



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

***Ronny J. Coleman***

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## Our Top Ten

I recently wrote an article for Sprinkler Age Magazine after looking at a History Channel show on the 101 gadgets that changed the nature of the world. In that article, I elaborated a little bit on the issues associated with what fire protection gadgets made that list. But it got me to thinking even more about what are the gadgets that made the fire service what it is today?

If we would go all the way back to the days of the Roman empire and work our way forward through the various stages of technology, what are the tools and techniques and gadgets that we have incorporated in fire protection that really, truly made a difference? With my weird sense of humor, I actually joked with one of my friends that probably the first technological breakthrough was when some caveman discovered that putting wet stuff on the red stuff resulted in the fire going out. Who that obscure human being was, who actually took it upon themselves to find a device to transmit water onto a fire was engaged in a technological breakthrough. But, that was tens of thousands of years ago and here we are in the year 2012 with all of the tools and technology that are available to us today that are still doing essentially the same thing, putting water on fire.

So, if we were going to develop our list like the History Channel did, where would we start? Is longevity a sign that technology is important? For example, are there things that we have embraced from the very first day of the dawn of civilization that are still current? Or, has the evolution of various tools and techniques shaped our industry into something different than was originally anticipated?

As an amateur historian of the fire service, I have ample evidence of when most technology was initiated and I have a pretty good sign when certain technologies have gone out of style. As a contemporary in the fire service today, I can go into a fire station and very quickly trace back the lineage of specific technologies. For example in a couple of my lectures on history, I point out that the speaking trumpet was the first version of command and control communications used by the fire service other than shouting loudly. When the speaking trumpet was introduced it began to focus on somebody being in charge, i.e. the incident commander and somebody who is supposed to respond to commands, i.e. the firefighter. Today we do that through a totally different technology; the radio.

So, in my amateurish historian way, I sat down and came up with what I consider to be a punch list of the ten technologies that have influenced us the most. How about you? Do you agree with my list or do you think there are things that are more important and should be given a higher priority?

I am going to list these not so much in the order of priority but rather in the sequence of events. They are as follows:

1. The bucket
2. The hand pump



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3. The nozzle
  4. Water delivery systems, hose water lines and hydrants
  5. The mechanized pump
  6. The concept of fire codes
  7. The concepts of incident command
  8. The concept of fire alarm systems
  9. The concept of automatic fire sprinklers
  10. The concept of professional qualifications

Now go back and take a look at that list. I can spend a significant amount of time talking about any given one of those items but this is a magazine not a textbook. Therefore, I would propose that you take a look at that list yourself and see if you can see the nexus over time as to how each of those technologies has evolved and turned into something drastically different than something that was originally anticipated.

One might look at this as being the DNA of fire technology. Where did things start? When did they evolve? What were the consequences of their initial performance? And what is their consequence of performance today?

Just arbitrarily picking one for discussion, let's talk about the concept of the nozzle. The nozzle required the transformation of the bucket brigade into something much more focused. It forced the issue of creating another concept called hydraulics. Pressure and volume of hydraulic calculations were not in existence when the first nozzle was invented. Some smart person picked up on the idea that if you pressured water in a confined vessel that it would "squirt out" and have a greater range than a bucket brigade. Today, if you look at a Stang monitor operating at the top of an aerial apparatus, using a fog pattern that can be altered with the twist of a bezel it is hard to visualize its lineage going all the way back the Roman Empire but it is true.

As I was preparing this article, I got close to the end and then I reminded myself that in actuality I left out one concept that is probably the Uber concept. That is the badge. The badge, which is often called the shield, was at one point in time a real shield. One concept that has evolved constantly since its days of origin is the idea that certain people take it upon themselves to dedicate their lives to the response to uncontrolled fires. One might consider it to be one of the most fundamental concepts that drive where we are today.

It is my belief that someday we will be fighting fires on the moon and perhaps on other planets. These simple concepts that we take for granted here on Terra Firma could and will likely evolve into tools and techniques we have never thought of during our lifetime. But make no mistake; we are where we are



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today because of what has happened in our past. We need to remember and respect that as we evaluate opportunities to shape the future.