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Company demonstrates fire-resistant material it says can save lives

Amy Gleich, Cronkite News – CAREFREE, ARIZONA



VIDEO STORY - A new fire shelter is in its testing stages, and it can withstand up to 2500 degrees. Cronkite News reporter Dominique Johnson has the story.

CAREFREE – With only fabric between his bare hand and a blowtorch, the founder of a California-based company demonstrated the heat-withstanding capability of his fire blanket Thursday by melting a penny.

Jim Moseley, founder and CEO of Sunseeker Enterprises, said this wool-based ceramic fiber, drawing from NASA technology, is capable of withstanding up to 2,500 degrees Fahrenheit. He hopes it will someday be used in the fire shelters carried by wildland firefighters.

A traditional fire shelter can withstand up to 500 degrees Fahrenheit, but according to those investigating the deaths of 19 hotshot firefighters near Yarnell the flames reached 2,000 degrees.

Moseley has yet to develop a prototype and said he is seeking investors through crowdsourcing, but he said he hopes a fire shelter made from his material wouldn't cost much more than the shelters firefighters currently carry.

"If you're putting your life on the line, you should be able to choose the protection you have," Moseley said.

Rural/Metro Fire Chief John Kraetz, who watched the demonstration at a fire station here, said a better shelter could have made all the difference for the Granite Mountain Hotshots.

"It would have saved their lives," Kraetz said.



A representative of Sunseeker Enterprises demonstrates how a protective material it is testing can keep a hand from burning while a blowtorch melts a penny.

Colin Williams, Rural/Metro's public information officer, said that the department is always interested in new firefighting technologies.

"It's very exciting for us to explore this new fire shelter which could potentially save lives," Williams said.

Mark Cichocki, a Rural/Metro Fire captain and paramedic, said he was impressed with the demonstration.

"You see where the future is headed," he said. "This could take everything to a whole new level."

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