

Meeting higher expectations

As countries around the world emerge from recession, organisations will be under increasing pressure to get the best value out of new purchases, says **Mike Hall** of Hughes Safety Showers



THE INEVITABLE CALL FOR COST savings will be accompanied by the need to make the most effective use of existing resources. Capital expenditure will be scrutinised even more rigorously with a renewed emphasis on seeking best value. That doesn't necessarily mean opting for the lowest cost solution, but it does mean justifying expenditure in terms of the efficiency and effectiveness.

Equipment manufacturers will have to become more creative in the way they help customers achieve these goals. Products once considered adequate may not meet these higher expectations. While end users will have their check list to evaluate new purchases, manufacturers should be ahead of the game, offering alternative solutions that meet the criteria, but which also offer additional benefits. An innovative approach should encompass all that the customer expects and more.

This is precisely what Hughes Safety Showers did when it developed a new emergency response shelter. Initial evaluation of existing products revealed that they all had good points, but they also had at least one drawback. User experience confirmed the problems and helped to formulate a wish list for the ideal shelter. Obviously the aim was to utilise the best features and eliminate the worst. It took two years of intensive development and testing to produce a shelter that not only met user expectations, but opened up opportunities for a more efficient use of resources.

It was clear from the outset that different customers had their own range of potential applications for this type of shelter. The Emergency Services Response Shelter (ERS), for example, could be used as a decontamination shower for public and service personnel, a command and control centre, casualty holding area and temporary mortuary. The concept of a standard universal shelter which could be customised by simply changing the inner 'pod' to suit different applications proved to be an attractive proposition with end users and one that would help them make the best use of their equipment.

So, the Hughes Articulated Rapid

Deployment (HARD) shelter took shape – lightweight, easy to carry, tough and durable. The 'Built for professionals, by professionals' catch line used by Hughes sums up the design philosophy and acknowledges the company's track record in supplying equipment for the emergency services.

SIMPLICITY

Simplicity is the key to the shelters' success and is essential for rapid deployment – it can be erected by two people and be ready for use in less than three minutes. Minimal maintenance was also identified by end users as an important feature. The frame is a collapsible one-piece construction that unfolds with the cover already in place and after use it remains attached as the frame is folded for storage. This prevents it from contacting the floor and becoming dirty or damaged, therefore reducing cleaning time and extending its life.

The frame's weight and strength are fundamental design considerations. This type of shelter has to stand up to some pretty rough treatment and be used repeatedly in harsh conditions. In addition to the emergency services, interest has also been expressed by the military, police and humanitarian relief agencies, all of which have specific requirements that can be met

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by simply changing the configuration, or adding ancillary equipment. The anodised aluminium frame combines light weight and strength to give a robust and rigid structure that can be anchored in place using guy lines and pegs or water-filled ballast tanks.

The Neoprene-coated Nylon cover, which has a wipe-clean rubber coating, has zip entry and exit doors. When additional space is required, two or more units can be connected together using these openings.

An insulated version of the shelter has been developed for use in extreme climates,



The Hughes HARD shelter can be erected by two people in under three minutes. Several shelters can be joined at the entrance or exit doors to provide additional space

and for hot countries there is an optional air conditioning system. The range also includes a basic model which can be palletised conveniently for rapid deployment around the world, to provide temporary accommodation for disaster relief.

As the Hughes example demonstrates, manufacturers will have to be more innovative in the future if they are to deliver best value out of new purchases. Ticking all the boxes in the end users' check list will only be the starting point. Delivering additional benefits for a more efficient way of working should be the goal. **CRJ**

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