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Ronny J. Coleman

Orwellian Technology

Many people have predicted the technology will eventually have such a profound impact on society that we human beings will become irrelevant. For example, you might've seen the Terminator series where machines have taken over. My perspective on this is a little more philosophical. It was generated when I was in high school reading George Orwell's classic novel 1984. One of the concepts that was used in this story, was that of "big brother". Although I don't recall if the term was ever used in that turn out in that fashion of the main character of his always seeing the message "big Brother is watching you." Currently there is a popular TV show that emphasizes how pervasive video surveillance has become in our society. Maybe, 1984 has gotten here about three decades later than Orwell predicted.

We don't often think much about video technology that is becoming omni-present in our society. If you have been reading the headlines about the use of helmet cams that may result in lawsuits against the fire service, then perhaps you're on the edge of that knowledge. More than one fire department has recently been confronted with video that demonstrates that any act performed in the public today may be on the 6 o'clock news tonight. All this sounds sort of negative.

But there may be a more positive variation coming down the road to help us with fire protection in the future. What I am referring to is called VI SD. The acronym stands for video image smoke detection. We all know that security systems in buildings have been improving over the last couple of years. Another good example of this is how often a crime has been recorded on house security cameras that have resulted in the apprehension of perpetrators.

Now video cameras are being combined with smoke detection technology. Greg Kessinger, writing in Security Dealer and Integrator magazine, recently described a series of new advances in detection and video technology. The author does not suggest that it will be revolutionary, but his article does suggest that this kind of technological combination may have the ability to multiply the value of one system times the value of another. In essence, if a person is buying a video system for security, why wouldn't it be a better deal if it also helped in the fire detection arena? Conversely someone putting any fire detection system that found out that their video system can do double duty, why wouldn't they want to do that?

If you go to the security info watch website (www.securityinfo watch.com) you'll find another article touting an entire new species of smoke detector. Tony Fadell, a gadget guru who used to work for Apple Computer has come up with a new design for smoke detectors that seemingly overcomes the problem of false alarming and being more of a nuisance than a help this new device, called "Nest Protect" is not only designed to address smoke issues but is also capable of detecting unsafe levels of carbon monoxide.



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I wonder what's going to come next? Both of these technological changes are consistent with what is going on in our industrial technology world. What if the sleek new smoke detectors that Fidel is offering will soon have a video camera that will be providing signals over the Internet that can be 10 by Alarm Company or even a public dispatch center? Don't tell me that it cannot happen, because the phenomenon is a good occurring already.

Reading outcome of this technological shift mailing again affect both response time and the efficiency and effectiveness of firefighters. We all know that one of the most critical and unmeasured elements of the fire protection defense system is the time between ignition and identification by a party that will report the emergency to the proper authority. We have spent a lot of time in the fire service discussing the five minute travel time with little emphasis on the ignition phase at the onset of fire. Most anyone who is studied fire behavior any length of time realizes that many fires remain in a smoldering stage for many minutes not hours before breaking into open flame. We also know that with the advent of many modern building and furnishing components that a fire can go from a low challenge smoldering fire to an intense rapidly spreading fire in very few minutes. Imagine what it will do to our ability to get there in a timely fashion is smoke detectors are not only creating an alert but being able to communicate conditions to responders.

Another sample of this type of change is contained in the latest issue of Government Technology. Colin Wood writes of three Princeton University students have created an iPad app that quickly delivers building layouts fire to locations hazards materials warnings and other critical information to firefighters during an emergency one of the young developers as a volunteer firefighter. His app, called FireStop draws information from common fire department databases and other sources and displays it in an easy -to - read format making the data available during response time.

As I was reading the article on these three technologies I was fascinated by the synergy that they imply. For example, the nest protect system also detects light and motion. It is programmed to deliver warnings in spoken words instead of us were alarm. Multiple devices are also able to communicate with each other through wireless connections. Is it too much to expect the pretty soon a smoke detector will ask a big dialing the 911 number before anybody in the home or business even knows there's a problem.

It's just a little step away from combining a smoke detector, and a commercial or residential sprinkler head and an internet connection and we have mastered the art of reducing fire to its lowest common denominator - The point of origin.

Big Brother, as conceived by George Orwell may still be lurking around trying to run our lives. But I doubt that Orwell would have been upset if he could see that all of this work in integrating communications capabilities is making safety a much more up close and personal condition. Very few



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fire officials read the magazines I'm alluding to today but the future is being described there nonetheless.

Maybe we should re-title Orwell's book as 1984 Revisited.