



Clean Gear May Contribute to Longer Life—For You & Your Gear

BY HALEY JORGENSEN

Twenty years ago, we didn't know about the hazards of carcinogens and soot," said Fire Chief Scott Grooms, of Eadytown, S.C., Volunteer Fire Dept. "Firefighters didn't know they were bringing hazardous chemicals and soot back on their gear and contaminating the fire station, themselves and others."

REVEALING THE HAZARDS OF FIREFIGHTING AND DIRTY GEAR

Today, studies reveal the real risk of dirty turnout gear. The University of Cincinnati (UC) determined that firefighters are twice as likely to develop testicular cancer and have significantly higher rates of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and prostate cancer than non-firefighters. Grace LeMasters, PhD, Ash Genaidy, PhD, and James Lockey, MD, reported these findings in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*.

"We believe there's a direct correlation between the chemical exposures firefighters experience on the job and their increased risk for cancer," said LeMasters, professor at UC.

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CLEAN GEAR CRITICAL TO FIREFIGHTER HEALTH & SAFETY

No wonder the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) recommends properly washing gear according to an established set of guidelines. Clean gear not only protects firefighters and emergency responders, it also lasts longer, according to Grooms. And that's a good thing, he said, considering one set of turnout gear runs between \$2,000 and \$2,500.

THE KEY TO PROPERLY CLEANING GEAR—EXPRESSWASH™ & EXPRESSDRY™

It makes sense, then, that many fire departments across the country are installing Continental Girbau Inc. (Continental) ExpressWash™ Washers and gear dryers. These include Eadytown Fire Department., with 15 volunteer firefighters; Cordova, Alabama Fire Department, with 22 volunteer firefighters; and Harlem, Georgia Fire Department, with 25 firefighters.

CHOOSING A SOFT-MOUNT EXPRESSWASH WASHER

Ever since twin twisters ripped through Cordova, Ala., last year, Cordova Fire Dept. has operated from a temporary location—an old high school basketball court made into a fire station. "Our fire station and its contents were leveled," said Fire Chief Dean Harbison. Craving replacement equipment that would relocate easily once the new fire station was constructed, Harbison installed a 20-pound capacity ExpressWash Washer and complementing gear dryer.

A freestanding, soft-mount machine, the washer offers unrivaled energy-efficiency and simple installation, according to Russ Arbuckle, of



Above-left: Amanda Hodge of Cordova Fire Department in Cordova, Alabama stands next to the department's Continental ExpressWash Washer-Extractor. The washer was installed in a temporary location—an old high school basketball court made into a fire station—after twin tornadoes leveled their previous station. Above-right: The team at Cordova Fire Department appreciates being able to clean gear after every fire to reduce their exposure to cancer-causing carcinogens.

Wholesale Commercial Laundry S.E., in Southside, Ala. Arbuckle worked closely with Harbison on the selection, programming and installation of Cordova Fire Dept.'s new laundry equipment.

"ExpressWash Washers slide into place without need for bolts and concrete foundations and operate on single-phase power—making them simple to install and relocate," said Arbuckle. Unlike hard-mount washers, they operate anywhere there is extra space, including second-floor areas, truck bays with in-floor heat, or over wood floors.

"The washer and dryer sit on the gym floor and work off of a typical 110-volt outlet," said Harbison. "We didn't have to rewire and the equipment runs on a generator if needed."

HIGH PROGRAMMABILITY CRITICAL TO PROPER CLEANING OF PROTECTIVE FABRICS

While ExpressWash Washers are simple to install, thanks to their soft-mount design, they are also highly programmable, which is critical to washing gear according to NFPA guidelines. Once the washer programs are set, firefighters simply separate turnout gear shells and liners, load the machine, select a program number, and press start. The washer automatically injects the right chemicals at the right water temperature, level and extract speed—eliminating user error and the possibility

of damage to costly protective gear.

At Eadytown Fire Dept., for example, firefighters wash their own gear using one of eight programs. "We wash gear liners and shells, brush firefighting gear, car extrication gear, and station towels," said Grooms. "We also use a sanitizing cycle to clean items exposed to bloodborne pathogens. It couldn't be any easier."

A PROPER WASH FOLLOWED BY A PROPER DRY

Once correctly cleaned, gear is then properly dried in an ExpressDry Gear Dryer. NFPA compliant, the dryer works by blowing (un-heated) ambient air through turnout gear, gloves, boots and facemasks. Firefighters simply hang gear on the dryer's invertible stickmen and press start.

Before installing a new ExpressDry Gear Dryer, Harlem Fire Dept. firefighters were forced to air-dry turnout suits, masks and gloves by spreading them out wherever they could find space. "The new dryer allows for hanging gear properly while air circulates through it," said Fire Chief Tripp Loneragan. "This makes for much faster drying times and more complete drying. We also use the dryer to dry hoods and gloves," he added.

RETURNING GEAR TO SERVICE SOONER

The difference is remarkable. Now, rather than waiting days for gear to dry, it's

returned to service in just three to four hours. "We do not issue spare sets of gear," said Loneragan, "so the longer it takes to dry, the longer we are short a firefighter who is able to enter a burning building."

To discover more about Continental ExpressWash Washers and ExpressDry Gear Dryers, visit www.continentalgirbau.com/firedepartments, or call 800-256-1073.

ASSISTANCE TO FIREFIGHTER GRANT PROGRAM AT WORK

Fire Chief Scott Grooms applied for funding from the Assistance to Firefighter Grant Program to purchase Eadytown Volunteer Fire Dept.'s new ExpressWash Washer and ExpressDry Gear Dryer. Installed in 2010, the duo delivers superior results, ease-of-use and a wash/dry turnaround of around three hours. The application process took some time, according to Grooms, and worth the effort! Discover more at www.fema.gov.