

WEST POINT TIMES-NEWS

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By Trey Wood

LaGRANGE — The Troup County Board of Commissioners is expected to approve at their Tuesday meeting a grant through the U.S. Department of Justice to keep members of the county sheriff's department safe and sound during firefights.

Part of the national Bulletproof Vest Partnership, the grant is expected to provide \$14,700 worth of bulletproof vests for the department, with sheriff's officials expecting a need of eight or nine vests.

"We've bought several thousands of dollars of vests already, and the county has been reimbursed for that, so it's an ongoing thing," Capt. William Grizzard said.

The county is expected to pay half of the cost upfront, with a check for that amount written back from the Department of Justice.

"We can buy some as the year goes. We have to," Grizzard said, "and all we have to do is submit the bill to them, and then they will reimburse us, the Department of Justice will. This is a nationwide thing."

Officials with the sheriff's department currently are looking at two bids, one asking \$575 for each of the bulletproof, kevlar vests —the other asking about \$675.

Many of the vests are fitted to the deputy or official using them. With a five-year shelf life, and no one entering the department the same size as another, several thousands of dollars of vests currently are going to waste.

"A lot of times people have to be fitted for them, so you can't just buy small, medium, large, extra large, different body proportions require," Sheriff James Woodruff said, "so we just don't want to say 'Give us five small, give us five medium,' and we can't even use it.

"There's \$2,500 worth of vests just sitting on a shelf."

The grant is the largest the county could ask for, hoping to eliminate the need for officials with the department to come back for an increase on the budget amendment.

Commissioner Tripp Foster thought it best the department get as much as required to help eliminate any vest needs realized throughout the year.

"One thing you might not want to do is fail to do that," Foster said. "It's going to sneak up on you, and you need more vests. We'd rather help you now than have to address it later when you're up against the wall on the issue."

"I just don't want to buy them and throw them on the shelf," Woodruff said. "We just wasted all that money."

As reported on valleytimesnews.com.