



More Than A Garage: Step Inside Today's New Fire Station



by Mike Scott, Interim Fire Chief

As the fire station nears completion one of the common questions might be, why is it so big, isn't it just a garage for fire trucks?

Fire stations in the 21st century hinge on how well the building design enables staff to train, perform at their peak and get emergency responders to the scene as quickly as possible.

Many fire station designs today are single-story (when site constraints allow), featuring clear paths to apparatus bays and four-fold side-motion garage doors for quick exiting of fire apparatus.

Both part-time and full-time firefighters must be certified or licensed by the State of Minnesota which requires not only a lot of initial training, but a tremendous amount of ongoing training. In response, more fire departments are building training facilities into their fire departments so all firefighters can train while on-site.

The Otsego Fire Station has built-in training features that can be used by not only Otsego firefighters, but our neighboring fire departments, EMS partners and the Sheriff's office. The training features include a training tower that leads to a movable wall maze system that can replicate many different types of rooms located in residential or commercial buildings that firefighters may encounter during fire or other emergency calls. The maze area has different types of training windows, doorways and balconies to allow firefighters to practice different ways to gain

access to buildings. The entire stairway and training maze area can have simulated smoke injected into the area with a training fog machine. The training area also features areas that firefighters can practice repelling exercise using ropes, confined space training areas and even areas to train with the ladder truck.

There is a large training classroom in the fire station that also serves as the city's Emergency Operations Center in the event of a large-scale disaster or event within Otsego. This training classroom is the largest training classroom within city buildings and will be used by all city staff and for public events. The public lobby outside the training room will feature space to celebrate the history of the Otsego area.

Cancer is unfortunately now the leading cause of death among firefighters nationwide followed closely by Cardiac-related events. "Hot zones" are becoming widely used to prevent prolonged and unnecessary exposures. Hot zones are spaces within your station that may be contaminated, while cold zones are free from risks. Warm zones are the transitional spaces in between. New fire stations are designed to protect our firefighters not only while working, but to ensure they are not bringing contaminants home to their families. Departments are identifying these zones, then completely segregating them from one another through strategic design and protocols. All of this takes up extra space within a new fire station. Otsego has dedicated decontamination areas to clean trucks, equipment and staff when returning from calls. This includes:

- Hotsy washers for trucks and fire hose
- Gear extractors and dryers for cleaning turnout gear
- Decontamination washer for the SCBA breathing airpaks we wear
- Cleaning areas and refill air for our SCBA airpaks
- "dirty" bathrooms and showers for firefighters to wash within an hour of returning from a fire and before going back into the clean "cold zone" of the station.
- Dedicated gear locker areas for firefighter turnout gear with ventilation systems to ensure any harmful contaminants are removed from the air.

To help reduce the cardiac risk for firefighters, there is an exercise and weight room in the fire station to encourage our fire staff to workout regularly.

Since our fire station will be staffed with firefighters working 48-hour shifts, there needs to be sleeping dorms, bathroom with showers, laundry room, a kitchen, and a living room area.

The station is built with the future in mind, the office areas include offices for the new fire chief, on duty fire captains and office space for the on-duty firefighter's to complete reports, but it also includes offices for a future Fire Marshal, Future Deputy Fire Chief, Administrative support, fire/building inspectors and even space for a future EMS/ambulance crew.

The fire station also provides two office spaces for our contracted Wright County Sheriff Office staff.

There are some things required by building code that must be included in a new structure like the fire station. This includes a dedicated storm shelter and a wellness room.

All of these things make this building far more than just a garage for storing fire trucks.

We are excited to show the new station to the citizens of Otsego during its grand opening later this summer.