Why Royal Berkshire chose Airlock

Olaf Baars, Deputy Chief Fire Officer of Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service in the UK, talks about why his brigade was the first in the world to chose Gore-Tex Airlock assemblies for its PPE

IN COMMON WITH most Fire and Rescue services around the world, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service attends a wide range of non-fire incidents involving technical rescue, hazardous materials, environmental protection and other humanitarian services. These non-fire activities take up a greater proportion of operational commitment than close quarters firefighting. Previous experience of firefighter protective clothing conforming to EN 469 has demonstrated the excellent level of thermal protection provided by these garments has a cost. These garments have proved to be very warm to wear, restricting the dispersal of metabolic heat, and very restrictive to movement, due to the high level of traditional thermal insulation built into the garments.

User trial

During extensive user trials, carried out over a period of months, we evaluated a number of different assemblies comparing traditional thermal barriers against other lightweight thermal barriers and Gore-Tex Airlock. The results of the trials left us in no doubt about which product we would specify for our new PPE.

Deputy Chief Fire Officer Olaf Baars

Gore-Tex Airlock assemblies proved without exception to be the choice of those wearing the PPE in both operational and training conditions. They provided an unbeatable moisture barrier with even better breathability than the Fireblocker that we used within our existing PPE, but this was combined with an uncompromised level of thermal protection, all within a garment set that was extremely flexible and unhindering to free movement of the wearer.

In addition to the user trials, a full set of laboratory tests were carried out by an accredited test house; these were required to prove performance against European standards, including thermal protection and chemical run-off/permeability. These tests were all completed to our entire satisfaction and resulted in the decision to specify an assembly incorporating Gore Airlock for our new firefighting PPE.

It is our view that the range of benefits offered by the Gore-Tex Airlock product cannot currently be matched by any other product that we have trialled or that we are aware of. CRJ

photo: Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service

A revolutionary new moisture barrier, Gore-Tex Airlock is almost 100 per cent more breathable than other products, and 20 per cent lighter, says the manufacturer, allowing significantly improved freedom of movement without compromising thermal protection.

Gore-Tex Airlock uses a system of silicon spacers to create space in the garment, which uses a cushion of air to provide insulation, dispensing with the need for additional padding and creating an overall lighter assembly.

■ *www.gore-tex.co.uk*