

County Durham and Darlington Improve Firefighter Safety

Leading edge Telemetry, longer duration lightweight cylinders and integral mask communications are now being used by County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service to improve the safety of operational personnel. As one of the latest Brigades to take delivery of the Draeger PSS Merlin Telemetry system, the Service has also been upgrading its breathing apparatus (BA) equipment over the past year to include new 300 Bar carbon composite cylinders and Draeger FPS-COM communications masks.

Robin Turnbull, Risk Reduction at the Service, has overseen the introduction of the new BA equipment. He comments, "The organisational responsibilities of the Safe Person Concept outline the requirements for an organisation to provide equipment to enhance the safety of BA personnel exposed to harsh working environments. We operate 27 appliances throughout the Service and use 165 Draeger BA sets. Each appliance is now equipped with a Draeger PSS Merlin Telemetry Entry Control Board and every BA sets is fitted with longer duration cylinders and the new communications masks. As a result, our operational crews are now able to carry out their tasks in a much safer manner."

He explains, "The use of telemetry allows us to remotely monitor the performance and physical conditions in which the BA crews are working when they are committed into a risk area. By providing a continuously updated supply of essential information on their exact status, this self-contained, state-of-the-art electronic system also enables us to react immediately in the event of an emergency. Following a three-month training period, complete with quality assurance sessions to ensure competence, the system went live in

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August, 2009. Early indications are that it has been extremely well received and is enabling BA crews to be monitored with enhanced safety.

“The inclusion of the new cylinders means that we have extended the working duration by 21 minutes to 57 minutes. This not only provides extra time which could prove to be vital but it also loosens the time constraints placed on crews when performing decontamination at incidents involving hazardous materials.”

He adds, “Particularly important when there is an increased level of ambient noise from pumps, generators and positive pressure fans, etc., the use of integral communications ensures that commands and instructions are both given and received with greater clarity. In addition to telemetry, each appliance is fitted with a Draeger FPS-COM face mask that enables the BA team leader to communicate with personnel remote from the incident. The appliances also house three Draeger FPS 7000 face masks, complete with voice amplification function, to further enhance communications amongst BA wearers inside the risk area.”

The issue of communications failures when BA wearers were committed into risk areas at high profile incidents has been well documented for many years. Following a comms demonstration at Draeger’s headquarters in Blyth, the documented evidence was used to strengthen the argument to purchase the new communications equipment, with finances becoming available during 2008 as part of the internal Decision Conferencing process.

Robin Turnbull concludes, “Historically, there has always been a strong connection between our two organisations and we have been very satisfied with the specifications and functionality of Draeger equipment over the years. We also subscribe to Draeger’s Total Care Programme which provides maintenance engineers and after sales care and service. By continuing to develop and enhance its’ product range and providing us with the ongoing

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support that we need, Draeger is helping us to ensure that our operational crews carry out their tasks in a much safer manner.”

Further information is available from David Fenton, Draeger Limited, Ullswater Close, Blyth Riverside Business Park, Blyth, Northumberland, NE24 4RG. Tel: 01670 352891. Fax: 01670 356266

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