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FIT-5 impresses in first test

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CITY EDITOR

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When the Pine Lake Fire Department got the new FIT-5 fire control device, department volunteers had no idea how quickly it would be pressed into use and how effective it would be.

"I knew it was going to make a difference, how big a difference I had no idea," said Pine Lake Assistant Chief Rick Zelechowski.

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Wednesday evening the Pine Lake department responded to a mutual aid call to assist the Stella Fire Department with a mobile home fire at Fisherman's Paradise off County Highway C. When they arrived, one end of the trailer was fully engulfed and flames were pouring out a bedroom window.

The Stella crew was just getting set up, and before any water was sprayed, Pine Lake Chief Brian Gehrig deployed his FIT-5 device. The device is intended to be used before firefighters begin battling the blaze with water, and Pine Lake is the first department in the state to have it.

When deployed – in almost hand grenade-like fashion – the FIT-5 drops the temperature in the building and suppresses the flames, making it safer for the people on the front lines.

On Wednesday, the device did its job. Zelechowski said the flames were knocked down within 15 seconds and the temperature quickly dropped.

"Once they threw it in there the fire was just knocked right down," said Stella Fire Captain Bart Tegen, who was in charge of the scene.

Firefighters were then able to enter the home and knock a hole in the wall to get at the heart of the fire. Members of both departments said it was amazing to get a mobile home fire under control so quickly. Gehrig said most mobile home fires spread quickly as flames and heat travel under the metal roofs, but the majority of this home was saved, along with most of the belongings and valuables.

Tegen said the mobile home fires he has responded to in the past have all spread quickly, and that so much was saved in this instance is a testament to the value of the FIT-5 device.

"It's incredible," Tegen said. "It's worth the money."

On a typical fire of this nature, Zelechowski said fighters would have spent at least three hours on the scene and used a minimum of 7,000 gallons of water. On Wednesday, firefighters were off the scene in an hour and 15 minutes, with only 100 gallons of water used, he said.

"It was awesome," Zelechowski said of the department's new tool. "It worked just the way it was supposed to. It made a huge, huge difference."



Firefighters from Pine Lake and Stella used the FIT-5 device for the first time Wednesday when they battled a trailer fire.
Andi Seidel photo

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Girl's Night Out makes manners fun

Girl's Night Out, or GNO as it is affectionately called by the group, is a program designed for girls in sixth through eighth grades. The group typically meets every other Thursday evening from October to May to learn new activities and practice the YMCA core values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility. One highlight of the program is a "Miss Manners" dinner hosted and provided by Holiday Acres Resort in Rhinelander. [READ MORE >](#)

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The \$1,300 FIT-5 can only be used once. Pine Lake has a backup, and on Thursday they were already set to order a replacement for the one employed the prior evening.

The fire was initially reported by a juvenile who was home at the time. After smelling smoke, he exited the home with his dog and called 911. None of the other three family members were home and no one was hurt in the fire, though two cats died.

The cause of the fire has not yet been determined, but Tegen said it may have been electrical in nature.

A fund is being established to help the family. Donations can be sent to Debbie Rudloff, 4968 Hilltop Road, Rhinelander, WI 54501. Questions regarding assistance for the family can be directed to Paul Dean at (715) 369-3621.

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