

# Fire crews take work home for Obama rally

## ELECTION NIGHT | Told to have equipment ready

BY FRAN SPIELMAN

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Staff Reporters

Off-duty Chicago firefighters and paramedics have been ordered to take all of their gear home with them to speed deployment in the event of an emergency at Barack Obama's giant election night rally in Grant Park.

The order begins next Wednesday and continues until Nov. 6 — two days after the election.

Firefighters have been ordered to take home gear that includes protective clothing known as bunker gear, gloves, face mask, helmet, boots and breathing apparatus tank.

Firefighters work 24 hours on — and then have 48 hours off. Paramedics work 24 hours on — with 72 hours off.

Fire Department spokesman Larry Langford acknowledged the order was prompted by the massive Obama rally.

"This way, their gear would be with them instead of having to go to the firehouse to get their gear. They could be sent to any location with their gear already with them," Langford said.

"It's a precautionary measure so they can respond if they have to in the unlikely event they would be required to report for duty," he said.

The last time firefighters were ordered to take their gear home was in August, when a South Side pumping station was swamped, raising concerns about widespread flooding.



On election night, city firefighters "could be sent to any location with their gear already with them." | JOHN J. KIM~SUN-TIMES

Last week, Mayor Daley put a \$2 million price tag on the cost of city services tied to the Obama rally and said the cash-flush Obama campaign had agreed to cover every penny.

"We have a financial crisis. ... The City of Chicago could not afford \$2 million on this because we're going to be laying off people, cutting back," Daley said.

The mayor acknowledged that the Grant Park rally would create a logistical headache, forcing the city to close Grant Park up to eight hours in advance, block streets, secure the CTA and "realign gas mains."

"When you close down Grant Park, you need police," he said. "You need fire. You need sanitation. You have to have extra police on the CTA going to and from downtown. You need an enormous amount of people there. That's quite a bit of overtime."

The mayor would have preferred a more "controlled" environment like the United Center or Soldier

Field. But, he said, "Could you see me saying 'no' to Senator Obama? Give me a break. I'm not that dumb."

Chicago Police are also preparing for the possibility of having to control unruly crowds after the polls close Nov. 4. Gang and tactical teams were trained in crowd control this spring and would be called in to quell any problems, along with the Targeted Response Unit and the newly created Mobile Strike Force.

With Obama being the first major party presidential candidate from Chicago, it required the department to plan for the potential of celebratory crowds if he wins or rioting if he loses, police said.

The planning was similar to what was in place in case the Cubs or White Sox got to the World Series and won.

Police spokeswoman Monique Bond said there's no need for officers to take special gear home with them. Specialized units carry such equipment in their cars, she said.

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