

# 15 years later: How the jobs of first responders have changed since 9/11

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
September 11 2016 9:28 AM



**ALTON/GODFREY** - Four hundred eleven first responders were killed on the horrific attacks on **9/11**.

Since that day, the life of every American changed. Laws like the **Patriot Act** were signed, American flags lined the streets and firefighters and police officers across the nation joined the mourning for their brothers and sisters they may never have met. As the nation continues to push into the future, not having seen another attack of that magnitude since, some people have forgotten about the pre-9/11 world.

**Alton Police Chief Jake Simmons** was a general case detective for the **Alton Police Department** on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001. He said he was about to leave his child at **St. Francis Daycare** when his wife called him.

"She was screaming on the phone," he said. "That's how I first heard what happened. I went home and saw it on the TV news."

Since that day, Simmons said the job of a police officer has not changed too much, but the way it has done has changed a lot.

"Since 9/11, officers have had more training - and better training - available to us," he said. "We also have stronger relationships with federal agencies. Before 9/11, we had good relationships with them, but now we have very, very good partnerships with them."

Federal agencies such as the **FBI**, **DEA** and **ATF** now share databases and intelligence with local departments such as Alton. Simmons said the federal government has provided him with lots of equipment and grants since the attacks 15 years ago.

"More military equipment became available on the government's dime, instead of us having to pay for it," Simmons said. "Those federal grants we have applied for have gotten us patrol rifles, Kevlar helmets to protect our guys on raids and bullet-proof vests."

Some of that equipment has also included at least one armored personnel carrier for Alton's S.W.A.T. team to get to and from a scene.

If not for those federal grants, several pieces of that equipment would come at a high price, Simmons said. Many of the military-grade patrol rifles are AR-15 assault rifles, which may cost as much as \$1,000 a piece. Simmons said that former military hardware is necessary to protect citizens.

"It definitely showed its use in Dallas, when the officers were able to use their patrol rifles to bring that killer who was targeting cops and endangering officers and civilians at bay," he said.

Federal grants also poured into fire departments across the country immediately following 9/11, **Godfrey Fire Chief Erik Kambarian** said. Those federal dollars, however, are currently "drying up," he added.

"Federal money for departments is slowly dwindling," Kambarian said. "The first five years saw a wealth of grants."

During those first five years, Kambarian said the St. Louis Metro Area received a large amount of federal grants. This was partially due to its classification as an **Urban Area Security Initiative**. Kambarian said a large amount of those grants went to equipment for tasks which were once outside the essentials of firefighting.

"The traditional roles of firefighting and emergency medical assistance are still there, but our hazmat role has greatly expanded," he said. "The knowledge base a firefighter has to have has dramatically expanded."

Kambarian said that is most prominently exemplified with the ***Essentials of Firefighting*** book. He described the text as the "Bible for people starting their firefighting careers." Kambarian said the book was a couple hundred pages 20 years ago, and is now a whopping 800-plus pages.

"They keep adding chapters to it," he said. "There's one on terrorism, one on weapons of mass destruction and extensive hazmat additions."

All of that extra training and equipment may prove to be excessive, however. Kambarian said the fire departments and regional emergency response teams are now tasked with sustaining this extra equipment attained through federal funding, which is no longer as much as it was.

"I'm on the **Madison County Hazmat Team** as well, and a piece of our equipment broke," Kambarian said. "We received that equipment through a federally-funded regional grant from **STARRS**, or the **St. Louis Area Regional Response System**. The repair would have been thousands of dollars, which is way outside our budget. We eventually worked with the manufacturer to get it fixed, but that's the beginning of the immense amount of equipment we have and the cost of sustaining it."

Training required for these new and expanded threats is also time-consuming. Kambarian said there is only so much training a firefighter can do. He said they focus on training for the contingencies most possible for the area. He said it was impossible to train for every contingency, but they train extensively for any they would likely find in the area.

"We're proud to serve the community," he said. "We're proud of the amount of trust the public gives us, and we really take that seriously. Whether we're a firefighter in New York City or a small town, we're all in this together."