

CITY OF VERGENNES FIRE DEPARTMENT

50 GREEN STREET

VERGENNES, VT 05491

STATION: 1-802-877-3201



FY2026 Funding Request

Vermont State Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Team

Request

On behalf of Vermont's municipal fire service, I respectfully request that the Legislature appropriate:

- **\$450,000** – Existing FY2025 Recurring Base Funding
- **\$270,000** – Additional FY2026 Recurring Funding Request

Total FY2027 State Investment: \$720,000 Recurring

This request represents the continuation of the Legislature's phased approach toward full operational sustainment of the Vermont State Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Team.

Background

In 2025, the Legislature formally established the Vermont State USAR Team in statute under 20 V.S.A. §50, recognizing the program as a critical statewide emergency response capability.

At that time, an operational funding request of \$950,000 was submitted to support the transition of the USAR Team from reliance on non-recurring federal grant funding toward a State-supported operational model.

The Legislature appropriated \$450,000 in recurring funding in FY2025. Vermont's fire service community is deeply appreciative of this investment, which began the intended phased transition toward long-term State sustainment of this capability.

Operational Risk

Despite this progress, the State USAR Team must still rely on:

- Federal Homeland Security Grant Program (HSGP) funding
- Hazardous Materials Response program funding

to support baseline operations.

In the absence of sufficient recurring State funding, the operational costs of the USAR Team have been partially offset through funding sources intended to sustain other statewide emergency

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response programs. This practice constrains the ability of those programs to maintain and replace essential response equipment and shifts financial burden between critical statewide response capabilities.

Additionally, the USAR Team operates from a facility that lacks adequate infrastructure and life-safety protections necessary to support statewide emergency response operations. This includes limited conditioned storage for sensitive technical rescue equipment and the absence of comprehensive fire protection systems to safeguard mission-critical assets.

Loss or degradation of this equipment due to facility limitations would have an immediate impact on the State's ability to deploy specialized technical rescue resources during flooding, structural collapse, and other complex emergencies.

Continued reliance on federal preparedness grant funding for core operations also:

- Reduces the availability of limited preparedness funds to Vermont's municipal emergency response agencies
- Conflicts with federal sustainment guidance for grant-funded capabilities
- Creates long-term risk to both program stability and future grant eligibility

Absent continued State investment, the USAR program risks reverting to reliance on non-recurring federal funding sources to support ongoing operations.

Funding Impact

Appropriating an additional \$270,000 in recurring funding in FY2027 will:

- Continue progress toward full State sustainment of this legislatively recognized capability
 - Reduce reliance on federal preparedness grants for baseline operations
 - Preserve federal preparedness funding for Vermont's municipal emergency responders
 - Protect existing statewide response program funding for its intended use
 - Support readiness for statewide deployment during flooding, structural collapse, and technical rescue emergencies
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Future Sustainment

The FY2025 appropriation represented an important first step in transitioning the USAR Team from reliance on non-recurring federal grant funding toward a State-supported operational model.

Continued incremental increases in recurring State funding in future fiscal years will be necessary to complete this transition and ensure that the program's baseline operational needs are sustainably supported through State investment, rather than reliance on non-recurring federal preparedness funding.

As Vermont has experienced an increase in large-scale flooding events and complex emergency incidents requiring deployment of specialized technical rescue resources, operational demand on the USAR capability continues to grow.

This phased approach allows the State to align funding with increasing operational need over time while preserving federal grant resources for Vermont's municipal emergency response agencies.

Conclusion

Vermont's municipalities increasingly rely on the deployment of specialized statewide technical rescue resources in response to severe weather events, infrastructure emergencies, and complex rescue incidents.

Continued incremental investment in FY2027 will ensure the long-term operational readiness and fiscal sustainability of this statewide capability upon which Vermont's fire service and the communities we serve depend.

David DiBiase

David DiBiase

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