

COMBATING THE HAZARDS OF DIRTY GEAR



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"If you don't get debris and carcinogens out of gear after a fire, they break down the protective fabrics—a disservice to firefighters because we lose protection," said Captain Matthew Hartman, a firefighter and paramedic at Munson Fire Dept. (Munson), in Munson Township, Ohio. "Back in the day, having black helmets and soiled gear was a status symbol. But through time, we found that there was an increased health risk to firefighters exposed to the soot and particulates in their gear."

Clean Gear Protects Firefighters

To better protect firefighters from the exposures of dirty gear, Munson – with its 27 firefighters – recently replaced its old home-style washer with a new Continental Girbau ExpressWash™ Gear Washer and ExpressDry™ Gear Dryer. Today, according to Hartman, fire departments across the country have embraced the proper cleaning of protective gear. It's a matter of firefighter health and protection.

"For years, we were washing turnout gear in a household grade washing machine," said Hartman of his department. "We realized that what we thought was clean, was not. Other fire departments near us had the right equipment and their gear was much cleaner than ours. Carcinogens and hazardous particulates were still in our gear after it was washed.

The only way to get it really clean was to figure out how to get the funding for the right washer."

Thankfully, according to Hartman, a local business absorbed costs for the project. "It was a great Christmas present," he said.

Other fire departments – those without private funding – often successfully gain grants for laundry equipment through the Assistance to Firefighter Grant Program (AFG) (<http://www.fema.gov/welcome-assistance-firefighters-grant-program>). ExpressWash Gear Washers and ExpressDry Gear Dryers regularly qualify for AFG dollars.

Cutting Dry Time from Three Days to Three Hours

Now, thanks to Munson's new ExpressWash Gear Washer and ExpressDry Gear

Dryer, protective gear is properly cleaned and dried in hours, not days.

"We used to run gear through the washer with two rinses and a heavy-duty cycle, then let it air dry," said Hartman. It took up to three days to dry – creating a problem. It was out of service for too long.

Munson firefighters serve a 24-square-mile area and honor mutual aid agreements with 24 surrounding townships and cities. So, with only one set of turnout gear each, they can't wait several days for protective gear to dry. Now, thanks to the new equipment, gear dries in just three or four hours.

Selecting a Freestanding Washer

Munson's new Continental ExpressWash Gear Washer is installed in the apparatus bay close to a water source and outlet. One of the reasons the washer



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Firefighter/Medic Tom Hummel II and Firefighter/Medic William Rivera rely on their Continental ExpressDry Gear Dryer to quickly and safely dry gear.



Firefighter/Medic Tom Hummel II loading the station's Continental ExpressWash Gear Washer.

was selected is because it is freestanding so it slides easily into place without bolts and reinforced concrete foundations. "The Township is renovating their building and we may be relocating the washer and dryer once that is complete," said Hartman. "We wanted equipment we could move easily."

Nearby, the ExpressDry Gear Dryer offers mobility thanks to its wheeled base.

Munson firefighters follow a standard operating guideline for washing turnout

gear. They are required to clean gear after any contact with fires or body fluids, according to Hartman. Luckily, the washer couldn't be simpler to use.

Why Programmability and Ease-of-Use are Critical

Scott Vlahos, of Advantage Equipment, in Akron, Ohio, helped the department select, install and program its new washer and dryer. He programmed the washer to clean

gear according to manufacturer and NFPA guidelines.

Munson firefighters simply select a program number, load the washer, add detergent and press start. In doing so, they properly wash a variety of items using various programs, including turnout suit shells, liners and truck towels. The washer automatically blends optimum water temperatures, water levels, extraction speeds and cycle times—ensuring quality results and proper cleaning every time.

"Our gear is definitely cleaner," said Hartman. "I think our new washer removes more soap, soot and water from the gear than our previous practices, which seems to help prevent debris from adhering to it."

Loving the ExpressDry Gear Dryer

Once clean, gear dries in just three or four hours using Munson's ExpressDry Gear Dryer. It safely and quickly dries personal protective equipment, including turnout gear, helmets, gloves, boots, facemasks, and wetsuits. "The dryer is amazing," said Hartman. It works by blowing a large volume of cool air, at high pressure, safely through the garment—drying even hard-to-reach areas. NFPA compliant, it features side vents for quickly drying gloves, facemasks and boots. "Soaked gloves are completely dry in just three or four hours," said Hartman. "It is a great piece of equipment because it eliminates the possibility of damage to fabrics, unlike tumble-drying with heat," he added.

The dryer has proven itself to be more than just a gear dryer ... "A lot of our guys like to hunt and fish," said Hartman. "They use it to also dry hip waders and coveralls. It's perfect for neoprene. Other fire departments see our dryer and want it. It rolls around so it's easily moved anywhere we need it."

The new washer and dryer have simplified the washing of turnout gear for Munson firefighters. Moreover, Fire Chief Mark S. Lynn feels good knowing the department is doing all it can to keep firefighters safe.

To find out more about Continental ExpressWash Gear Washers and Dryers, visit www.continentalgirbau.com or call 800-256-1073.