

## There's No Excuse for Dirty Gear

"Our guys are expected to keep gear clean," says Fred McKinney, firefighter and Board of director at North Queensbury Fire Co., in Cleverdale, N.Y. "It's their protection against disaster."

North Queensbury requires that all soiled turnout gear be properly cleaned using the department's 30-pound capacity Continental Pro-Series Washer-Extractor.

"If gear is dirty, you can't tell if the integrity of the fire gear is unsafe," adds Gene Konzen, deputy chief at Wayne Township Fire Dept. in Indianapolis. "Any kind of petroleum residues remaining on gear following a fire or accident can be flammable."

But until recently, Wayne Township had trouble ensuring gear was consistently cleaned and inspected following a contaminating event. Part of the problem was that the department's old hard-mount washer couldn't handle the influx of gear and didn't extract enough water, leaving gear out of service to dry for days. Because the old hard-mount washer sat at a firehouse miles away from headquarters, it was a challenge for Asset Manager Wes Lock to keep accurate tabs on how gear was washed. Since gear took upwards of three days to dry, lack of space was also a concern. The laundry area was constantly packed with hanging gear. That's why the department installed a 55-pound and 30-pound, soft-mount Continental Pro-Series Washer-Extractor. "Our previous washer's extract cycle left items almost soaking wet," Lock says. "Gear took 72 hours to dry out. Now it air dries in eight to 10 hours."

By cutting dry time, firefighters are more quickly re-equipped with their own, custom-fit gear—their best protection from on-the-job hazards.

An industrial washer-extractor, the Continental also offers superior washability, according to McKinney, who says North

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Queensbury had relied on a home-style topload to clean turnout gear for years. "The old machine labored to do the job," says McKinney. "But when we started using the Continental, stuff came out like brand new."

"The washers get the tar off," says Lock of the new Continentals. "The other washer didn't. That's how good they work."

## Dirty Gear—It's No Badge of Courage

"Some fire departments think it's a badge of courage to have soot-covered gear," says Fire Chief John Childs of Sterling Heights Fire

Department in Sterling Heights, Mich. Wearing soiled gear puts firefighters—and anyone they come in contact with—at risk, Childs maintains. That's why NFPA warns against cleaning gear in homes or public laundries. NFPA specifications also rule out dry cleaning as a method of decontaminating gear.

Like Sterling Heights, Argentine Township Fire and Rescue, in Linden, Mich., requires its 22 on-call firefighters to clean soiled gear using the firehouse's industrial Continental washer-extractor. "You don't know what you get into with fires in today's world," says Argentine's Chief Engineer John Cross, a veteran firefighter of 30 years.

Sterling Heights used to clean gear in buckets of soap and water, or by scrubbing it with a long-handled brush. "It wasn't the right way to do it," says Childs.

Without proper cleaning, contaminants and particulate matter "impede and break down the flame-retardant fabric of protective gear," he says. "We purchase top-notch stuff and it should be cleaned to maintain its fire-retardant integrity."

"Typically there's not a lot of extra room in a firehouse," says Doug Jones of Automatic Laundry. "Continental's soft-mount design allows for efficient installations in utility rooms or truck bays—wherever there's some extra space."

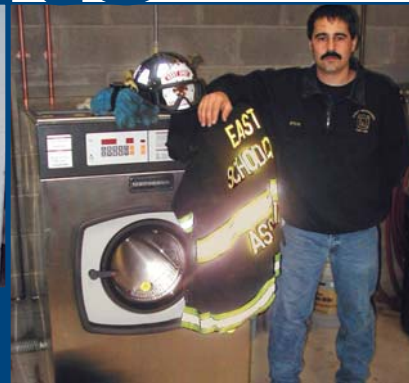
# fire departments



Fred McKinney of North Queensbury Fire Co. in Cleverdale, N.Y., with the department's 30-pound capacity Pro-Series Washer-Extractor.



Sterling Heights Fire Dept. Captain Richard Choate and Chief John Childs with the department's 30-pound capacity Pro-Series Washer.



Lt. Anthony O'Connors of Newport Fire Dept. with the department's 55-pound capacity Pro-Series Washer.



Now, with the Continental washer-extractor, the fire departments report that gear air dries in less time—only three or four hours, according to Cross. The soft-mount Continentals remove more water from a load than hard-mount models because they reach extract speeds up to 387 G-force. Hard-mount washers only produce speeds of 85-150 G-force.

Clean gear, according to Cross, O'Connors and Childs is critical to firefighter and public safety. "We don't fight fires for a living," says Cross of Argentine's on-call firefighters. "We all have other jobs, so if we get hurt it could take us away from our regular jobs and the ability to support our families."

Having an on-premise washer-extractor, he adds, "is a cheap price to pay for safety. It's an absolute necessity and as important as anything else in a firehouse for firefighter safety."

### Is Soiled Protective Gear Putting You at Risk?

Biohazards and toxic chemicals plague firefighters more than ever before, according to Assistant Fire Chief Steve Schweigert of the East Schodack Fire Co., in East Schodack, N.Y.

"Nowadays, we have more contact with dangerous chemicals and diseases like AIDS and Hepatitis. Before, firefighters didn't think too much about someone else's blood," Schweigert says. "Now they do."

A fire company with 40 volunteer firefighters, Schweigert says East Schodack responds to everything from accidents and fire, to Emergency Medical Service (EMS) calls. Each call, he says, requires slightly different protective gear. "It's important that we don't transmit diseases wearing the same soiled gear on accident calls," Schweigert says. "Clean gear protects us and the victim."

Contaminants from a fire can expose firefighters to cancer-causing carcinogens and eventually weaken the gear meant to protect them. Blood and body fluids can further expose them to deadly diseases. That's why the Fire and Emergency Manufacturers and Services Association, Inc. recommends washing soiled turnout gear immediately after exposure to fire or body fluids. "After too much build-up,

the gear itself becomes flammable," says Schweigert. "In the old days, being dirty was a sign of a lot of hard work. Nowadays, dirty gear isn't worth the risk—cleaner is the way to be."

But, properly outfitting a firefighter is costly—running from \$600-1,000 for a set of turnout gear. Proper cleaning, Schweigert says, helps extend the life of the gear by removing contaminants than can break down fabric. "We think we'll get three or four more years out of the gear," says Schweigert, thanks to the department's new 30-pound capacity Continental Pro-Series Washer-Extractor.

With the help of Gauch Distributing, a Continental distributor in Albany, N.Y., the fire company chose a 30-pound Continental Pro-Series high-performance washer-extractor because of its flexible microprocessor control and programmable extract speeds that reach 387-G force. The easy-to-operate control allows firefighters to select extraction speeds and rinse cycles.

The new washer, installed against the back of the truck bay, is programmed to automatically inject the right chemicals at the appropriate water temperature and time. That way, turnout gear, jumpsuits and truck towels are all cleaned automatically and

properly. Part of the appeal of the soft-mount washer-extractor is that it is not necessary to bolt it to an expensive and permanent concrete foundation—saving time and money. The machine fits into small spaces, and, if need be, it can easily be moved to another spot.

Sink-washing—the old way the firehouse cleaned gear—simply didn't work. "It came out dripping wet and not very clean," Schweigert maintains. "It took several days to dry." Now, since the new machine extracts nearly all of the water from the fabric, gear air-dries in a couple hours, he says.

By installing Continental Pro-Series Washer-Extractors, Schweigert says he is helping to ensure the safety of the staff. "We're hoping to extend the life of the gear and our firefighters," says Schweigert.

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Wayne Township Fire Department's Asset Manager Wes Lock stands beside the department's 55-pound capacity Pro-Series Washer-Extractor.



Fire Chief Bob Carter of Hudson Fire Dept. in Hudson, Ohio stands beside the department's high performance washer-extractor.



Assistant Fire Chief Steve Schweigert of the East Schodack Fire Co. installed a Continental 30-pound soft-mount washer extractor—ensuring gear is properly cleaned and his staff of 40 properly protected.

