



MIKE CHANEY
Commissioner of Insurance
State Fire Marshal

LEE HARRELL
Deputy Commissioner

STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
Mississippi Insurance Department

1001 Woolfolk Building (39201)
Post Office Box 79
Jackson, Mississippi 39205-0079
(601) 359-3569
www.doi.state.ms.us

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Mike Chaney, Commissioner of Insurance/State Fire Marshal
Mississippi Insurance Department
Jackson, Mississippi
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For additional information, please contact
Donna J. Cromeans, Public Relations Director 601-359-3569

Federal Grant to Aid Attack on Fire Deaths in State

Jackson – Mississippi’s rank as the leader in fire deaths in the nation could take a major blow soon and state fire officials couldn’t be happier. Their latest tool in the fight for fire death prevention is a nearly half-million dollar Federal Grant awarded to the Mississippi State Fire Marshal’s Office. The grant will be used for a statewide Smoke Alarm Installation Program and will provide free smoke alarms to nearly 10,000 households that are at or below the poverty level.

Totaling exactly \$497,025, the grant was awarded through the United States Department of Homeland Security’s Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) Program. County fire coordinators will coordinate installation efforts with the fire departments in their respective counties. Smoke alarms will then be delivered and installed by firefighters. During the visit firefighters will provide fire prevention and home escape planning education and leave educational brochures for the residents to review after the firefighters have left.

“Thirty-five fire deaths that have been investigated by the State Fire Marshal’s Office have already occurred this year. You can’t help but wonder how many of those cases could have been prevented with the presence of a smoke alarm,” said Mike Chaney, Mississippi Insurance Commissioner and State Fire Marshal.

“We had 74 fire deaths last year. We have been working on getting this grant for over a year and now that we have received it we can take major steps to everything we can to reduce that number this year.”

A special sealed smoke alarm with a 10-year battery will be used for the program. Because the alarm is sealed, it removes the ability to unplug the battery. Another advantage is that the alarm uses a battery cell specific to the alarm. If the resident were to open the alarm, the cell would not fit in other electronic devices.

According to statistics compiled by the State Fire Marshal’s office for the grant application, as of November 28, 2007 there had been 69 fire deaths in 51 fires reported. Of those reported, smoke

alarms were present in 18 fires resulting in 23 deaths; smoke alarms were not present in 28 fires resulting in 40 deaths; in 5 fires resulting in 6 deaths, it was unknown if smoke alarms were present.

Communities wishing to participate should contact their local fire department or county fire coordinator.

The State Fire Marshal's Office is continuing to explore other grants for additional funding to expand the program.

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