suburban Hospital, with over 300 combined beds are in the jurisdiction. A 12' DuPage County Public Works water transmission tunnel runs under Oak Park from Chicago that brings Lake Michigan water to the western suburbs. There are eight primary schools, three middle school and two high schools within the community with over 3,000 students and faculty in attendance. In addition, there are approximately 70 churches/houses of worship in the village. The Oak Park Fire Department is also an automatic “First Due” responder to Midway Airport (approximately seven miles south west of the village) for mass casualty incidents.

***Organization (and the community you serve)*** – The Oak Park, IL Fire Department is in dire need of developing and implementing a viable Wellness and Fitness Program for the members of the fire department. At this time the agency does not have a Wellness and Fitness Program that meets the current National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1582 standards, nor is funding available through normal budgetary channels of the village to fund such a vital program. In order to insure the safety of the residents and visitors to Oak Park, and to ensure that the firefighters who are responsible for that safety are themselves healthy and safe enough to provide those services, it is imperative that a Wellness and Fitness Program be established by the department. The Oak Park Fire Department is a career urban fire department located in the Village of Oak Park, Illinois, a community that borders the City of Chicago on two sides of the village. The department provides fire protection and EMS services to approximately 52,000 residents (2014 Census) and to the thousands of visitors who work, shop, travel through and recreate in this 4.7 square mile community. The department is comprised of 63 full-time career firefighters/paramedics. In 2015 the department responded to 6,734 NFIRS Series calls including 349 Mutual-Aid assists to one of the six other fire departments in Mutual-Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS) Division 11 (Berwyn, Cicero, Forest Park, North Riverside, River Forest and Stickney). In addition, the department has an Auto-Aid contractual agreement with the Village of River Forest, IL (Population 11,000) Fire Department and Village of Forest Park, IL (Population 15,500) Fire Department, as well as responding to requests for assistance from the

Chicago Fire Department (responses to these agencies are included in the 2015 Mutual-Aid activities).

These 6,734 actions are a 5% increase over the 6,417 calls for service including the 259 Mutual-Aid assists in 2014. Although enumerated in the “Critical Infrastructure Protected” section of this proposal, the Interstate Highway (I-290), the Metropolitan Transit Authority (METRA) regional commuter train and Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) elevated train system are locations where dealing with crashes are extremely dangerous for the members of the fire department and responding to calls for service on the Interstate or on the train tracks are some of the most hazardous duties the department’s members perform.

Demographically, the community itself is the epitome of diversity and is racially made up of 63% White, 21% Afro-American, 7% Hispanic, 5.5% Asian and 3.5% Two or more races. The median age of residents is 39 years of age, and 75% of the residents are over the age of 18 years old, the age group to which most fire department resources (especially rescue and emergency medical activities) are provided. The demands (calls for service, training requirements, administrative and maintenance type activities) placed on the members of the department are growing rapidly, yet the resources to deal with these increases in activity remain the same or are being reduced. The term, “Doing more with less,” has never been more true. The residents of Oak Park, although appreciative of the department’s efforts, usually don’t want to hear about what it takes to get an ambulance or a fire truck to their desperate calls for assistance. They want to see quick response times and professional services.

All these demands place a very heavy burden on the members of the department who must respond to them. Members of the department don’t have the luxury choosing the types of calls they go on, they all must be answered, no matter how tired, how exhausted, how stressed out they may be, the calls must be answered. This gives rise to a hazard of the job and one that is becoming recognized by all National and Local Fire Fighter Organizations and Associations. The physical and mental wellness of the members of the fire department throughout the country has long been overlooked in what is necessary to provide the residents and visitors to the community the fire/emergency rescue services protection it deserves. But the physical and mental toll on department members is unquestionable. In a January 11, 2016 in a “Forbes Magazine” article, firefighters were the second most stressful job in today’s workplace after military men and women in combat roles. An aging fire fighting force, obesity, cardio vascular disease, diabetes, the stresses of the job have led to a record number of officers being injured on the job or having to take sick time to deal with medical issues. Nationally, the number of fire fighters who have died “on the job” as a result of Cardiovascular Disease (CD) over the last three years (2013-15) is staggering. Along with providing the most technologically advanced equipment to perform the job as a firefighter, the time has come for the Oak Park Fire Department to implement a Wellness and Fitness Program and hopefully with funding through the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFG), to boldly manifest concern for the health of the members of the department through a well thought out and ongoing program that will hopefully become a model for all fire departments in MABAS Division 11. Each member of the department will benefit by the program, in that a healthier member will be a happier member who will be present for duty more

often. This will in turn insure that more department members are present for duty in the community they serve.

Just as technologically advanced SCBA and extrication equipment is essential to deal with present day fire department responsibilities, a Wellness and Fitness Program is just as important.

**Financial Need** – The Village of Oak Park, Illinois is diverse community which properties are primarily residential with an increasing commercial component as well. Like many other similar sized communities in the State of Illinois, especially in the Chicago Metropolitan area, Oak Park has undergone some financial difficulties over the last few years. In 2015 the village's net position (after the bottom lines of all income, expenditures, liabilities and debt) was calculated, Oak Park's net position was 91.8% less than it was in 2014 (\$148,110,425 in 2014 vs. \$12,170,457 in 2015). There has been a need to "tighten the belts" of all departments in the village. In 2016 Moody's Investor Service, has assigned an A1 rating to the village (third highest) due to a somewhat limited reserve position, a lack of a debt service reserve and a sizeable unfunded pension liability. At the end of 2015 expenses from Governmental Activities in Oak Park increased approximately 31% due in part to Public Safety pension expenses. Funding for all governmental activities in Oak Park comes predominantly from taxes. Of the approximately \$52,000,000 2015 General Fund budget (from which the Fire Department is funded) 77% was gleaned from taxes, the other 23% being obtained through miscellaneous fees such as EMS revenues, fees for service and miscellaneous revenue sources. Although this may seem like an extraordinarily large amount, over the last three years (2013-2015) 98% of those General Fund expenditures have gone for personnel expenses. The Fire Department has not been immune from the "belt tightening" that all other village departments have experienced. The department's operating budget only increased .05% from 2014 to 2015 (\$10,952,280 in 2014 to \$11,004,442 in 2015). And as with the General Fund, 98% of the Fire Department's expenses were related to personnel costs. In 2015 only .004% of the Village's General Fund budget was expended on Fire Department operating expenses. In 2015 there was only \$228,000 for all operational expenses (equipment, supplies, consumables, etc.) for both the fire protection and EMS. Re-cycling is an ongoing theme in the department to contain costs. Vehicles that would normally be left running during calls for service or administrative activities are being turned off. Thermostats in department fire stations are being turned down. Attempts are being made to get more years out of turn-out equipment, and serious consideration is being given to re-cycling individual equipment for new personnel when/if new firefighters are hired. There are no funds available for projects such as a Wellness and Fitness program that this department is seeking funding for. The department has over the last two fiscal years approached the Oak Park Village Administration seeking funding for a Wellness and Fitness Program with no success. The department is in the process of developing a funding strategy to present to the Oak Park Fire Department Foreign Fire Fund if all other funding opportunities have been exhausted. Hopefully with the success of the program being requested for funding, the village will realize the cost-benefit of such a program.

Even though there is consensus among National Firefighter Organization or Associations (National Fire Safety Association-NFPA), International Association of Firefighters (IAFF), International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), and the National Fallen Firefighters Association (NFFA) that Wellness and Fitness programs will save the lives of and prevent injury to firefighters by recognizing health problems before they become catastrophic, and that will in turn save taxpayer dollars that could go for fire prevention instead of supporting injury and illness claims. Fire department administration has been advised that there is a 74-million-dollar unfunded pension obligation, and a 100% unfunded post-employment benefit obligations (OPED) of 7.5 million dollars with no relief in sight. There is a limited sales tax base compared to similar municipalities, high debt balances in outstanding bonds (95.2 million) and outstanding bank installment loans (\$2.6 million). The Fire Department Pension Fund liability is staggering. The municipal property tax rate is relatively high, which dissuades new residents and business from considering Oak Park as “home.” There is no pot of gold at the end of the rainbow for 2016. Without assistance through the FY 2016 Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFG), the Wellness and Fitness initiative will not become a reality. The main goal of the AFG Program is to enhance the safety of the public and firefighters with respect to fire and fire related hazards through funding assistance. The members of the Oak Park Fire Department maintain that there would be no better way of enhancing that safety than by “kick-starting” the department’s Wellness and Fitness and help protect the firefighters themselves so that they in turn could better and more effectively protect the residents and visitors to the community.

**Project Description** – The Oak Park Fire Department is seeking to receive favorable consideration for the funding of a Wellness and Fitness Program for the 63 members of the department. At the current time the department does not have a Health Exam/Health Screening program that meets National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1582 & 1583 Standards. The current program consists of: Mandatory OSHA Respirator Medical Evaluation Questionnaire, fit testing procedures for respirator (mandatory), review of medical questionnaire with Occupational Health doctor, Audiometry (hearing test), vision screening, pulmonary function (Spirometry Test) and Immunizations and infectious disease screening. The program being recommended for funding is intended to strengthen emergency responders so their mental, physical, and emotional capabilities are resilient enough to withstand the demands of all hazardous operations. The Wellness and Fitness Program being sought to be funded will include or already includes the following “Priority 1/High Priority” activities:

A. & B. **Initial medical exams for all new personnel.** Since none of the 63 department members of the department have never had this exam, the requested funding will cover 63 initial medical exams for current department members and the same medical exam will be given to new personnel as they matriculate onto the department. **The same medical exam will be given to all department members on an annual basis.** The components of the medical exams are as follows: Individualized Health Risk Appraisal and Medical History Questionnaire reviewed by and Occupational Health Doctor, Hands-on physical examination, Blood/Urinalysis, Hearing screening, Vision screening, Pulmonary function (Spirometry Test), Chest X-ray, Stress test

EKG, Resting EKG, Oncology Screening and any other additional testing deemed necessary by medical personnel.

C. **Job-related immunizations** – Funds for this activity are not being requested due to an Immunization Program that currently exists for the department that covers all immunizations called for in NFPA 1582.

D. **Behavioral Health** – Funding for this activity is not being requested due to the fact that there is a Behavioral Health Program currently in existence in the village. Through “Perspectives LTD,” located in Chicago, IL which is a very well respected organizational counselling agency that provides, behavioral healthcare, EAP/work life and wellness consultations for all department members by telephone, online or in person.

Since the Oak Park Fire Department is proposing that with the funding of this Wellness and Fitness Program request that all four Priority 1 programs will be implemented through funding or are currently in place, the department requests funding in Priority 2 in hopes to develop and implement a IAFF / IAFC Peer Fitness Training Program. These International Firefighter Organizations have agreed that to successfully implement a Wellness/Fitness Initiative there must be firefighter(s) on each department who can take the lead. This individual (s) must have the ability to design and implement the fitness programs, to improve the wellness and fitness of the department and to assist with the physical training of recruit as well as veteran personnel. This need for department level leader(s)/trainer(s) has led to the development of the Fire Service Peer Fitness Trainer (PFT) certification program. In collaboration with the American Council on Exercise (ACE), that organization was chosen to develop and implement the PFT program. Through funding from this FY 2016 AFG Program, the department will send eight (8) department members to training programs that are held throughout the United States so that they will become certified PFT instructors who will play an integral part of implementing a total Wellness and Fitness Program in the Oak Park Fire Department. Grant funding will be used for the cost of the instruction by ACE and for the overtime (OT) to pay the officers who will attend the training during off-duty hours.

If approved for funding, the department will comply with all regulations and practices of the AFG Grant Program.

The budget breakdown for the Oak Park Fire Department Wellness and Fitness Program is as follows:

**Budget** (All quotations for services in this section provided by recognized Occupational Health Provider: U.S. Health works in Bellwood, IL).

Wellness Activities:

63 FD Personnel X \$1,344.00/medical exam  
.....\$84,672.00

8 Hazardous Material Technicians X \$1,020.00/Optional Heavy Metal Test (Hazardous Material Members) \$ 6,120.00

SUB TOTAL \$90,792.00

Fitness Activities:

Tuition (Books and Materials) for the PFT Training Program (40 hours) \$1,000.00 per student X 8 department members ..... \$ 8,000.00

Overtime to pay off-duty personnel to attend PFT = 8 trainers X 40 hours = 320 hours X \$52.63 (Average department OT rate)..... \$16,842.00

SUB TOTAL \$16,842.00

TOTAL WELLNESS AND FITNESS PROGRAM COST..... **\$107,634.00**

Since, cost effectiveness is very important in attempting to implement a Wellness and Fitness program in the environment of “cost consciousness,” determining if there is a need (setting aside the premise that a Wellness and Fitness Program would be beneficial to any firefighting agency) at the Oak Park Fire Department. In 2015 there were nine line members injured while on duty with a loss of 3,389.75 man hours. As of 10/26/16 11 members have incurred on the job injuries with a total man hour loss of 6,059.75. In 2014 1,708 man-hours were lost due to injury. During that same time period (2015) 52 line members used sick time for 6,965.00 hours and so for in 2016 52 line members have used 11,000.25 sick time hours, and in 2014 2,282 sick time hours were taken. And although not an on the job injury or illness, on January 11, 2016 a 56-year-old off duty department member died of Coronary Artery Disease after working his shift (more to follow in subsequent section). All these absences due to injury and illness had to be paid for. If we calculated the almost 31,404 hours lost by department members to on job injuries and sickness and used a multiple of \$35.08 (average firefighter pay rate), those absences conservatively cost the Village of Oak Park approximately \$1,101,652.00 just to cover paying the firefighters even they were not on duty. A functioning Wellness and Fitness Program could have certainly prevented (through exercise and diet) some of the injuries and identified potential for illnesses that took such a big toll on members being present for duty. All aspects of the Wellness and Fitness Program will be implemented (physical exams given, PFT personnel trained, individual programs designed) by March 2018 (the end of the period of performance).

**Cost-Benefit** – In the fire service it’s relatively easy to see the cost-benefit of an ambulance or an aerial truck. You can easily see the number of lives that are saved by the use of that type of equipment. It becomes a bit more nebulous to immediately see the cost-benefits of a Wellness and Fitness Program for the Fire Service, but the benefit of such a program is just as dramatic. In a January 11, 2016 *Forbes Magazine* piece firefighters were identified as the second most stressful profession in the United States (second only to a military combat infantry unit). Nationally, from 2013 – 2015 there have been 260 duty related deaths of firefighters. Of those, 130 (50%) were the result of heart attacks or Cardiovascular disease. Recently the U.S. Fire

Administration indicated that the leading cause of fatalities to firefighters is heart attack (44% as compared to fatalities due to trauma, motor vehicle crashes, burns and asphyxiation (56%). Firefighting is a physically demanding and inherently dangerous occupation.

Firefighters push, pull, drag, raise, carry, swing, stretch and crawl while wearing heavy protective equipment Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA). This leads to great physical and emotional stress on the firefighter's body. Studies have shown that while wearing PPE and SCBA respiration is increased by 25-30%. Our de-conditioned firefighters, when placed in these superheated environments experience elevated heart rate, and produce an adrenalin dump on the system. There is little question that 50+% of firefighter deaths are associated with stress and acute cardiovascular events. Studies have also shown that firefighters that are under age 35 are more likely to be injured/die from incidents related to burns, trauma or asphyxiation, while those firefighters over 35 years of age are more likely to suffer injuries/death due to cardiovascular problems. The average age of the 62 members of the Oak Park Fire Department (department is short one firefighter) is 42.11 years of age. Nineteen members are under 35 years of age and 43 are 36 years of age or older. It is imperative that the village and department begin as soon as possible to ensure that the aging and most likely unfit firefighters begin to embark on a department sponsored and facilitated Wellness and Fitness Program. Since the IAFF/IAFC established the Wellness Fitness Initiative in 1996 departments have shown a 28% decrease in lost work days. Every \$1.00 spent on wellness has a \$2.00 return in one year and a \$3.00 return in year two. An average savings (big departments, small departments, career departments, volunteer departments have realized an average savings of about \$250,000.00 in health care claims. Conservatively, if the results of other programs continue to hold true in Oak Park, and based on the expenditure of approximately \$107,000.00 for the program, the village could see a savings in health care cost of \$200,000.00 after the first year of program implementation and a \$300,000.00 savings after the second year. With over 31,400 hours (1,308/24 hour shift days) in lost time due to injury and illness (2014-2016) at the Oak Park Fire Department, the realization in health claim savings through the implementation of a Wellness and Fitness Program would be a tremendous moral and financial boon to the department, the village and the residents of the community. The mission of the Oak Park Fire Department is quite similar to that of AFG. That mission is to meet the firefighting and emergency response needs of the community and the members of the department who serve that community. Through the implementation of a Wellness and Fitness program, a program that is completely consistent with that mission, more firefighters will be available, through being healthier and more fit, to serve and protect the residents and visitors of Oak Park, IL. This program, will most definitely lower the overall fire department's cost by lowering the tremendous amount of overtime and manpower that is currently necessary to fill gaps in coverage by department personnel being injured or ill and unable to perform their duties. Fire department members will be healthier and less prone to injury, there will be a sizeable reduction in lost time through the Wellness and Fitness Program.

*Statement of Effect* – On January 11, 2016 56-year-old male career fire fighter/paramedic (FF/P) who had 28 years on the job, and who had just worked a 24-hour shift where he responded to several calls for service, after shoveling some light snow from his driveway, went into his bedroom and was found unresponsive by his family. FF/P was transported to ER where he was pronounced dead at 9:47 p.m.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) investigated the death and found that the decedent had major cardiovascular disease and other serious health issues (diabetes and obesity). NIOSH made several recommendations based on their investigation, among them was to 1. Ensure that all firefighters receive an annual medical evaluation consistent with NFPA 1582 Standard on Comprehensive Medical Program for Fire Departments. 2. To incorporate exercise stress tests (EST's) into the fire department medical evaluation program for fire fighters at increased risk for coronary artery disease. 3. **Phase in a mandatory comprehensive wellness and fitness program for firefighters.** 4. Perform an annual physical performance (physical ability) evaluation. Although tragic, the death of this beloved department member had the effect of igniting some real zeal on the members of the fire department to get serious about wellness and fitness for the firefighting job. Fire department administration and members realize that having health screening done on an annual basis, and having peers, members of the department trained in developing and implementing fitness programs will only enhance their ability to do their jobs more effectively and help reduce injuries and illness caused by the stresses and physical toll they experience. Through the program which funding is being requested, a baseline medical profile will be established and members will be able to see how their health is progressing year after year. Through the fitness portion of the program, individualized fitness programs will be set up by the trained/certified PFT's that will encourage exercise, diet and nutrition and overall physical and mental toughness. This program will have a tremendous impact on reducing the most common risks involved with the firefighting occupation, especially those that are related to knowing one's health profile and taking actions to improve that profile. Through annual physical examinations and routine contact by shift/team members with PFT's, the program will be a highlight of daily routine around the firehouses. The members of the department have fully embraced the prospective of embarking on this Wellness and Fitness Program. The most recent union contract (Local 95) agrees with the development of the Fitness Program. Through implementation of this program, members of the department will be able to reduce the negative effects of out indolent way of life in society. Obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes are all medical conditions that will be identified and treatment undertaken. All Personnel will be given the opportunity to participate in fitness programs that have no punitive results, there will be milestones and guidelines for becoming and staying physically fit, but healthier and more active lifestyles will be the result, not disciplinary actions. In the end, the residents and visitors in Oak Park will be benefactors of this program. Healthier firefighters will mean happier firefighters who will be at work more frequently and will be more able to serve those they are sworn to protect. The funding of this Wellness and Fitness program will truly be a "win, win" situation for the residents and members of the department.



Notes:

Critical Infrastructure:

Two hospitals -Narrative reports Oak Park and West Suburban combined beds 300+  
Actual: Oak Park 237, West Sub 234-Combined 471

Schools 8 primary 3 middle schools, 2 high schools with over 3000 students.  
Actual 2 middle schools not 3 and under Illinois Report Card all schools actually shows combined attendance of 10,432

No mention of Com Ed substation on North Blvd. Incoming Transmission lines of 340,000 Volts, with step down Volt distribution of 4,000 to 34,000

In 2015, Oak Park FF/PM age 56 suffered a heart attack while off duty but related this incident to the job. FF/PM was at a Structure Fire 5 days before his heart attack.

Summary of Report.

Responded to building fire. During extreme physical exertion, while wearing full PPE, including SCBA, deployed and operated a 2-1/2" exposure line with FF/P A. Retrieved several personal property items from 1st floor for tenant. Participated in placing all apparatus back in service after fire was extinguished. I mentioned to B/C that I felt particularly tired and he asked if I wanted to go to Occ Health or document it. We both chuckled and I said for what, being tired? We're all tired and I thought nothing of it after that. I then prepared for and conducted the origin and cause investigation, finally leaving for home at approximately 1200 hours on 05/08/2015. During the following days, I still felt tired and winded after climbing stairs, but attributed the feeling to being up approximately 42 straight hours on May 7 and 8. On May 10, 2015, I was assigned as driver of T-631. On Wednesday, May 13, 2015, I attended the Fire Investigator Strike Force training seminar and returned for duty at 1930 hours as the driver of E-603. Between 2000 and 0730 hours, E-603 responded to four incidents. One incident was to assist the police, where FF/P B and I deployed the 35 foot ladder to the roof of the grocery store at 6226 Roosevelt Road. While at home on Friday May 15, 2015 at approximately 2330 hours, I experienced signs/symptoms of a heart attack and called 911. While being treated at Hospital, it was confirmed that I did have a myocardial infarction and that ultimately led to triple bypass open heart surgery.

Lieutenant had heart issues in 2015 requiring a pacemaker and was removed from active duty.

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