

FY2020 **AFG** PPE Project Guide



Sponsored by:



EDITOR'S NOTE

As we await the opening of the annual Assistance to Firefighters Grant program, there are steps that you can take now to plan and develop a competitive application for your PPE project.

Applications to AFG for PPE have consistently been one of the two top activities requested under the Firefighter Operations grant category, and for good reason. Turnout gear is utilized on every alarm. It is a foundational element of every fire department. Your department simply cannot exist without it.

The Assistance to Firefighters Grant program provides one of the best means to cover these expenses. However, because of their popularity, turnout gear requests are among the most competitive activities of this grant program.

To assist you in this endeavor, our guide will provide you with information and suggestions to formulate your application for turnout gear. The guide focuses on what data is needed to successfully plan and develop your application. It highlights the importance of telling your own story about your department's financial situation and your current PPE needs. Included in these segments are sample narrative sections to give you an example of the type of information detail that makes an application competitive.

This guide also offers an easy-to-understand segment on administrative requirements for your AFG application. Good luck — and remember it is never too early to start planning your application.

Jerry Brant, Senior Grant Consultant and Grant Writer with [FireGrantsHelp](#) and [EMSGrantsHelp](#)

CONTENTS

3. Your guide to planning your AFG application
4. The importance of integrating data into your application
11. Addressing COVID-19 and its financial aftermath
12. Tell your story
15. What PPE is eligible for AFG funding?
16. Grant 'get ready' checklist
17. Assistance to Firefighters Grants administrative steps
18. Resources

Planning Your AFG Application

We all have the tendency to procrastinate when it comes to planning and developing our AFG applications. To help you avoid being a last minute-filer, we have developed a timeline that gives you a three-month schedule for planning and developing your AFG proposal for 2020. We are anticipating a late application cycle this year, so plan accordingly!

Here is our suggested plan:

1. Decide who will be part of the grant writing team.
2. Assemble your demographic profile.
3. Collect the necessary data.
4. Perform an inventory of your equipment.
5. Decide what you will apply for this year.
6. Get cost estimates for all items for which you are applying.
7. Make sure your online account and registrations are current, including the [FEMA GO](#) system.
8. Obtain signed MOUs if needed for regional projects.
9. Complete the [AFG Checklist](#) provided on FEMA's website.
10. Have your team go over the completed checklist.
11. Read the grant guidelines/NOFO.
12. Complete rough drafts of your narratives and have them reviewed by the team.
13. Finalize narratives.
14. Complete your application.
15. Have another person review before submission.
16. Submit application.

This planning guide will help eliminate the last-minute panic of trying to submit a competitive AFG application.



THE IMPORTANCE OF **INTEGRATING DATA** INTO YOUR **AFG APPLICATION**

We are bombarded with data on a daily basis. Statistics and information are all around us. From the sports events that we watch to decisions on investments, we constantly hear information being generated for our benefit.

Why, then, do we have such a difficult time realizing the importance data can play in developing a competitive grant application to the AFG program? When you talk to reviewers they will tell you that they would have given applications higher scores if the applicant had only presented a better picture of their situation.

By the time you have completed reading this guide you will have a better idea of:

- 1.** Why data is so important to your AFG application.
- 2.** The types of data that you should be collecting.
- 3.** How to present this data.
- 4.** Where to find these statistics.
- 5.** Why it's important to tell your story.

The beginning of your data collection should center on your annual risk assessment.



The types of data you will need and where you can find it

The reason and need for your department to do an annual risk assessment or analysis

- 1.** The process is a requirement of the AFG program.
- 2.** This assessment will show trends that your department has been experiencing over the past few years. (It is safe to use a three- to five-year term for this purpose.)
- 3.** The assessment will be the foundation of your grant application.

Formal vs. informal assessment

- 1.** A formal assessment is conducted by an outside agency or firm and is usually done in conjunction with your local government.
- 2.** An informal assessment is conducted in house by your department. Usually it is completed by the department's officers using both department and outside data.

To initiate this assessment, you need to develop a demographic profile of your coverage area and your department. Begin with U.S. Census data, which you can access at [Census.gov](https://www.census.gov). Once you reach the site, scroll to the bottom and click on [Access Local Data](#) to query data for your community. Repeat this process for all the municipalities in your primary coverage area. (Note: “American Fact Finder” has been discontinued. Visit the [“Explore Census Data”](#) page for more information on how to find relevant information.)

Next, depending on your preference, either download the data or print it and put it into a binder. This is the start of your profile. From this data you should have a snapshot of your population. This can provide you with important information, such as:

1. Is your overall population increasing or decreasing?
2. Are certain segments of your population increasing or decreasing? Why is this important? (Certain segments, such as senior citizens, tend to use emergency services more frequently than other population segments. Seniors also have less income to support fire and EMS service funding.)
3. What are your coverage area’s median household income, per capita income and poverty rate? These figures are significant because they help to paint a picture of the area’s economy in real terms rather than generalities.
4. If a portion of your annual income is based on property taxes, you should also include data on real estate values for your primary area and how they compare to values nationally.

A visit to your planning commission should be next on your agenda. Most every state requires its transportation and/or public utility agencies to compile 10 and 20-year planning documents, which are available through your planning commission. A section of these plans will discuss anticipated areas of development and their projected rates of growth. If any of these zones are in your first due coverage area, make a note of them for future use.

Your area’s employment outlook should be your next concern. Again, your planning commission or the Bureau of Labor Statistics are both good sources for this information. At a minimum, know your community’s unemployment rate and check it monthly as new figures are posted. Additionally, either of these sources may also provide you with information on employment sectors that are anticipating imminent growth.

After that, delve into any relevant information that’s available at your department, such as, your ISO Public Protection Classification and the date this survey was conducted. Determine what items could help to lower your ISO PPC and what items could hurt your ISO rating. List the SARA facilities and critical infrastructure components in your first due area as well.

Record and report your own data

Also begin compiling as much information as you can on every call you answer. More importantly, remember to count every call. This may be a painstaking task, but you need to document every alarm, not just the big ones. If you are entering data on your department’s responses into the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS), this information will be at your fingertips.

If you are not reporting to NFIRS, at a minimum, you should document how many members responded, what apparatus was used, the length of the call, the mileage traveled to get to the call and any mutual aid required. If it was a structure fire, what was the cause and origin of the incident? Were there any casualties or injuries? If yes, explain why. Have someone in

your department start to record this information so you can pull statistics from it as needed.

Next, examine your apparatus and equipment. Record the date equipment was purchased and placed in service. Keep a record of any maintenance issues. Remember to record any injuries that occur because of deficient equipment. Document your staffing or membership levels. Know how many firefighters you have responding to alarms. Keep training records of your firefighters, including copies of certificates and any training, even in-house, that they attend.

This may seem like a large and difficult undertaking, but it really isn't. The original assessment may take some time, but after the first one the others should fall in place. Also, once you have used this data profile for your first grant application you will see how much easier it is to develop and assemble an application. No longer will you have to sit in front of your computer and guess or dig through file after file to find information.

Once your data gathering is complete, it's time to meet with your officers or planning committee to assemble all the information into a useable document that adequately portrays the demographics of your coverage area and your department.

From this process you will be able to determine and document your department's needs, and you will have the information available to develop a strong and competitive application.

Use data to improve your financial need narrative

A portion of the data you gathered for your profile will be important in helping to plan and write a strong financial need narrative for your AFG application. The financial need element of the AFG narrative typically receives the lowest score of all elements, most likely for the following three reasons:

DID YOU KNOW?

Opportunity Zones receive priority consideration

What is an Opportunity Zone? Created by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act on December 22, 2017, the IRS describes an Opportunity Zone as, "an economically-distressed community where new investments, under certain conditions, may be eligible for preferential tax treatment. Localities qualify as opportunity zones if they have been nominated for that designation by the state and that nomination has been certified by the Secretary of the U.S. Treasury via his delegation of authority to the Internal Revenue Service."

What does this mean for grants?

Federal agencies, such as FEMA, assign priority consideration for applicants who propose to implement projects that will directly benefit a Qualified Opportunity Zones. The applicant must be sure to include the QOZ in the application and how the project will benefit the QOZ.

How to find a QOZ

Please visit the U.S. Department of the Treasury's resource webpage: <https://www.cdfifund.gov/pages/opportunity-zones.aspx>



Three reasons departments miss the mark

1. Applicants fail to remember that the reviewers know nothing about the applicant's department or coverage area.
2. Applicants assume that simply by stating, "We are a poor, rural fire department with a small budget and no help," the AFG reviewers are going to completely understand their plight.
3. Applicants fear, "If we tell them we have money, then we won't get funded."

Do any of these sound familiar? Here are some options to assist you in making your narrative's financial need element stronger and more competitive.

The best place to begin is to give the reviewer a good look at your current financial situation. What is your annual budget? What are your sources of revenue and what are your expenses?

EXAMPLE: The United Fire Department provides fire and rescue services to the community of Uniontown. Our department has an annual operating budget of \$131,000. 40% of this amount is derived from the community's fire tax. 25% comes from donations and 35% from fundraising activities. Our expenses are: Insurance \$32,000, Utilities \$27,000, Fuel \$12,000, Vehicle repairs and maintenance \$15,000, Training \$18,000, Equipment purchases \$10,000, Building maintenance \$12,000, and Consumable supplies \$5,000.

Next, describe the root cause of your need for financial assistance. This is where a quick reference to your service area profile is extremely beneficial. The census data profile that you should have for each community in your first

due coverage area is critical in painting a picture of the local economic and social landscape for the reviewers.

At a minimum, examine such data as the per capita income for the community, the poverty rate and the median household income. If you feel that any of this information is helpful to your cause, then extract it both in whole numbers and percentages. Include with this local data, the national data and how your area compares.

EXAMPLE: The community has continued to suffer chronic unemployment since the closing of the town's major employer, Turn Signal Fluid Inc. This is evident by the community's per capita income of \$19,060, compared to the national average of \$28,000. This is almost a 43% difference. In addition, the median household income for Uniontown is \$36,250 a drastic drop from the national figure of \$53,842.

At the same time our unemployment rate has risen to 7%, which is 3% higher than the national rate. This has pushed our local poverty rate to 5.7% higher than the nationwide figure. But one of the most compelling statistics that accurately depicts the disinvestment in this community is the median value of a single-family owner-occupied home in Uniontown, which is \$65,000 – 42% below the national average. This is significant because 40% of our budget is derived from property taxes. All the data used in this section is from the U.S. Census Bureau.

This gives the reviewers factual statistics to illustrate the local economic landscape in which you must try to secure your operating funds. Next, explain other items that impact your annual revenue. For example, have you eliminated any fundraising activity because it was losing money or because of a lack of volunteers? Have you experienced a major



Three things to keep in mind



1. Be clear with the description of your financial situation. If you are not sure how your narrative sounds, have someone else read it and make comments. It never hurts to have a second set of eyes go over your application.
2. Be concise. Remember, your application will probably be in front of the reviewers for about 20 minutes.
3. Be open about your department's financial outlook and the reasons for it. Explain with examples why this situation has occurred and how you are trying to address it.

unexpected expenditure? Have you had to take out a loan to cover a purchase? Describe why and how this has affected your operations.

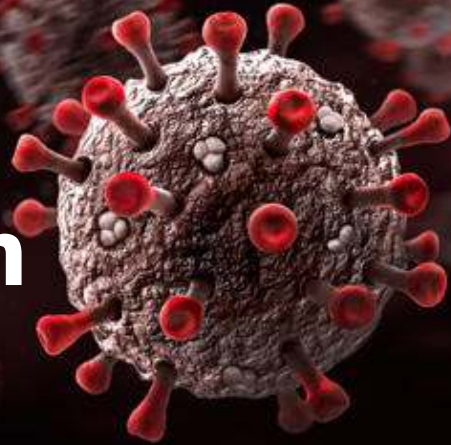
EXAMPLE: Due to our region's depressed economy, contributions to our annual fund drive have dropped 30% from their total of five years ago. In addition, last year we had to cancel our largest annual fundraiser "The Road Runner 5k Walk," which annually raised \$13,000, because of a lack of financial support. The past two years the event actually lost money. Losing this event caused a 10% drop in our budget. Because of this, we have postponed the replacement of our station's 35-year-old roof and patched it instead. We also placed a freeze on all non-emergency expenditures, and we have fallen two years behind on our vehicle replacement program.

Your grant reviewers now have a better idea of your department's financial situation. Be sure to explain what steps you are taking to address the situation and what are the short- and long-term outlooks for improvement. Tie all this information into your justification for federal assistance.

EXAMPLE: For almost 115 years, the United Fire Department has been able to sustain its operations without outside assistance. In recent years, the community's economy has been devastated by the loss of its major employer. This has translated into less expendable income for the area's residents, and in turn less revenue for the fire department. The UFD perceives this to be a short-term situation with plans to attract other employers into the community. Until this happens, the department must turn to outside sources for assistance to fund the replacement of our portable radios and 15 sets of turnout gear. At the present time, it would take us 10 years to raise the funds to purchase these two critically needed items.



Addressing COVID-19 and its financial aftermath



Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic has left local governments, agencies and departments financially strained, resulting in staff furloughs despite increasing calls for service. Additionally, due to event cancellations, departments were not able to pursue their annual fundraising efforts, significantly decreasing this year's revenue stream.

Recent budget impacts may influence your department's decision on whether or not to apply for funding opportunities like AFG. Before the decision is made, it is important to consider the information below:

In the Financial Need section of the application, be sure to address COVID-19 related impacts to your budget:

- What is your anticipated decrease in revenue for the current fiscal year?
- Were there any unexpected expenses?
- Were there any layoffs in public safety?

Review the [AFG Economic Hardship Waiver Policy](#):

- Your department may qualify for a waiver or reduction of non-federal cost share requirements.

TELL YOUR STORY



Ultimately, your grant application is your chance to explain what your department is doing and why you need financial assistance. Take this opportunity to tell your story.

The cost/benefit and effect on daily operations elements of the AFG narrative section gives you the opportunity to tell your story and explain what benefits your department and community will realize in return for the grant funds you receive. These elements, like other parts of the AFG application, can be augmented with data to help make your case for funding, but at the same time you need to tell reviewers what will change if you are approved for funding.

As in the financial need element, you need to talk specifically about your department and your community. The reviewers are not interested in national trends or statistics. They want to know what has been happening in your coverage area that has caused you to apply for this project. They want to know what will change if you are

funded and how this will positively affect the health and safety of your firefighters and your community.

Make your case: How will new PPE improve operations?

In these elements your narrative should discuss how often the gear that you are requesting will be used both for alarms and training. Reviewers have a tendency to give low scores to items that will be used infrequently. The exception to this rule is if you can justify the substantial benefit that will be received by the department or the community. This is an extremely difficult task but one that can be accomplished with the proper amount of information and explanation.

Next, explain how the purchase of this equipment will increase the efficiency of your department's operations. Basically, describe what will change if your request is approved.

EXAMPLE: The United Fire Department is requesting funds to purchase 15 complete sets of turnout gear for our firefighters. The purchase of this gear will have a 100% benefit to the department, the community and our firefighters. The new PPE will be used at all calls because its use is mandated by our department's SOGs. Currently we have 25 firefighters. Only five of our firefighters have gear that is compliant. Ten have gear that is not compliant, and they share this gear with our other 10 members. Funding our request will allow our department to respond to all alarms with a greater number of trained and properly equipped firefighters.

The next point you should attempt to make is how this equipment will increase interoperability. Interoperability means the application of command, control and the ability to coordinate the ICS features to enable the sections operating in a disaster situation along with other associated agencies to accomplish seamless coordinated action in the implementation of the Incident Action Plan. One point to remember: Do not confuse interoperability with standardization. In other words, it is not interoperability to state that we want to purchase new PPE to be the same as all other departments in our area.

Also discuss how the impact of the grant will be increased or leveraged in your area.

EXAMPLE: By funding the UFD request for PPE, we will be able to respond with additional firefighters upon request by other departments under mutual aid. This is especially important during the daylight hours of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., when our neighboring departments of Lincoln and Washington only have four firefighters available.



What you want to communicate to the reviewers is that the money spent in purchasing this equipment will be used 100% of the time by your department. You have made an additional case for your request by showing that not only will your department benefit, but you are benefiting the entire area by increasing the number of equipped firefighters that can respond upon request. Your application has now made an impact not only on your community, but it has made an impact on the entire region.

Describe the consequences of not receiving financial support

Next, briefly explain how the cost of the grant will be controlled. Then discuss why this is the most economical or innovative solution to your identified risk. Describe the process you will use to procure the gear if you are funded and how this will ensure the best possible price.

To conclude this element, describe the consequences of not receiving financial support through AFG. Again, the best possible technique to use is to simply tell your story by giving real examples of incidents that have been negatively impacted in recent months because you didn't have the proper equipment.

9 TIPS ON WRITING A SUCCESSFUL GRANT NARRATIVE

Some points to keep in mind:

1. Write clearly and concisely.
2. Read the Program and Application Guidance before you start. Then read it again and highlight or make notes of important information.
3. Make sure your organization is eligible to apply.
4. Check the guidelines to see if you have an eligible project.
5. Ask yourself: Is your budget reasonable?
6. If in doubt, seek advice.
7. Find someone from outside your group to read your narrative and give you feedback.
8. Make sure you have enough time to produce a competitive narrative. If you don't, wait until next time.
9. Remember, a grant reviewer's job is stressful, repetitive work. Put yourself in the reader's place and write a complete and detailed narrative.

EXAMPLE: At 11:15 a.m. on December 18th, 2019, our department was dispatched to smoke in a structure at 215 River Street. When our first engine arrived on scene, they laid a supply line from the hydrant at the corner of 3rd and River Street and established operations at the A side of the building. A crew advanced a hand line into the structure and radioed to the IC that they had encountered heavy fire in the interior of the structure. The IC radioed communications to upgrade the call to a working fire and to dispatch a second alarm.

Our department was unable to fulfill our second alarm assignment because the personnel that responded to our station that day lacked proper PPE for interior structural firefighting. Because of the time of day, it was 12 minutes before a second engine from our mutual aid company arrived. By this time the IC had made the decision to pull the interior crew because of safety reasons. As a result, we moved to a defensive

operation and the building suffered \$250,000 in damages.

If our request for assistance to purchase PPE for our additional members is not approved, it will continue to have a negative impact on our ability to provide our community with the best possible protection, and it will continue to jeopardize the safety of our firefighters.

This should give you a reasonably good idea of the essential and specific information that makes a grant narrative more viable. As you can see from the examples in this section, it doesn't have to be a masterpiece of literature. AFG wants you to tell them what you will do with their funds, how this will benefit your department and the community, how often it will be used and what will happen if you are not funded. FEMA wants to hear your story.

Remember, writing a successful narrative involves several activities, including planning, searching for data, developing a budget, making an outline, writing your draft, proofreading, making revisions and submitting the application.



What PPE is eligible for AFG funding?

Here are the elements, per firefighter, that your department can purchase using AFG funds.

Structural/Proximity PPE

- 1 pair pants
- 1 coat
- 1 helmet
- 2 hoods
- 1 pair boots
- 2 pair gloves
- 1 pair suspenders
- 1 pair goggles

Note: In the Authority Having Jurisdiction where additional PPE, such as a Personal Safety/Rescue Bailout System, is statutorily required, FEMA will consider all statutorily required items to be part of a complete PPE set.

SCBA

- FEMA considers a complete SCBA unit to be comprised of a harness/backpack, 1 facepiece and 2 cylinders.

Note: The following respiratory items are considered high-priority under AFG:

- Air-line unit
- Face pieces
- Respirators
- SCBA spare cylinders
- SCBA (harness/backpack, facepiece and two cylinders)

Wildland PPE

- 1 pair pants
- 1 coat
- 1 jumpsuit
- 1 helmet
- 1 pair boots
- 1 pair gloves
- 1 pair suspenders
- 1 pair goggles
- 1 fire shelter
- Web gear
- Backpack
- Canteen/hydration system

Note: The following wildland items are considered high-priority under AFG:

- Jumpsuits/coveralls
- Boots
- Coats
- Pants
- Suspenders
- Goggles
- Shelters
- Web gear/backpacks
- Canteens/hydration systems
- Helmets

GRANT 'GET READY' CHECKLIST

Get started early, before the application period opens, to improve the quality of your grant application. Our grant experts recommend that you closely follow the tips below:

- ✓ Access your department's NFIRS data for the past three years if possible.
- ✓ Analyze this data to determine if there are trends emerging.
- ✓ Identify staffing challenges in your department and surrounding departments to whom you provide mutual aid.
- ✓ Compile a demographic profile of your service area, including income and population statistics.
- ✓ Determine what your department needs are and if these needs are eligible for AFG funding. Secure a good cost estimate and make sure your department has sufficient funds to cover the AFG match.
- ✓ Review your department's budget, identify all sources of income and detail expenses.
- ✓ Know your SAM.gov registration information and DUNS number, as well as your FEMA GO login. If you have trouble with any of these, seek help right away. Make sure that the information contained in SAM and DUNS match each other and are same as the information contained in your FEMA profile.
- ✓ Save all of this information in one place so you can access it and update it easily. Back up this information on a thumb drive in case you work on the grant application on different computers or the original computer malfunctions.

IMPORTANT UPDATES FROM SAM.GOV

The [System for Award Management](#) (SAM) is an official website of the U.S. government. There is no cost to use SAM. You can use this site for FREE to:

- Register to do business with the U.S. government.
- Update or renew your entity registration.
- Check status of an entity registration.
- Search for entity registration and exclusion records.

All SAM.gov users must now create a login.gov account in order to sign into SAM.gov. Use your existing SAM email address to create an account. For assistance, call the SAM.gov help desk at 866-606-8220.

Also, entities registering in SAM must submit a notarized letter appointing their authorized Entity Administrator.

All non-federal entities who create or update their registration in SAM.gov will no longer need to have an approved Entity Administrator notarized letter on file before their registration is activated. This applies to you if your SAM.gov Purpose of Registration is either Federal Assistance or All Awards. Check SAM.gov to find your Purpose of Registration.

All non-federal entities still must mail the original, signed copy of the notarized letter to the Federal Service Desk.

Notarized letter templates are available online from the "[instructions for domestic entities](#)" page of the [Federal Service Desk](#) website.

You must mail the original, notarized letter to:

FEDERAL SERVICE DESK
ATTN: SAM.GOV REGISTRATION PROCESSING
460 INDUSTRIAL BLVD
LONDON, KY 40741-7285



Assistance to Firefighters Grants Administrative Steps

Registration can take three to four weeks to complete, so get started now. Here are the steps you need to take to get your grant application ready:

1. Identify the Legal Applicant.
2. Apply for, update or verify the Legal Applicant's [DUNS](#) number.
3. Apply for, update or verify the Legal Applicant's Employee Identification Number.
4. Register, update or verify the Legal Applicant's System for Award Management ([SAM](#)) account and entity registration.
5. Create or update your login to the [FEMA GO](#) portal.
6. Determine what your department needs are and if these needs are eligible for AFG funding.
7. Secure a good cost estimate and make sure your department has sufficient funds to cover the AFG match.
8. Review your department's budget, identify all sources of income and detail expenses.
9. Know your SAM.gov registration information and DUNS number, and ensure the information contained in SAM and DUNS match each other and are the same as the information contained in your FEMA profile.
10. Save all of this information in one place so you can access it and update it easily.
11. Save this information on a thumb drive as a backup.

If you have additional questions or need help with your AFG application for PPE, contact a [FireGrantsHelp](#) expert.

As of the publication of this guide, FEMA has not yet released the Notice of Funding Opportunity or 2020 AFG Guidelines. Please check the [FEMA AFG page](#) for updates.

GRANTS RESOURCES



HOW TO NOT SABOTAGE YOUR FIRE GRANT APPLICATION



FIREFIGHTING GRANTS: HOW TO LAND NON-AFG FUNDING



THE IMPORTANCE OF DATA IN FRAMING A WINNING FIRE GRANT APPLICATION



FEMA GO: THE NEW SYSTEM FOR MANAGING FIRE GRANT PROGRAMS

MSA Safety

At MSA, our business is safety. We've been the world's leading manufacturer of high-quality protective equipment for firefighters and industrial workers since 1914. Our commitment to developing innovative safety solutions is founded on one singular and unchanging mission: "That men and women may work in safety, and that they, their families and their communities may live in health throughout the world." We bring this mission to life through a relentless focus on listening to customer needs, countless hours spent on R&D and product testing and a never-ending commitment to product quality.

Our core fire service products include the revolutionary G1 SCBA, Cairns fire helmets, Globe turnout gear and boots, Altair portable gas detection instruments, and Evolution TICs.

[Request Free Grant Assistance for Globe Turnout Gear](#)

[Request Free Grant Assistance for MSA Safety SCBA](#)



PERFORMANCE AND PROTECTION IN PERFECT BALANCE.



•DUPONT•
Kevlar | **Nomex**

GLOBE. ATHLETIC GEAR FOR FIREFIGHTERS.™

Globe gear is designed to meet the new challenges you face every day to help keep you safe and healthy throughout your career and beyond.

Get the full story at MSAfire.com/Globe

MSA
The Safety Company

GLOBE®