

County fire departments coping with aging equipment and staff shortages will get some much-needed relief with more than a half million dollars in federal fire grants announced Tuesday.

Three county fire stations were awarded more than \$500,000 through the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program, which Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-Md.) helped establish to aid fire companies across the country to buy equipment and provide adequate training.

The Silver Hill Volunteer Fire Department (VFD) received a \$225,000 grant, which will be used to purchase a new fire engine. Both of their engines are approaching their maximum years of service.

"You have no clue how bad we need a piece of apparatus in good shape up there," Charles Diana, department president, said.

A \$47,838 fire grant was awarded to the Berwyn Heights VFD to purchase new hydraulic rescue tools, which will be used to free people trapped in motor vehicles and construction accidents.

The Morningside VFD will be able to purchase a new fire engine with \$227,500 in grant money to replace the county-owned vehicle they use now that has logged more than 150,000 miles. Morningside is the busiest rescue squad in the state of Maryland, responding to nearly 5,000 calls a year.

"This fire grant is very important to us because we were originally going to have to take out a 10-year loan to purchase this vehicle. This grant enabled us to purchase the truck and will allow us to also think about replacing other aging apparatus over the next one to two years," Assistant Chief Syd Girven said.

Hoyer, co-chair of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus, helped start the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program because fire departments often have difficulty purchasing proper equipment. A ladder truck can cost more than \$750,000 and outfitting one firefighter with turnout gear and breathing apparatus can cost \$4,500. In addition, departments must fund training

programs for paid and volunteer firefighters.

"I am pleased that these three Volunteer Fire Departments are the recipients of grants that will allow them to purchase a new fire truck, upgrade the equipment that allows a firefighter to breathe safely and rescue tools to free someone trapped in a motor vehicle," Hoyer said in a statement.

Since 2001, Maryland fire stations have received \$22 million through the Assistance to Firefighters grant program.