



News Release

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San Juan County Fire Districts Awarded Regional FEMA Grant

FRIDAY HARBOR, WA – The four fire districts of San Juan County have received a regional Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant to replace aging personal protective equipment for firefighters and increase compatibility between agencies, maximizing mutual aid throughout our islands while reducing costs to our tax payers.

FEMA awarded \$923,115 from the Assistance to Firefighters grant to the fire districts for Orcas, Lopez, Shaw and San Juan Islands to fund replacement, testing training and maintenance for Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA), critical for firefighter safety and fire operations. Much of the islands' fire districts respiratory equipment is in need of increasingly frequent and expensive repairs. As the systems age, replacement parts become harder to locate and sometimes obsolete.

In a joint-statement, the Fire Chiefs of Orcas, Lopez, Shaw and San Juan Islands said, "Our islands' communities are unique with their own identities and cultures. In an emergency, we are all one, supporting each other. We are working together to ensure the safety and security of all our islands' residents. We are grateful to FEMA for this grant and providing our districts the opportunity to continue collaboration and cooperation while saving taxpayer dollars and increasing San Juan County's emergency mutual aid compatibility."

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A large portion of the islands fire districts SCBA inventory must be retired over the next 12 months. Repair costs for the remaining aging units have continued to rapidly increase. The districts are greatly challenged to provide this critical equipment. The districts would financially struggle to provide replacement equipment on their own without depleting reserve funds. The FEMA grant provides a huge opportunity for our islands fire districts to maintain emergency reserves.

There are many benefits to outfitting our volunteer and career firefighters with newer SCBAs. While ensuring breathing safety during fires, the San Juan Islands fire districts' firefighters will be able to operate at emergency scenes without concern for SCBA compatibility. Our volunteer firefighters will be properly protected, resulting in better protection for the public, improved life safety, and reduced property loss.

In addition to adding new, compatible SCBA units through the FEMA Assistance to Firefighters grant, the districts will create one point of training and service for the breathing equipment. This will reduce redundancy for maintenance, safety fitting and SCBA training. Reducing redundancy extends the FEMA grant money for more SCBA equipment and allows for faster replacement of outdated units.

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