



# ***CHIEF'S FILE CABINET***

***Ronny J. Coleman***

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## Interschutz

Every five years the fire services of the world join forces to exchange information. The event is called “Interschutz” and has the nickname of “Rote de Han”. The translation is the “red rooster”. Both are in German because that is where the conference is held. In 2010, this conference was conducted in Leipzig Germany to the delight of thousands of firefighters some of whom traveled half way around the world to attend.

This show is not as well known in the United States. Nonetheless, those who have been attending it for the last several cycles have witnessed a subtle change that may have long term implications for the fire service here in the United States.

The event, which had close to 1,500 vendors, was conducted over 5 days. Hosted by the Germany National Firefighters Association, there were representatives from over 50 nations present. The American Pavilion, which was comprised of vendors from the United States that are doing business internationally, contained about 75 companies, was extremely well attended. Reportedly, the event had close to 100,000 attendees.

As a long time observer of the Interschutz, it has been interesting to see how this global interface works with respect to fire protection. Going back to a conference about 20 years ago, there was very limited attendance by US firms. Admittedly, there was very little appeal by the global market to sell products to the fire department in the United States either. That has very definitely changed. The process has been subtle, but is it persistent. One only has to go back two or three cycles in the Interschutz events to note that there were few fire departments using European style roll up doors as opposed to traditional doors. Now they are present on many US configurations. And, many countries were not manufacturing their own fire equipment, but importing it all. Today China has a significant presence as a manufacturer of basic fire protection equipment.

For those who have never attended the Interschutz, it is probably important to note that this one show clearly demonstrates vast differences in the cultural aspects of fire protection between the USA and the rest of the world. There are significant differences in approach to the use of technology as well. There are probably few events in which you can see a range of technology from basic fire brigade buckets all the way up to extremely sophisticated robots and aerial surveillance devices and an audience for both ends of the spectrum walking the halls together. That happens at Interschutz.

There were several themes that emerged from this year’s eclectic and diverse vendor list. Several of the key words that are operative in this year’s show were: water mist technology, robotics, modular construction, aerial surveillance by drone aircraft, firefighter safety and emphasis on scientific research.



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If one considers almost 1,500 booths to visit and only five 8-hour days to achieve it, it is clear that a complete inventory of what was available is mind boggling. For purposes of this article, I would like to share with you some observations about specific technologies that may have an impact on us sooner or later. For example, this concept of robotics is taking hold at the international level. It was interesting to observe the “game boy” approach being suggested by the various robots that were on display. Rather than risking firefighters lives, in real dangerous situations, robots are being developed to enter buildings and other hazardous atmospheres with control being in the hands of someone who remains out of danger. A couple of samples of this technology are being provided as an illustration with this article.

The robots range in size as small as a large suitcase all the way up to a mechanism the size of a military tank. What was particularly interesting about the large robotics was that they were being converted from military applications to civilian applications.

Probably the most heavily attended individual booths were those that were addressing personal protective equipment for firefighter’s especially self contained breathing apparatus. A reoccurring theme in the European fire service is focused on raising the bar for firefighter safety. One debate that was heard over and over again was that no matter how sophisticated the technology becomes, adequate training and incident command are critical to firefighter safety.

In the same vein as robotics, was the idea of ground control drone aircraft that can be used by fire ground commanders to maintain surveillance both on the interior of a building as well as outside perimeters. The aircraft ranged in size from as small as a brief case to one that was almost as large as an ultra light aircraft. An illustration of one of the smaller ones provides evidence that this vehicle could actually be flown inside of a building. It was circulating in the vicinity of the vendors.

Another example of robotics was provided by a tracked vehicle that provided a high volume mist stream that could be operated by a single firefighter in an attack on both flammable liquids as well as wild fire situations.

Last but certainly not least was overwhelming evidence that Europeans are focusing their attention on water mist technology. An entire inventory of vehicles and built-in technology is focusing in on the use of very high pressure finely divided mist spray. Based on the theory of latent heat vaporization, these systems are being proposed at both the operations level in the fire service as well as built-in to specialize risks. One interesting combination on display was a mechanism to provide a water mist around a wildland vehicle to protect it during exposure caused by a burn over. This same vehicle had a mounted breathing apparatus in the cab so that the crew could have safe air during such a burn over.

Modular equipment provides a wide range of specialty units that are adding to the capacity of the European fire service to be more and more an “all-risk” delivery system.



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The terminal event at Interschutz was a huge parade of fire apparatus. One could not observe this parade without being impressed with the European approach to standardization and uniformity. The parade was organized by the age of the apparatus and provided a comprehensive overview of the evolution of European fire equipment.

Conventions of this nature always raise the question of who should be in attendance and how often is it of value to return. Traveling half way around the world to participate in a conference is an expensive proposition. It is unlikely that every firefighter would benefit from such an experience. On the other hand, this particular fire show is an outstanding opportunity for leaders, innovators, and advocates of change to put their concepts on public display. It is unlikely that this process will ever result in all of our cultures agreeing on how things ought to be done. But there is already proof that this type of cultural exchange has resulted in improvements on everyone's part. The next show is scheduled for 2015 in Hanover. Undoubtedly there will be more American vendors to participate. It is likely that more individual participants may find their way to Hanover to form their own conclusions about the state-of-the-art in the fire service.

The only question is whether or not you will be one of those individuals. I hope to see you in Hanover.