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Last Updated: Wednesday, April 1, 2009 10:50 PM CDT

New device may help PLFD save lives

BY MICHAEL SKUBAL
DAILY NEWS

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Big stories sometimes come in small packages. The Pine Lake Fire Department has a groundbreaking piece of new equipment called the FIT-5. It comes in a small package but has large implications when it comes to fighting house fires and saving lives.

Rick Zelechowski is an assistant fire chief for the town of Pine Lake.

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"We are the first fire department in the state of Wisconsin to get this," Zelechowski said. "Our chief, Brian Gehrig, had mentioned it and I did some research. Popular Science magazine ranked it in the top 10 of new products."

According to the ARA Safety Web site, "FIT stands for Fire Interruption Technology and the name describes exactly how the FIT works. Fire needs fuel, oxygen and heat to sustain a chemical reaction.

In seconds, ARA Safety's FIT removes the fuel from the equation at the molecular level, interrupting the fire triangle and knocking down flame and heat.

"It can be effectively deployed in a wide variety of structure fire scenarios, from incipient to fully involved. Depending on the progress of the fire, deploying a FIT-5 can buy crews fifteen minutes or more."

There have been a number of house fires in the area recently, including one in Rhinelander in which a life was lost. After the fact, it's impossible to say whether the FIT-5 would have made a difference in that instance. But if it works as advertised even once, it would be worth the cost of \$1,300 per unit.

"The FIT-5's nickname is the firefighter's grenade," said Zelechowski. "You pop the top off, pull the string inside and throw it into the building. It'll drop the temperature by 1,000 degrees in 10 seconds and is effective in areas up to 2,100 square feet. It only became available last month."

Using a FIT-5 early in the life of a fire may save lives, preserve the contents of a house and make fighting the fire safer. And, according to the ARA Safety press release, "It also helps the environment. Fast extinguishment with little or no water means less water used, less polluted runoff and less carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases entering the air."

Tell us what you think...

COMMENTS »

Mark Hinz wrote on Apr 7, 2009 8:07 PM:
" Congratulations Pine Lake!!!

Any device that makes an environment more tenable for victims OR firefighters is worth a 1,300 -1,500 dollar per use as far as I am concerned. Since our turnout gear cannot



Michael Skubal/Daily News Pine Lake Fire Department is in the forefront of new technology with the addition of the FIT-5, a powerful handheld fire knockdown tool, the "firefighter's grenade." Left to right are Assistant Fire Chief Cory Hoffman, Fire Chief Brian Gehrig and Assistant Fire Chief Rick Zelechowski of the Pine Lake Fire Department.

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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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protect us from flashover conditions (the entire room catching fire at the same time, with heat levels nearing or exceeding 2,000 F,) this will definitely save injuries, and lives!! I would love to see a demo of this tool, and AC Hoffmanns account of how well it worked was great!

Mark Hinz
Manitowoc Fire Department "

Brad wrote on Apr 3, 2009 9:38 AM:
" I can not believe that people out there can say a bad thing about this device, especially when it has already proved itself and saved a home!!! I am sorry that all you have to do with your lives it to demean something that is good for us and everyone that lives in the Town of Pine Lake and all surrounding townships. Kuddos Pine Lake Fire Department!!!! "

Scott wrote on Apr 3, 2009 9:08 AM:
" Jack,
The typical house fire will hit temps of 1700-2200 Degrees F.
Making the drop to 700 to 1200 Degrees F not to minus 459.
If there is a victim in the fire room it's not survivable, never has been. As for victims in other parts of the structure, it might just buy them some much needed time. Fire doubles in intensity every 18- 30 sec. depending on the fuel load. "

firefighter wrote on Apr 3, 2009 8:03 AM:
" Structure fires come with variables that can not be predicted. One should not think this is device is the only answer to fire fighting. The 1000 degree claim is misinformation from the media I believe. I am some what sure the device will impede fire spread. How ever you will still have to put firefighters in harms way to completely extinguish fires that is a fact. True if it works once it was worth it. Don't bet your life on it. You still need to get out and stay out of the structure, practice fire safety everyday!!! In the event you suffer a structure fire don't wait or delay call for help. Structure fires double in size every minute Be Safe "

In the loop wrote on Apr 3, 2009 5:37 AM:
" These new devices do not replace the fire trucks and firefighters, but act to slow the fire down hopefully allowing the fire department to save more of the structure and contents. Remember all of the firefighters needed to fight a fire have to get there somehow. If they didn't come in all those fire trucks, there would be a lot of personal vehicles parked everywhere. New firetrucks and equipment will always be needed. These new devices are merely another tool in the fire dept toolbox and not a cure all for everything. "

Rick Zelechowski Asst. Chief Pine Lake Fire Department wrote on Apr 2, 2009 3:53 PM:
" The FIT is not meant to replace manpower or equipment. There is video after video on the internet, on the Science Channel on the tv show Brink that explains how this works. It does work. As Cory stated above, we used one at a fire last night. Any questions, call Duane at ARA Safety. His phone number is 214-587-5276. Tell him that is don't work. We have a lot of time and money wrapped up in these. They will save lives and property. By the way it's 2100 cu.ft. not 2100 sq. ft. The FIT will drop the temp. inside a burning structure around 800 to 1,000 degrees, in other words an environment that a firefighter can work in safely without worrying about a flashover. "

Gus wrote on Apr 2, 2009 3:42 PM:
" George, at \$1300 a shot I do not see too many fire departments being able to afford this device. Also if this was a magic bean that would put down all fires you still have the need for the FD's for numerous other things. car

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Wisconsin Woodsmoke: Calendar can't name the first day of spring

One of the most tragic things I know about human nature is that all of us tend to put off living. We are all dreaming of some magical rose garden over the horizon — instead of enjoying the roses blooming outside our windows today.

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have the need for the D.E. for numerous other things, car crashes, water rescue, medical emergencies, etc, etc

Good job Pine Lake on the Stella Fire! "

George wrote on Apr 2, 2009 11:56 AM:

" If this works what are we going to do with all the fire trucks? Right now it seems we sometimes have more fire trucks than firemen at rural fires. As we look to try to live on less perhaps some of the new fire truck (Newbold) in the works should be put on hold. "

Jack wrote on Apr 2, 2009 11:11 AM:

" What happens to the potential victim in the house when the temp drops 1000 degrees? -459 or so Fahrenheit is absolute zero. I'm assuming, of course, the temperature can drop by AS MUCH AS 1000 degrees. Correct? My guess is it drops high temperature somehow, but doesn't do much in the normal temperature range. If it really did drop the temp by 1000 degrees in an area of 2100 square ft, we might wanna call Kurt Vonnegut and have him start work on a "Cat's Cradle 2". Oh wait. Scratch that. He died in 2007.... "

Cory Hoffmann Asst. Chief Pine Lake Fire Department wrote on Apr 1, 2009 11:17 PM:

" After the press conference for this new firefighting device, we had never imagined that we would be using it so soon. We were paged out to the Town of Stella as mutual aid for a fully involved structure fire. Upon arrival, my fire chief, Brian Gehrig, deployed his FIT 5 into the room that was heavily involved in fire and knocked the fire down to the point that only small spot fires were needed to be extinguished. Most of the structure was still standing and with minimal fire damage. "

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