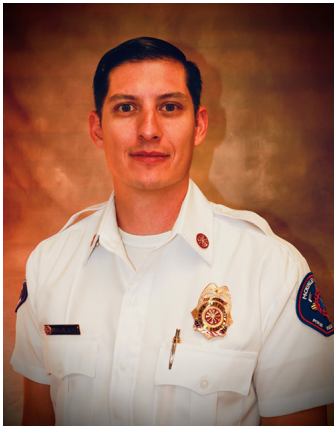


Firefighting unbound

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
Friday, 10 November 2023 06:59



McKinley County to receive two new fire engines, high-tech gear

It's not just children who perk up at the sight of a shiny, new fire engine. Firefighters love them, too.

Especially when they are replacing old trucks and are fitted with new equipment so they can shine light in all directions, carry more firefighters and let them communicate via wireless headsets and operate truck water tanks remotely.

One big thing the new technology will do is eliminate tethers: wireless communication among personnel and with truck pumps and cordless "jaws of life" will all make the job on scene easier to manage.

McKinley County is getting two new trucks, and some cutting-edge equipment. Fire Chief Lawrence Montoya, Jr. said they should be in action by January at the county's two busiest fire stations, Thoreau (71) and McKinley West (44).

The price tag for the two new engines is \$530,000 for Thoreau and \$610,00 for McKinley West. Both stations primarily respond to highway incidents, which is why they're the busiest.

The trucks they are replacing are a 2002 Freightliner and a 2020 International, with 65,834 and 86,979 miles on them, respectively. The newer of those trucks will be sent to Crownpoint station, the older one will go to Tsayatoh.

It's been a bit of a chess game since a semi truck rammed into the back of the Crownpoint engine while it was on a highway call in January. That forced management to move an engine from less-busy Tsayatoh until the insurance claim could be settled to help pay for a new engine.

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Sometimes low tech does the job. The current vehicles can carry up to eight crew members, but only come standard with four seats; these two will have extra bench seats so they can carry up to six people at a time. The trucks will also be fitted with custom cabinets to protect the emergency medical monitors that travel on the engines – and the county’s \$90,000- to \$100,000-per-monitor investment.

Those upgrades are done at the manufacturer level; the vendor, 411 Equipment, will add aftermarket techie equipment to the tune of just under \$34,000 per truck. That’s the cost to trick them out with some of the latest specialized equipment. It’s the firefighting equivalent of Pimp My Ride.

“The other really cool thing that both of these trucks are going to have is SAM Boost technology,” Montoya said, adding McKinley is the first fire department in the state to get them.

SAM Boost nozzles and pumps have wireless communications that allow remote activation of the trucks’ water pumps and have a display on the nozzle that tells a firefighter in real time how much water is still in the tank. That’s a big deal if you have to make a snap decision about whether or not to run into a burning building. It should also speed up getting water onto fires and free up a firefighter.

“We get to a fire scene and we’ve got 200 feet of hose. Before, you would pull the hose off the truck, they would fill up the hose and somebody would have to start the pump and be standing there to make sure the gauges were appropriate for the amount of pressure they needed at the end of the line,” Montoya explained. “This allows the firefighters to pull a line without water in it so it’s not heavy.”

That will save time and money.

“When you think about hiring a firefighter or eliminating having to pay one to manage the pump, if we can focus that person toward extinguishment instead of monitoring the pump it makes us more effective,” Montoya said.

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By getting SAM Boost first, Montoya was able to get a discount because the new engines will be rolling demonstrations – plus, the firefighters are sure to exercise their bragging rights when talking to colleagues.

“We got a smoking deal on this. They typically charge \$50,000 for two nozzles per fire truck,” he said. McKinley did a demonstration and got them at half price.

Getting \$280,000 from the state Fire Excise Tax Fund plus some grant money and an insurance settlement after a semi rear-ended a truck also let the county shift some money it was saving for a new truck to getting some new field gear.

The new trucks will also get super-bright LED “brow lights” that mount on the front and sides to give responders 360-degree visibility on night calls.

Five trucks are getting sets of three new extrication units – so-called “jaws of life” – that are more powerful and more importantly, cordless.

“A lot of these are hydraulic so they need a hydraulic line. Further out, you have to carry the small engine closer to the scene. The new ones we are getting are wireless and cordless and operate by a battery,” Montoya said.

The new spreaders and cutters also have onboard lights, so they won’t need a responder to hold a flashlight over the work area.

Every truck recently got wearable magnetic Guardian Angel lights, so responders can put them wherever they are needed to make personnel more visible and warn and direct traffic.

The lights have multiple flashing patterns for different applications, and they have another special use: Montoya said that they can be put on the ground in a square formation to create a landing zone for helicopters.

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The money will also provide 28 new sets of turnouts – the yellow head-to-toe firefighting outerwear – for the Zuni station.

The department will also get a new “burn house” for training.

With all these developments, it’s no wonder the department is excited about the new goodies.

“It’s going to promote recruitment, it’s going to increase morale,” Montoya said. “The best part is, it is going to provide a better service to the constituents of the county. All the way around it’s a win-win situation.”

The fire folk will test the extrication equipment to make a final choice for purchase at 10 am Nov. 15 at the Speedway Salvage yard, 425 Hasler Valley Rd. The community is invited to the event for a sneak peak, and Montoya said the department will have an open house to show off the new trucks when they arrive.

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