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News Release

IFRM Aids Firefighters in the Republic of Georgia

The International Fire Relief Mission completed its equipment distribution and training mission to outfit fire departments in the Republic of Georgia.

MTSKHETA, REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA—International Fire Relief Mission (IFRM) team members completed equipment distribution and training in the Republic of Georgia earlier this week. IFRM delivered a 40-foot sea container packed full of fire fighting and EMS equipment, all donated by U.S. fire departments, to several Republic of Georgia fire departments.

“Thanks to the generosity of American fire departments, hundreds of Georgian firefighters will for the first time in their careers have the safety afforded by full turnout gear and SCBA,” says IFRM President Ron Gruening, who led IFRM’s team in Georgia. “Although this gear no longer meets U.S. standards, it has years of useful life left in it. It seems unthinkable that these firefighters have never had items as simple as boots and gloves, let alone full PPE. Now, each firefighter has a full ensemble. Because of this recycling effort, these firefighter have a much greater chance of avoiding life-threatening injuries.”

Mtskheta is about 12 miles north of the country’s capital Tblisi. It has 10,000 residents protected by the city’s one fire station. That fire station was partially destroyed,

as was much of its equipment, in 2008 during a conflict with Russia over disputed territories. The conflict also added thousands of refugees from those areas to the Mtskheta fire department's coverage responsibility. Although the fire station was rebuilt, what equipment there was was not replenished—until now.

In addition to the gear, IFRM team members spent days training the Mtskheta firefighters on such things as how the PPE works, how to correctly wear it, and how to care for it. They received similarly detailed instruction on the SCBA.

“Despite these firefighters’ obvious intelligence and years of service, running them through the training was like having a class of new recruits,” says Gruening, who is a retired paramedic and fire captain with more than 20 years of experience. “This was apparent watching how uncomfortable they were donning their masks and going on air for the first time. But they were so grateful for the equipment and eager to learn, I’m confident that this equipment and training will have a terrific impact on their safety.”

In addition to teaching the firefighters about their new gear, IFRM also held train-the-trainer sessions with the department's officers. They were instructed on how to conduct “go drills” to teach the firefighters to quickly and properly don their PPE, how to turn the sea container into a live-burn room, and how to build mazes to teach firefighters to work in their PPE.

“When traveling to these countries, we have to assess where the firefighters are in their level of training and adjust our work accordingly,” Gruening says. “Here, we had to start from scratch because of their lack of exposure to PPE.”

While in Georgia, Gruening met with representatives from Counterpart International, a private, nonprofit development organization. Counterpart assisted IFRM in moving the donation from the United States to Georgia. Its employees in Georgia will monitor the donated equipment to see that it is being used as intended and submit regular reports to IFRM.

With this mission completed, IFRM is focused on collecting more donated equipment for other fire departments in need of help. The group will also look for financial backers to help defray the cost of collecting the gear, shipping it to the recipients and training those firefighters on its safe and proper use. Those interested in

contributing equipment, services or capital can visit www.ifrm2007.com or contact Ron Gruening at rgruening@ifrm2007.com.

About the International Fire Relief Mission

IFRM is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization whose mission is to collect donated new and used fire and EMS equipment, deliver it to fire departments in developing nations and educate members of those fire departments on the equipment's safe and proper use. IFRM is a nonreligious, nonpolitical group dedicated to saving firefighter and civilian lives. IFRM members do not draw a salary and all of the money raised is used to fulfilling the group's mission. IFRM was formed in 2007 by retired emergency-response professionals. For more information, visit its website at www.ifrm2007.com.

Photo Caption: International Fire Relief Mission President Ron Gruening (far right) discusses the donated personal protective gear with a Republic of Georgia fire captain, while the department's assistant chief helps a firefighter don his SCBA mask.