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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Signs Bill to Provide Fire Organizations with Thermal Imaging Cameras

Gov. Christie Whitman today demonstrated her commitment to keeping New Jersey's fire fighters safe and well-equipped by signing legislation authorizing the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to implement a program to purchase thermal imaging cameras for fire organizations. The Governor's Fiscal Year 2000 budget appropriated \$7.5 million for the purchase of the high-tech devices, which enable firemen to see through heavy smoke and pinpoint locations of trapped fire victims.

"I am pleased to sign such an important piece of fire safety legislation. This bill will provide New Jersey's firefighters with the remarkable technology that will allow them to see through dense smoke and to check for `hot spots' behind closed doors and walls," the Governor said.

"The thermal imaging camera is a valuable tool that can help save both the lives of those trapped in a burning building and the lives of the men and women trying to put the fire out. This noble profession is well deserving of the \$7.5 million state grant that ensures we are providing as much support as we can for our fire fighters," she said.

"As important as the thermal imaging camera is to the fire-fighting profession, I recognize the fact that the camera is only a tool. Each and every fire fighter remains the most important part of the fire fighting equation," Gov. Whitman said.

The program authorized through the legislation will allow a fire organization to receive - at no cost to it - a quality camera chosen by the DCA. Fire organizations that purchase a camera other than the one offered by the state will be entitled to reimbursement up to the purchase price of the state-selected camera.

The legislation, A-3073, was sponsored by Assembly Members Christopher "Kip" Bateman (R-Morris/Somerset) and Peter J. Biondi (R-Morris/Somerset) and Senators John J. Matheussen (R-Camden/Gloucester) and Norman M. Robertson (R-Essex/Passaic).

Gov. Whitman said fire fighters deserve a share of the credit for the recent news from the state's Uniform Crime Report that there was a 12 percent decrease in reportable arsons in 1998. She said this decrease shows the importance of fire safety and the seriousness of arson, and that is improving the quality of life in the state's communities.

According to the Governor, the drop in arsons also can be attributed to the many important changes the state is making in the field of fire safety.

"For example, the Division of Fire Safety adopted a new version of the New Jersey Fire Code. Since the enforcement of this new code, civilian fire fatalities have dropped from almost 200 in 1986 to 65 in 1998. This is a significant decrease, and let's hope the numbers continue to drop in the coming year," Gov. Whitman said.

"Last year, I signed legislation which ensures that fire police have the training necessary to perform their jobs safely. And included in this year's budget are funds to increase the staff of the Division of Fire Safety, as well as a \$1.5 million appropriation to establish a statewide Urban Search and Rescue Team," she said.

"Again, I would like to thank all of New Jersey's fire fighters for their many contributions - from protecting our dry land from this summer's drought, to passing out smoke detectors, to risking their own lives to save others. I want to thank them not only in word but also in action. This fall I intend to record a new recruitment video, asking more New Jerseyans to volunteer their time to the local fire departments," Gov. Whitman said.

"I will also encourage towns to consider adopting the Length of Service Award Program, which provides an IRA-like account to volunteers who are constant participants in emergency calls and complete the necessary training. So far, more than 10 percent of the municipalities throughout the state have adopted or have considered LOSAP since I signed the bill establishing this program last year," the Governor said.

