

## Grant will help Vernon firefighters, ambulance workers

By Jason Rowe, *Journal Inquirer* Staff Writer

**VERNON** - The fire department has received more than \$183,000 from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, which will be used, in part, to improve health and safety conditions for local firefighters and ambulance workers. The funding comes from the federal FIRE Act of 2000, which was established to improve operations and firefighter safety at departments throughout the country.

The Vernon grant was included in the nearly \$600,000 in firefighter grants awarded to Connecticut departments during this latest round of the program, according to a press release issued by U.S. Sens. Christopher J. Dodd and Joseph I. Lieberman. In order to receive the grant, the town is required to match the federal award with more than \$20,300, bringing the total amount of the award to \$203,575, said Michael J. Purcaro, the town's emergency services director.

Town officials requested nearly \$288,000 in their application to the program. Of the money awarded to Vernon, roughly \$80,000 will be used to install ventilation systems in the Nye Street and Birch Road fire stations, Fire Chief Robert Kelley said Friday. This will allow firefighters to start up fire engines without the fear of releasing hazardous diesel fumes into the rest of the fire station. Ventilation systems have already been installed at the Vernon Center and Talcottville fire stations for \$25,000 and \$18,000 respectively. Because the Nye Street and Birch Road stations house the most fire apparatus, Kelley said it is more expensive to install the systems in these buildings. "When the trucks start up, you can smell the diesel a long time after," Kelley said. "It's an unhealthy situation."

Kelley said officials are also planning to install a similar system at the fire station on Prospect Street. Once the new ventilation systems are in place, Town Administrator Laurence R. Shaffer said firefighters will be able to do maintenance on the trucks during cold, winter weather without having to keep the garage doors open. Although there have been no instances of firefighters becoming sick because of the present setup, Shaffer said the new ventilation systems would go a long way toward ensuring that such illnesses never happen. "This gives them the opportunity to work on their rigs inside," Shaffer said. "It certainly is a health and safety concern."

Shaffer credited Purcaro and local fire officials for working during the past year to secure federal funding for the fire department. Kelley said the federal funding would also be used to purchase fire retardant uniforms for the town's ambulance workers. When working on a patient trapped in a car following a crash, Kelley said ambulance workers are required to wear fire retardant clothing in case the vehicle should catch fire. But unlike firefighters, the ambulance workers do not have their own personal fire retardant uniform. At present, the workers utilize uniforms that are kept in the ambulances and taken out whenever needed. But oftentimes, the uniforms don't fit the person who is using them. With the grant money, Kelley said each ambulance worker will have his or her own personal uniform.

The fire department's rescue capability would also receive a boost from the grant through the purchase of a rescue boat and two all-terrain-vehicles. Purcaro said the ATVs would allow firefighters to respond to emergencies along the town's network of hiking trails, while the boat would aid in potential water rescues at local lakes and reservoirs. "This grant is a huge help for the town of Vernon volunteer fire department and the residents we serve," Purcaro said.