Lawmakers say funding is critical to ensuring radio equipment meets new standards

(Washington, DC) – Today, Congressman Tim Walz (D-Minn.) and Sens. Klobuchar and Franken (D-Minn.) announced the Albert Lea, Minnesota Fire Department will receive a $1 million grant to go towards the purchase of new communications equipment. Emergency responders across the country are upgrading equipment to ensure interoperability between departments and across broad geographic areas.

“This upgrade to emergency radio equipment is critical to public safety,” said Congressman Walz. “During the June tornados that struck Minnesota, some emergency responders told me that due to the weather their older radios went down for periods of time, causing them to respond more slowly to the damage caused by the storms. Those communities that had already upgraded were able to function without disruption because of the advancements in technology. This grant will help Albert Lea transition to the new system so that should the worst ever happen, emergency responders are able to get to folks as quickly as possible.”

“Fire departments and first responders are critical to the safety and security of our communities,” said Senator Klobuchar. “This grant will provide our emergency personnel with the tools and technology they need to ensure Minnesota families are safe.”

“At a time when cities across Minnesota are struggling to provide basic services, our first responders remain critically important,” said Sen. Franken. “These federal funds will give Minnesota’s firefighters the technology they need to keep our communities safe.”

"Our current system doesn't interoperate with the rest of the county and this grant will allow us to tie in with the 16 other fire departments throughout the county. If we could have had this system in place on June 17th when the tornadoes rolled through here, we could have avoided a lot of uncertainty and anxiety. It is a huge safety issue when you can't communicate across the county with various emergency personnel," said Mark Roche, Fire Captain for City of Albert Lea.

The grant is part of the Department of Homeland Security Assistance to Firefighters Grants program. Click here fact sheet about the program.

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