

Aurora firefighters will get new turnout gear with federal grant

The Ellsworth American, July 12, 2016, by Steve Fuller

AURORA — Grant money from the federal government will allow the Aurora Volunteer Fire Department to stop wearing hand-me-downs while on the front line of fighting fires.

On Monday, Sens. Susan Collins (R-Maine) and Angus King (I-Maine) announced five departments across Maine would receive more than \$550,000 in funding from the Assistance to Firefighters Grant program.

Aurora will receive the smallest amount, \$18,667. Fire Chief Bill Cook said Monday the money will allow the department to purchase seven new sets of turnout gear, the pants, boots, heavy coats and helmets that firefighters wear when responding to fire calls.

Cook said guidelines state fire departments must use turnout gear that is no more than 10 years old. He said much of the department's current turnout gear is older than that, and this grant money will allow that old gear to be replaced with newer equipment.

"It'll make a major difference. This is the first time the department has received funding through the Assistance to Firefighters grant program," said Cook, who applied for the funding last fall.

Cook said he noted in his application for the grant that new turnout gear will allow Aurora firefighters to step out from the "shadows of previous owners," as the stenciled letters of other departments can often still be seen on the gear that Aurora has right now.

In addition to its namesake community, the Aurora Volunteer Fire Department also covers Amherst and Great Pond, in addition to nearby unorganized townships.

Other Maine departments to receive grant money are Caribou Fire and Ambulance (\$253,334), Fort Kent Fire Department (\$121,715), Dixfield Fire Company (\$89,143) and Farmingdale Fire Department (\$68,572).

The Assistance to Firefighters Grant program is administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which is part of the Department of Homeland Security.

The program was created to assist fire departments and emergency medical service organizations with purchasing equipment, protective gear, emergency vehicles, training and other resources “to better protect the public and emergency personnel.”