

## APPLICATION



City Name Columbus, Mississippi

Population  Under 10,000  Over 10,000

Category  Public Safety  Planning & Economic Development  
 City Spirit  Public Works

Title of Entry Thousands of Persons Helped By New Specialized Emergency Medical Vehicles

Description of Project Attaining the highest possible standards known to firefighters throughout the world, the Columbus Fire and Rescue Department (CF&R) completed their goal in 2017 of creating and adding two specialized, medical emergency vehicles that answer over 1,000 calls for help per year. During the same period, the Department continued to maintain their status as the only internationally-accredited municipal fire department in the State of Mississippi.

Project Summary (use additional pages if necessary) Please see attached.

Signature of Chief Elected or Appointed Official David Armstrong

Please provide the following information in case of questions about the application.

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Title Chief Operations Officer

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Mississippi Municipal Excellence Award Entry

City of Columbus, Mississippi

Population Over 10,000

**PROJECT SUMMARY:** A small Mississippi town tucked in the northeast corner of the state is home to the only accredited municipal fire department in Mississippi.

The city is Columbus, and a four-year effort to become accredited required hundreds of changes in the Columbus Fire and Rescue Department (CF&R) in everything from how calls are answered to how firefighters are trained. Those changes have resulted in a Department that reaches and maintains the highest standards of firefighters throughout the world.

One of the accreditation requirements is an emergency response by the Fire Department to all ambulance calls within the City limits. Even though the ambulance service is operated and funded by the local hospital, CF&R is required to send a two-person EMT-level crew to every medical call dispatched by 911. This is done entirely at the cost of the Fire Department.

During the first two years of accreditation, full-size fire trucks answered these medical calls. Over 85 per cent of the calls received by the fire department are medical calls. The result was thousands of dispatches of the large trucks filled with firefighting gear that was not needed for the calls. Also, there were concerns over driving these 10,000-pound trucks on City streets and the associated wear and tear on the units.

The leadership of CF&R and Columbus Mayor Robert Smith conceived a plan to purchase and staff two smaller mobile units that would later be known as **Med 1** and **Med 2**, specifically for the medical calls. In late 2017, the plan was completed and is now in full operation.

With each of the medical units stationed on opposite sides of town and close to its citizens, Med 1 or Med 2 answers each medical call and routinely arrives before the ambulance to provide immediate care.

In 2017, **Med 1 and Med 2 answered 1,895 calls** for help. City of Columbus officials see two positive results of these responses:

- **1,409 persons were helped**
- **Large fire trucks were dispatched 1,634 less times.**

All 75 firefighters at CF&R are Emergency Medical Technicians or higher in their training so each one can provide needed medical care. All are also certified firefighters.

Another critical and practical aspect of the accreditation is measuring, recording and maintaining on-time responses of sixty seconds or less to be en-route and arrival on the scene in three to five minutes.

**SUMMARY:** Only 247 departments in the United States and Canada are accredited, and Columbus is home to one of those. While the national average for **annual training for a firefighter is 45 hours**, in Columbus that number is over 400 training hours.

The City of Columbus maintains a **fire insurance rating of 4** (lower is better) and is actively working to **achieve a rating of 3**. The average rating in the state is 8. That means savings of hundreds of thousands of dollars on fire insurance rates for Columbus homes and businesses.

The Department has specialists ready to answer calls about hazardous materials, confined spaces, rope and trench rescue, swift water rescue, collapsed buildings, overland search and rescue and even more. The Department of Homeland Security and other agencies routinely call CF&R for help, and these professional men and women are ready, willing and able to do so.

No matter what day you read this report, you can be assured of the following:

Someone in Columbus, Mississippi will call 911 in an hour or two and ask for help. The first two rescuers that arrive will likely have driven a fully-equipped CF&R Med 1 or Med 2 unit and these firefighters will have been trained to provide expert and kind care.

The person in need won't have any idea of how an international accreditation might have saved their life, but the professionals of Columbus Fire and Rescue certainly will, and they will be ready to repeat the process again and again...saving lives and helping others.

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