



# A Giant Leap

**Former FDNY Firefighter Larry Cohen has developed Fire Ground Technologies, a New Jersey-based training company that has made great steps in promoting all levels of safety for the industry.**

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PHOTOS BY RON JEFFERS

Notwithstanding the magic firefighters perform every day, the one shortcoming, if you will, in the industry is its ability to adapt to new technologies. Years ago, moving up to the steam engine from the horse drawn pump wagons was a tough sell; SCBA apparatuses were new, heavy and scary; even radios met resistance, let alone thermal-imaging cameras. Unfortunately, it sometimes takes tragedies to realize the necessity for certain tools. Then, eventually, these items that fought through such strong entry barriers become staples of modern Per-

sonal Protective Equipment (PPE).

After a fatal fire in the Bronx in the winter of 2005 when six firefighters were forced to jump from a fifth-story window, killing two of them, the FDNY started an initiative to outfit its ranks with personal escape systems. In the past, FDNY had simply used the Gemtor harness with a bag of rope. At one point these harnesses and ropes were taken away but the union fought to bring them back. Eventually, the city brought back personal positional harnesses, and then eventually all members of the FDNY received the harness once again. It wasn't until 2005 when those six firefighters got jammed

up that the FDNY felt a need to investigate the need for a more practical escape system.

## An unprecedented mandate

Fifteen million dollars backed an unprecedented research and development program that had the task of creating the most effective escape system for today's firefighters caught on an upper level with no way out except the window. The unit, spearheaded by FDNY Ladder 28 Captain Mike Hayes, worked with the Exponent Engineering and Scientific Consulting Company to guide them in their creation of a personal escape sys-

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