



# Butler County Uses CARES Act Funds to Buy Gear Washers

By Haley Jorgensen



Fire Department  
Laundry Profile

Five fire districts in Butler County, Kan. (BUCO) recently purchased Continental Girbau® (Continental) washer-extractors for decontaminating and properly cleaning bunker gear. The new machines were funded by the Strengthening People and Revitalizing Kansas (SPARK) initiative and Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), which requires payments are used to cover costs of necessary expenditures incurred due to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

## Five Fire Districts Receive Continental Washers

Fire Chief Kevin Webster, of BUCO's Fire District #3, worked with BUCO's Emergency Management Director Keri Korthals to identify the need for the washers and to qualify for the funding. The washers were a shoe-in, according to Webster. "Our firefighters and first responders use bunker gear as personal protective equipment (PPE) during COVID-19 calls," he said. "We needed a way to get the gear clean after exposure to the virus. Dirty bunker gear — either contaminated by fire and smoke particulates and chemicals, or bio-hazards, such as COVID-19 — is dangerous to firefighters and those they serve."

BUCO — geographically the largest county in Kansas with 1,443 square miles — is served by nine fire districts and four city fire departments comprised of volunteer, full- and part-time firefighters. "In the past, the fire districts didn't have a good way to get gear cleaned," added Korthals. "When we received a substantial distribution from SPARK, we knew the washers would be really beneficial in helping to protect our front-line responders."

"We used to ask Fire District #8 to clean our gear," added Webster. "We'd take it over there and they'd wash it for us. It was inconvenient to say the least, but the results were impressive."



Fire District #3 installed a 40-pound capacity Continental ExpressshWash® Gear Washer thanks to funding from the SPARK initiative and CARES Act.



So when the funding opportunity arose, Webster talked to a couple of fire departments that already had washers. Andover Fire-Rescue, a neighboring city department, had previously purchased a Continental washer and was extremely pleased with its performance. Webster jumped at the chance to get a Continental washer, also.

To secure the right machines to fit the needs of all five districts, he and Korthals worked closely with Matt Samms of Commercial Laundry Sales and Service, a full-service laundry equipment distributor, in Wichita, Kan.

#### ExpressWash Gear Washer Programmed to Comply with NFPA 1851 Guidelines

At Fire District #3, in Rose Hill, Kan., a 40-pound capacity Continental ExpressWash® Gear Washer offers superior programmability that allows for complete control over water temperature, number of baths and rinses, extract speed, mechanical action, cycle time and more. It automatically injects detergents

to eliminate possible overuse and resulting damage to protective fabrics, and features a soft-mount, freestanding design that allows for easy relocation if needed. Firefighters simply separate their gear liners and shells, load them in the washer, choose the right program and press start. After they are washed, the gear is hung on a gear dryer, where ambient air is pushed through the shells and liners. The wash cycle is done in about 30-45 minutes. Drying takes a few hours.

Fast forward a year later and Webster couldn't be happier. He knows his six full-time and 15 volunteer firefighters, who perform fire rescue, trench rescue and medical first response, are better protected than ever before. And not just from COVID-19.

#### Better Protection from COVID-19 and Carcinogens

In addition to protecting firefighters and first responders from the virus, the washers remove the residue and chemicals left on gear after a fire — further protecting them from cancer and other health hazards.



#### Meeting NFPA Guidelines

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) maintains that firefighters face a 9 percent increase in cancer diagnoses, and a 14 percent increase in cancer-related deaths, compared to the general population in the U.S. To minimize those risks, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) developed a set of guidelines (1851) for properly cleaning protective gear promptly after a fire or medical incident. In compliance, each of BUCO's Continental Washer-Extractors is programmed to clean bunker gear shells and liners according to those guidelines. Even better? If those guidelines are changed in the future, the Continental washers can be easily reprogrammed to align with them.

*To learn more about BUCO, visit [bucoks.com](http://bucoks.com). To learn more about Continental Gear Washers — backed by industry-leading warranties, visit [continentalgirbau.com/firedepartments](http://continentalgirbau.com/firedepartments) or call 800-256-1073.*