

SECURITY MANAGEMENT

SECURITY'S WEB CONNECTION

Home The Magazine News Beyond Print Marketplace Events

THE MAGAZINE

GOVERNMENT: FIRE SAFETY

A Burning Issue: How to Save Lives

October 2008

By Matthew Harwood

Wind-control devices. The last solution that Kerber and Madrzykowski studied for fighting wind-driven fires was flame retardant fire blankets and curtains.

The idea for the products—also known as wind-control devices—came from firefighters within the FDNY. In 1999, one particular firefighter, John Norman, approached the department about purchasing flame retardant blankets for the purpose of stopping wind from entering a room through the window when there was a fire inside. He succeeded and blankets began to be distributed between 2000 and 2001. The blankets, specially made for larger windows, measure 10 by 12 feet and take at least two firefighters to deploy.

The curtain, however, is a newer device. Measuring 6 by 8 feet, it can be carried and deployed by a single firefighter. Kerber and Madrzykowski's job has been to test the curtain and devise proper protocols for their use in the field.

During experiments at an abandoned high-rise building at Governors Island, sandwiched between Manhattan and Brooklyn in Upper New York Harbor, wind-control curtains worked well during high-rise fires under wind-driven conditions. Firefighters first had to locate which side of the structure the wind was hitting. Next, they draped the curtain over the open or broken window where the fire was located. They then either tied or held it in place. (They similarly secured the blankets.)

The devices stopped the wind from fanning the flames, thereby depriving the fires of pressure and oxygen. Essentially, the fires were smothered.

The FDNY currently has a pilot program underway that uses all three of the tools validated by Kerber and Madrzykowski's Governors Island experiments under real high-rise fire conditions. Ladder companies on Manhattan; Rockaway Peninsula, Queens; and Coney Island, Brooklyn, have been equipped with fans, high-rise nozzles, and wind-control devices, says Tracy.

So far, only the fans have been needed to battle the blazes confronted. Nevertheless, Tracy expects all three tools to be adopted into the FDNY's arsenal of firefighting techniques when the pilot program ends in October.

The novelty of Kerber and Madrzy-

kowski's three-pronged tactical assault on wind-driven fires is that each tactic, whether alone or in tandem, allows firefighters to battle unpredictable fires without unnecessarily exposing firefighters to danger. The goal, says Kerber, is to make sure another Vandalia Avenue does not happen.

Whether by tracking firefighters in a structure, by alerting them to fires as soon as possible, or by reducing the likelihood of wind-driven fires, technology is reducing the risk of firefighting. The result will be fewer lives lost for firefighters and for the people they dedicate themselves to saving.

<http://www.securitymanagement.com/article/burning-issue-how-save-lives-0046897?page=0%2C4>