



Maximum Performance

FRAMINGHAM AND FIRELINIC™ ANSWER THE CALL

When leadership of the Framingham, Mass. Fire Department changed over, the message from new Fire Chief Joseph C. Hicks and Assistant Chief Michael Dutcher was clear, simple and resolute – we have to protect our people. The pair was talking about the 150 uniformed firefighters serving the city.

A CHANGE IS NEEDED

The two men understood their department lacked a system to keep their brothers and sisters safe from the harmful carcinogens that can attach to PPE. The very gear that is designed to protect firefighters can make them sick – a fact Hicks knows all too well after losing his father, a former firefighter himself, to cancer.

Firefighters in Framingham were basically in charge of determining when to wash their gear. PPE was bagged and sent to headquarters to be washed. It often returned mismatched, leaving firefighters to search for pieces. This lack of process control and documentation left most on staff irritated and often avoiding the hassle of washing all together. Things had to change.

“We do many things on the fire ground to keep ourselves safe ...washers allow us to continue to make sure we stay safe after a fire,” Dutcher said of the department’s initiative to create better processes and the purchase additional equipment.

OBTAINING SUPPORT

However, in order for the department to move forward with these broad and impactful changes, it needed buy-in from all parties and that started with city leaders. They needed the citizens and city to invest in their safety...their lives. The response was immediate and overwhelming.

“Our citizens have been remarkable,” Dutcher said, adding that they just presented the straight facts to city leaders. The numbers, alone, are staggering and the message the pair delivered was simple “firefighters are dying of cancer. We laid out the statistics and the department received a major commitment from the town.”

That financial commitment started with making sure each uniformed officer had two sets of turnout gear. Going with the two-set arrangement ensures staff always have one set available for calls, while one is in for cleaning or repair (if necessary).

FINDING A SYSTEM

Two sets of gear was a fine start, but the heavy lifting would come in selecting not just laundry equipment to be installed in each of the department's five houses, but putting together processes and a system to keep track of when PPE was cleaned. For Dutcher, UniMac was the starting point. The department had a 10-year-old UniMac® washer-extractor in operation, proving the brand was up to the rugged demands of the firehouse environment.

It was a discussion with Phil Lapenta, a UniMac regional sales manager living in

the Framingham area, about UniMac's new FireLinc™ system that really made an impact on Dutcher.

"I said, 'Phil, this is a no-brainer,'" Dutcher said after learning about how the FireLinc system would simplify logging of gear maintenance by just hitting a couple buttons on a tablet and scanning the barcode on the bunker gear.

Working with New Hampshire-based UniMac Distributor, Daniels Equipment Co., the department received exceptional service and support, from

equipment installation to training of personnel on the system's operation.

FireLinc's ease of use has been a foundational element in getting the entire department on-board with the need to not just keep gear clean, but maintain accurate records of that maintenance.

"It's easy to do ...the simplicity of the machines and FireLinc, that's the key," Dutcher said. "The UniMac machines and FireLinc have helped us do a 180 among the staff. The days of salty, filthy gear are gone."

PROCESS IS SET

Framingham firefighters have a standing order that after any significant event, they are to clean their gear immediately. PPE is scanned in and tablets, loaded with the FireLinc app, on each house's machine are used to log the service performed. From there, gear is loaded into the washer, cleaned and transferred to the UniMac Gear Cabinet for drying – returning PPE to service within hours.

And Dutcher, a 21-year veteran of the fire industry, is blunt about the need to have a system as easy to use as FireLinc in place to log all gear cleaning activity, "if we had to do this manually, it would be impossible."

Commanding officers review logs as a double check that staff is following processes to ensure everyone's safety.

"We're not interested in creating a 'big brother' situation; what FireLinc helps us do is create teachable moments," Dutcher said, adding that the message they are sending to staff is "we want you to live long lives."



