GEAR AT THE READY

By Dennis Ross, AIA featured in June 16, 2009 issue of **STATION***STYLE* online by "*Fire Chief Magazine*"

Lockers provide several options for storing personal protective equipment. Generally the method of storage relates to a specific type of response. For example, EMS gear generally is stored in carry bags and uses shelf or rack storage rather than lockers. Its location is dependent on the type of response and how the EMS coordinator sets up the station.

Architects also design differently for volunteers and full-time fire and rescue responders.

Volunteer. The separate room arrangement does not often work well for volunteers because of the way they arrive and get suited for a call. These responders park in dedicated parking spaces and enter the station through a specific door directly into the bays.

Architects prefer to attach gear lockers to the apparatus bay walls adjacent this door and a gear storage area (part of the bay) close to this door. Volunteers put on gear as soon as they arrive and then go to a vehicle. Not all the same people arrive for all calls, or at the same time, so it's a good idea to get a fair number of lockers located near the responder door.

It is difficult for arriving volunteers to access a dedicated room, change, exit the room and run to a vehicle. This is time consuming and awkward. The response is much smoother if the volunteer can go from car to door to locker to vehicle in the same direct path. So why not locate a bunker gear room in the path of travel? This may work depending on the station layout. Often times, the first responder parking and end bay are the area dedicated for future bay expansion, so a room on the end may not be practical.

In addition, the bays should be properly heated and have positive air movement to keep gear dry and healthy. Be careful to arrange the lockers and bay windows to prevent ultraviolet light from shining onto the PPE, which will degrade it. Cleaning and drying should take place using modern gear washing and drying equipment specifically for that purpose.

Full-time/career. Full-time firefighter PPE usually is stored in a separate, well-ventilated room. As a shift comes on, each responder takes his gear and sets it up next to his assigned vehicle. Sometimes the fire department will use rolling racks between vehicles for each shift. When the shift is over, firefighters can clean and dry or just return the gear to their assigned locker in the room.

Some architects feel strongly that all gear should be stored and accessed this way due to the expense of replacing, cleaning and/or protecting it. They also feel that overspray from wash down and other bay activities may compromise the gear.

Locker arrangement depends on response, operations and client preference. Bays should be designed in such a way to avoid overspray and ultraviolet infiltration. Clearance problems between lockers and the vehicles should not be an issue in a properly sized bay. Also, with overhead fans and well designed lockers, ventilation of the gear is not a problem.

Personal lockers and/or wardrobes

Personal lockers in a separate room versus wardrobes located in the bunkroom is a never ending operational and design issue. It is a matter of department preference and operation. A separate locker room may cost more in initial construction, but moves noise and disruption out of the bunk room. Wood wardrobes are preferable to metal lockers in the bunk room itself. This has to do with noise, locker size and aesthetics. One solution to this ongoing issue is to have wardrobes that can be accessed from both the hallway and the bunk room (two opposite doors) to avoid disturbance during a shift change. The biggest issue is use. Are the bunk rooms individual, gang, twos, fours, volunteer, career or EMT? All theses issues must be balanced in terms of current operations and the flexibility to change depending where you may be in 10 to 20 years.

Dennis A. Ross, AIA, of Pacheco Ross Architects, P.C. is a graduate of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, where his education included a year as an exchange student with the Polytechnic of Central London. He has over 30-years experience including a long tenure in real estate development and construction, which allows him to assess projects from multiple points of view. Ross is National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB) certified; a member of the American Institute of Architects, NFPA, the International Code Council, and is a licensed architect in 14 states. His expertise in areas of project management, land use, budgeting, construction and focus on practical solutions to difficult problems, has enabled him to knowledgeably write and speak on various aspects of fire station design.

Reprinted with permission Station Style Online www.firechief.com

© Pacheco Ross Architects, P.C.
72 Voorheesville Avenue, PO Box 558 Voorheesville, NY 12186
(518) 765-5105 fax: 765-5107
Web: www.pra-pc.com Email: mail@pra-pc.com