

Firefighters receive confined space rescue training

Departments join forces for new project



Derek Dunn, left, and Larry Graham, right, both of the York Water District, set up the confined space emergency response apparatus, which the Water District has partnered with York's emergency response agencies to obtain.

By **Susan Morse**

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YORK — Firefighters know how to rescue someone from a burning home and what to do in the event of a medical emergency. Now, thanks to new training and equipment, they know how to safely get someone out of a confined space.

On Tuesday, July 21, the York Water Department, Sewer Department and chiefs of both fire departments unveiled the new Confined Space Rescue Trailer that arrived in town in April.

The trailer is detailed with the insignia of all four departments. All four both contributed to — and will benefit from — the new equipment, which is designed to rescue someone from a confined space.

York's water and sewer departments both have numerous areas which meet the definition of a confined space, said Water Superintendent Donald Neumann Jr. These include manholes and wells.

A confined space, said York Sewer District Superintendent Tim Haskell, is basically any place not accessible by a staircase.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration has a confined space entry standard said Neumann. The Maine Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Standards, cited the water district for not meeting that standard, he said.

The neglected OSHA requirement came with no fines attached, but the message was clear, according to Neumann: he needed to correct the problem.

"We own confined spaces," said Neumann. "We need to have a resource team available. The sewer district has the same problem."

Neumann approached the chiefs of both the York Village and York Beach fire departments and asked the firefighters to be available as a rescue team from a confined space. The chiefs initially said no, according to Neumann; the firefighters were not trained for such rescues.

"We bribed the fire department," joked Neumann, by offering training to the firefighters in exchange for their help in a rescue situation.

The water and sewer departments put up the funding for training and equipment. The main pieces are the confined space rescue trailer; a unihoist, which is a retrieval device to get someone out of a hole; and a ventilator to push fresh air into a small space. Firefighters supplied some of their own equipment.

The cost: \$10,000 for equipment, \$7,000 for the trailer, and \$6,000 to \$8,000 for training. The Maine Municipal Association provided more than \$6,000 in grants for the project.

Town funds supplied some of the expense, but as the Water Department operates as quasi-municipal entity — supported by service rates — tax money did not foot the entire bill.

"It's a win-win," said York Beach fire Chief David Bridges. "It's a situation waiting to happen sometime. It's a critical thing to have available."

Before York was trained, the closest department to call upon for confined space rescue was Kittery.

The Confined Space Rescue Trailer arrived at the water department in April. Since that time, crews have been conducting training sessions at manholes and other sites. The original training was done by consultant Ray Lussier of Life Safety Specialists in Auburn.

There are confined spaces where you wouldn't think, said the fire chiefs and department heads, such as a local lobster wholesale company that has an underwater tank.

York Beach fire Captain David Osgood encountered a confined space emergency years ago, he said. A man was stuck at the bottom of a well, having fallen in an effort to rescue his dog.

Osgood climbed down a ladder and firefighters got the man and dog out safely, he said.

What Osgood now knows after training, he said, is to check for oxygen levels at the bottom of the well, among other safety measures.

"I thank the water department for the great job they did," he said, "helping us help them."

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