

THE SOFT-MOUNT WASHER WHEN YOU'RE TIGHT ON SPACE AND LIGHT ON FOUNDATION



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Finding extra space to install an industrial washer isn't always easy. But, fire departments across the country are squeezing them into truck bays and utility rooms, knowing an in-house industrial washer is critical to keeping gear clean, costs down and firefighters safe. When space is at a premium, a soft-mount washer-extractor provides a sensible benefit over its hard-mount rival—an easy-to-install freestanding design.

The Soft-mount Washer Attraction

What makes soft-mount washer-extractors so special is the fact that they can be installed in unconventional locations, such as in truck bays with in-floor heat, or second-story utility rooms. Unlike hard-mount machines, soft mounts don't bolt to reinforced concrete foundations. So, generally, installations are less costly, less involved and demand less time. Additionally, soft-mount washer-extractors are easier to relocate and service.

In some cases, a soft-mount washer may be a fire department's only choice, especially when installing in an existing tight space without an appropriate foundation.

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"We're in a cramped, old building that was constructed in late 1950s," says Fire Chief John Schilling of the Tisbury, Mass., Fire Dept. (Tisbury). "We don't have any extra space, so we knew finding and installing a new washer would be an issue." After researching options, Schilling selected and installed a Continental Girbau soft-mount washer-extractor—a freestanding machine that slid

easily into a cramped space between the firehouse's air filling station and furnace.

The 40-pound capacity soft-mount washer not only properly cleans turnout gear according to NFPA guidelines — keeping firefighters safe from cancer-causing contaminants — it is simple to relocate, according to Schilling. Ultimately, Tisbury, and its 42 volunteer firefighters, will move to a new location.

"It was simple to install without jack-hammering the floor and easily connected to our septic system," says Schilling of the washer. "We were also going through the phases of building a new facility and we wanted to make capital purchases with that in mind. Our new washer-extractor will be easy to relocate when the time comes."

Sterling Fire Dept. (Sterling), in Sterling, Colo., chose a soft-mount machine for similar reasons. Fire Engineer Kelly Headley maintains that if a hard-mount washer had been selected instead, it would have been necessary to dig up the firehouse's concrete workroom floor, making installation more expensive.



This 40-pound capacity soft-mount washer slid easily into the cramped space at Tisbury, Mass. Fire Department

Another bonus of choosing the soft-mount washer was simplified movement. "It's easy to pull out if there are maintenance issues," he says.

The On-premise Washer Value

No matter what type of washer is selected — hardmount or softmount — Headley and Schilling agree an on-premise washer is critical to controlling costs and ensuring gear is promptly cleaned.

"In a structural fire, items like carpet, sealed wood and stain-resistant fabrics put out nasty gasses and chemicals," says Headley, a veteran firefighter of 23 years. "Those carcinogens are very



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Tisbury, Mass. Fire Department (left) and Sterling Fire Dept., Sterling, Colo. (right) are both experiencing the cost-savings and benefits of having laundry service on-premise.

dangerous and so we keep a breathing apparatus on and monitor carbon dioxide levels the whole time. All of those gasses and fire by products also get into our protective gear, so it's common practice after a fire for our guys to bring their turnout gear back to the firehouse and wash it. You can't wear dirty gear and expose yourself and others to what's on the gear."

Schilling agrees. "Years ago, we kept turnout gear by our beds and jumped into it," he attests. "Then studies showed that there were residual effects from the contaminants stuck on the gear. We learned that those contaminants could hurt firefighters or their families."

Now, gear at both Fire Departments is promptly cleaned after a fire—improving firefighter safety. Moreover, the new on-premise washers are cutting costs related to sending gear out for cleaning.

The On-Premise Savings

Prior to Tisbury's soft-mount washer installation, gear was outsourced for cleaning at \$200 per suit. "Gear would be out of service for four weeks from the time we shipped it out," says Schilling. "Being a small department with limited funds, we don't have an extra set of gear for each firefighter. Often, our most highly trained firefighters were out of service waiting for gear."

The situation, he says, spurred reluctance on the part of firefighters. They didn't want to turn gear in for cleaning because it was out of service so long. With a washer in-house, Tisbury successfully lowered the cost of cleaning gear,

returned gear to service days sooner, and improved firefighter protection from the carcinogens and contaminants of dirty gear. Because Tisbury selected a soft-mount washer, the department could also install it in a small space without tearing up the floor. By keeping gear clean, it should last longer, Schilling and Headley agree.

"I think our gear lasts longer because it gets cleaner and the new machine isn't as hard on the fabric," says Headley, "which is important since each set of turnout gear can cost up to \$1,500. It also appears to come out much cleaner. I'm amazed at how ugly the water is when it drains out of there."

"It was a big process getting the NFPA-compliant gear for all of our firefighters," adds Schilling. "And, now that we have it, we want to maintain and take care of it."

Washing turnout gear requires care, and should be done according to NFPA recommendations using a programmable washer-extractor, they maintain. The Continental Girbau soft-mount washer-extractors embraced by Tisbury and Sterling feature programmable extract speeds (up to 387 G-force), baths, water temperatures, water levels, cylinder rotation, mechanical action, wash time and automatic chemical injection.

On-premise Cleaning Anywhere

At Tisbury, each firefighter handles washing his/her own turnout gear. Gloves, hoods, turnout gear liners and shells are all cleaned in the soft-mount washer using appropriate programs. "It's simple to operate," says Schilling. "You just hit a program number, load the gear in the washer and press start. When the load is done, the gear goes on the drying rack and it's back in service the next morning."

With their new, in-house soft-mount washers – installed next to a furnace at Tisbury and in a workroom at Sterling – both fire departments are assured gear is properly cleaned and promptly returned to service. In both cases, the fire departments chose soft mounts over hard mounts for ease of installation and a freestanding design.

To learn more about Continental gear washers and dryers for fire departments, visit www.continentalgirbau.com/firedepartments

Story adapted from Fire Chief Magazine.

