



PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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COMING SOON! IMPROVED LIVE FIRE TRAINING FACILITY

Fire Department constructing permanent facility out of Conex containers

MUSCATINE, Iowa – Work is underway to construct a new live fire training facility using Conex containers at Muscatine Fire Department Station 2 off of Stewart Road. The facility will be a cost savings to the department and replace the procurement and use of old mobile homes for Fire Academy training.

The purchase of three Conex containers was approved by the Muscatine City Council during their March 16 meeting with the \$9,485.00 cost being covered by American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.

In his memo to the City Council, Battalion Chief Darrell Janssen said that Conex containers have proven to be a very effective way of creating a training facility that can be used for multiple live fire training scenarios.





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“These containers can be modified and converted into various training props, which includes live fire rooms that can simulate real life situations,” Janssen said. “Creation of a live fire training facility like this has been a department goal for years as it provides flexibility, realistic training opportunities, and has a lower environmental impact than what we have had available for use in the past.”

“I would like to say thank you to the Fire Chief, mayor, city administrator, and city council for making this possible,” Captain Andy Summitt said.

Summitt and Lieutenant Andrew McSorley have been heavily involved in the investigation and development of a live fire training facility.

“Many on staff spent hours preparing the trailers we were using for fire training, putting up drywall, fixing the floors, and prepping for the live burns,” Summitt said. “It was a costly, time-consuming process. We knew that there had to be a better way, one that was more durable and less costly.”

McSorley added that many departments are now going to these Conex boxes to burn in.

“They are safer, easier, last forever, and really cheap,” McSorley said.

Summitt, McSorley, and firefighter Sean Paustian were among those that started visiting other departments and seeing what they have done, including the facility at Iowa City, taking pictures and measurements to develop the basic layout for Muscatine.

“Iowa City facility graciously gave us all the help we needed along with input,” Summitt said. “We will work to have them come down and instruct us how to do the burns so that we can get the most bang for our buck.”

Staff continued with their research by calling and visiting other departments to see what they were doing, what worked, and what didn’t.



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"We learned a lot for our design from the problems they encountered," McSorley said. "Some departments don't even burn in them, but just smoke the trainees out with a smoke machine."

McSorley took all the information, sat down with paper and a ruler, and drew out the design for the Muscatine live fire training facility.

"We are getting to be such a young department that, if we are going to do it right, we might as well design it so that we can burn in it," McSorley said.



When the first box arrived at the training site located at the old armory next to Station 2, it was discovered that the concrete pad had an arch to it. That meant that one end of the 8-foot x 40-foot container was 16-inches off the ground. With a team effort that is not unique for the City of Muscatine, Tyson Wedekind, the Roadway Maintenance Supervisor in the Department of

Public Works, had his staff deliver and prep a level pad made up of crushed asphalt for the container.

"They had to pull off for other assignments but will be back in the next couple of weeks to create pads for the other two trailers," McSorley said.

Public Works is not the only partner in the development of the training facility as the Fire Department has received help from Hoffmann, Inc., and MUSCO.

"Hoffmann donated two guys to us and a welder, which is amazing from them," Summitt said. "I cannot thank them enough for that. And MUSCO provided their fork lift truck to help us place the containers."



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Kris Lee, president of Hoffmann, Inc., was on site Tuesday to see how the work was progressing. McSorley was hired by Hoffman while he was still in college and worked there until eight years ago when he decided to follow his lifelong dream to become a firefighter.

"I have known Andrew for a long time and when he reached out to us, we were happy to help," Lee said.

McSorley noted that the expertise and equipment that Hoffman has donated to the fabrication of the facility is saving the department thousands of dollars, and a lot more in man hours.

The first container being worked on will house the burn room, a section of the container that has



to be built to certain specifications and is lined with steel on the sides, the top, and on the bottom to absorb the heat of the fire. Behind that will be the control room where the instructors will maintain the fires.

"The heat inside one of these things is insane," McSorley said. "We are going to have to put special covers on our helmets and use our older gear during the exercises."

A second box will fit perpendicular to the first box with a third box sitting alongside the second box when the first phase of the facility has been completed. Both of these will be used to simulate rooms in a home or entrances to a home.

The second and third containers will have ports cut into the side so a pipe can be inserted to dispense smoke and keep the smoke machine outside. Plans also include using the piping of smoke into additional containers as the facility rises vertically and horizontally.

"There will be days with our academies when we will just pump these units full of smoke and let the trainees do searches," McSorley said. "We will build walls in them to simulate rooms. An end



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to one container will look like the front of a house with a door, and the end of another container will look like a window with plexiglass in it so we can do vent and search."

Paustian did construction before becoming a firefighter and will be constructing the rooms in the interior portions of the second two boxes. Plans include building a couple of closets and a bathroom that the trainees will have to open up and search through.

McSorley recalled four or five winters ago that a department in the general vicinity missed a child that was in a closet.



"For me, I've got two little kids, and that hit home," McSorley said. "That is something that, in my academies now, we really hit hard on searches, especially in places that you don't think of looking into."

The current academy trainees will finish with the county burn trailer since the new facility will not be ready in time.

"This will be permanent training facility," Summitt said. "My vision is that in the next couple of years we will go up maybe two-, three-, and four-stories high. We can stack them to make an upstairs, and to simulate basements. You can even stack them vertically to simulate elevators that you can repel down into. It will be the future training ground for sure."

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