

For Immediate Release:

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Virginia Fire Chiefs Association Kicks-Off Statewide Volunteer Workforce Solutions Program

Richmond, Va.; April 29, 2011...Today, the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association (VFCA) formally kicked off its Volunteer Workforce Solutions (VWS) program and announced the 20 departments selected to participate in the year-long study. The Volunteer Workforce Solutions program is the first-of-its-kind study designed to assist Virginia's communities in achieving a viable and sustainable volunteer firefighter workforce.

The program is funded by a Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant awarded to the VFCA by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to develop a model to enhance the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. Working in partnership with the International Association of Fire Chiefs, ESRI, George Mason University and 20 select Virginia communities; the VFCA hopes the program will significantly enhance the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters in the Commonwealth and eventually serve as a national model.

Research and data collected by the VFCA since 2004 has shown that staffing issues in volunteer fire departments is consistently the #1 issue facing fire departments in Virginia. A 2010 Virginia Fire Service Needs Assessment Survey conducted by the Virginia Department of Fire Programs, found that 67% of all survey respondents reported the need for more volunteer firefighters. Because two-thirds of all Virginia firefighters are volunteers, it is critical to bolster and maintain volunteer personnel to continue to adequately protect Virginia's residents and visitors.

"Over the last several years, it has been very tough for many fire departments throughout Virginia to recruit and retain volunteers for a variety of reasons," said Chief Jack Jones, VFCA President. "Most volunteer fire departments are constantly struggling to bolster their volunteer workforce in order to provide the optimum level of protection for residents. The VWS program will work to identify and mitigate the recruitment and retention problems facing volunteer fire departments while assisting the departments and elected officials in effectively planning their future emergency response systems."

Twenty Virginia departments were selected to participate in the program based on geographic information, community demographics, fire department statistics, and the community's willingness.

Of the 20 participants, 10 will take part in a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Segmentation Study which will take an in-depth look at the community itself by measuring demographic, cultural, and economic data to predict the best way to recruit and maintain a volunteer firefighting workforce. The basis of the Segmentation Study is that just like people; communities also have unique "personalities" that can be analyzed to identify the characteristics and traits that will attract a viable and sustainable volunteer firefighter workforce. It is intended that these studies will provide a roadmap for the individual community to show the current state of each community and suggest recommendations that can further advance the recruitment and sustainability of volunteers.

To assist the VFCA in this very important initiative, Esri's Tapestry™ Segmentation system was selected as the vehicle to accurately describe communities by their demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. "Tapestry Segmentation has been used successfully by government agencies, businesses, and organizations to better understand population segments, how to reach them, and serve them," says Jennifer Schottke, Senior Manager of Fire/EMS and Public Safety Policy at Esri.

The remaining 10 departments will serve as the VWS control group. The control group will use traditional methods to recruit and retain volunteers, such as promotional and marketing materials, media advertising and mailers.

The effectiveness and success of the program will be evaluated by ESRI, George Mason University, IAFC and the VFCA with the goal of providing a roadmap for further advancing the recruitment and sustainability of volunteer firefighters in Virginia.

The following fire departments will participate in the GIS Segmentation Study:

- Fauquier County Fire Rescue Department and Volunteer Fire Rescue Association
- Frederick County Fire and Rescue Department (in tandem with City of Winchester Fire and Rescue)
- Goochland County Fire-Rescue
- Shenandoah County Department of Fire and Rescue
- Hanover County Fire and EMS
- Louisa County Fire and EMS
- Page County Fire and EMS
- Martinsville Fire and EMS
- Namozine Volunteer Fire and EMS
- Spotsylvania County Department of Fire, Rescue and Emergency Management

The following fire departments will participate as the Control Group (Traditional Group):

- Bedford County Fire and Rescue
- Roanoke County Fire and Rescue Department
- Caroline County Department of Fire-Rescue and Emergency Management
- Culpeper County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association
- Rockingham County Dept of Fire and Rescue
- Botetourt County Emergency Services
- Charlotte County Fire and Rescue Association
- Colonial Heights Fire and EMS
- City of Hampton Fire and Rescue
- Huguenot Volunteer Fire Department

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About the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association, Inc. (VFCA)

The VFCA is an advocate for leadership to emergency response organizations. The VFCA provides a comprehensive and integrated statewide public safety effort to enhance the quality of life for its customers. The VFCA is committed to providing its members the educational opportunities, leadership skills, and support tools to manage and lead today, and into the future. For more information about the VFCA, please visit www.vfca.us

