

Colorado State Forest Service SB09-021 — Incentives for Volunteer Firefighters



Summary

SB09-021 creates a program to provide volunteer firefighters with college tuition vouchers. To be considered for a voucher, a volunteer firefighter must be a full- or part-time student, complete at least 36 hours of training each year, and agree to serve as a volunteer firefighter for at least 4 years after completing his/her education. The Division of Fire Safety, Department of Public Safety (DPS), will work with the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education and the board of trustees for each local community college to establish the tuition voucher program for up to three credits per academic year.

No general funds were appropriated for this legislation. The Division of Fire Safety is directed to seek funding through gifts, grants, and other sources.

Talking Points

- Volunteer firefighters are the backbone of the first responder system in Colorado and on a national level.
- Volunteer firefighters respond to wildfires, structure fires, hazardous materials spills, and medical emergencies on their own time.
- A volunteer firefighter donates more than 36 hours to training and numerous additional hours to maintain equipment. In many cases, they must purchase their own protective gear.
- Changes in demographics have caused a decline in both recruitment and retention among volunteer firefighter ranks. Simply put, fire departments are having a hard time enticing volunteers to join and stay with them.
- Investing in the recruitment and retention of dedicated volunteer firefighters who give so much of their own time and resources is both prudent and responsible.

Legislation takes effect August 5, 2009.