

**For Immediate Release**

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## **Fighting Fire with Light**

*Nebraska fire department enjoys increased safety, productivity with light tower.*

KEARNEY, Neb. – When responding to an alarm, fire departments have a standard arsenal of tools that are used to complete the task at hand. Most of these tools, like the fire truck, have been around for decades. When a new technology is introduced that helps get a job done safer and more efficiently, firefighters take notice.

Light towers have been used for years on construction sites across the country, but only recently has a light tower been specifically designed for the fire industry. These mobile lighting units are ideal for use on fire and rescue runs for many of the same reasons they have been used in the construction industry. A light tower's extremely high light output, up to 840,000 lumens, increases the visibility of a scene, illuminates obstacles that may be encountered and reduces safety hazards. The tower also features a generator that can be used to power additional equipment on the scene.

Perhaps the most beneficial feature of a light tower is its portability. The unit is self-contained and does not need to attach to a larger piece of equipment to gain power. In the fire industry, this means the tower can be placed away from the truck to provide light wherever it is needed.

The Kearney (Neb.) Fire Department has come to understand these benefits first-hand. Its purchase of a light tower three years ago has proven to be a valuable addition to its fleet.

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Several members of the KFD had seen light towers used on construction sites and were familiar with the light output the towers produced. When the department learned Allmand Bros. Inc., located only 30 miles from Kearney in Holdrege, Neb., manufactured light towers designed for the fire industry, the crew began looking at the product's capabilities more closely. In fact, the Allmand Night Responder is the first and only light tower that has been designed with fire departments in mind, right down to the tower's red paint. After recognizing this new equipment had the potential to help the KFD overcome challenges common to fire departments across the country, the department added a Night Responder to its fleet.

### **Shedding Light on Safety**

A crew's safety is the highest of priorities on a run. If a firefighter is injured during a call, he or she suddenly becomes a victim who cannot perform rescue duties. On night runs, safety becomes an even greater issue. "When our crew responds to a call at night and has to work in the dark, it creates safety concerns," said Assistant Chief Steve Johnson.

That's why the Night Responder is an important addition to the KFD crew. "A scene can have a lot of obstacles that could potentially injure a firefighter," said Johnson. "With the light tower, our crew can see what they have to deal with and can avoid hazards. Our visibility on the scene is tremendous."

A recent hay bale fire is a prime example of the increased safety the KFD enjoys with the light tower. "We brought the light tower out to a scene where a yard of more than 150 large, round hay bales caught fire," recalls Assistant Chief Terry Eirich. "We had several loader tractors come in to spread the bales out so we could put out the fire. The light tower made the area so much safer because the loader operators could see the firefighters and we could see the loaders. Without the tower, a loader could have easily hurt a firefighter just because the operator couldn't see who or what was around."

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Eirich noted the Night Responder, which can be raised up to 30 feet, lit up areas truck-mounted lights weren't able to reach. "We could put some light on the scene with our trucks, but they didn't go up high enough," he said. "It was really nice to raise up the tower to its full height and light up the whole area. It almost looked like daytime."

The additional lighting also allows the crew to concentrate on their job without being distracted by insufficient light. "If you're working in a dark situation, you might be using flashlights that keep one hand busy and decrease productivity," said Rescue Capt. Tony Rich. "The light tower takes away the need for flashlights and frees the crew to use both hands to focus on their job."

### **In Two Places at Once**

Not only did the light tower increase the crew's safety, it also solved a critical equipment issue the department often faced. When nighttime accidents occur, the KFD responds with their trucks – and lighting – to lead rescue efforts. However, after the fire crew has finished their part of the job, the work of the Kearney Police Department's accident scene investigators is only beginning. Prior to owning a light tower, the KFD was forced to leave its truck on the scene, sometimes for several hours, to provide lighting to investigators, prohibiting the apparatus from returning to the station to prepare for another run.

Now, the KFD can light an accident scene with the light tower while sending the truck back to the station. "The Night Responder helps both departments get their work done," said Rich. "After we use the light tower to secure and clear the scene, the police department continues to use it to conduct their investigation."

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Serving an urban area with a population of 27,000 as well as a 272 square mile rural area, equipment availability is a major issue. Trucks and other apparatus must be available at all times to serve every corner of KFD's jurisdiction. The freestanding design of the light tower ensures trucks are available for the next emergency without leaving anyone in the dark.

"We respond to a lot of locations that are pretty far away from the station," said Eirich. "If all we need on the scene is light, instead of relying on truck-mounted lights, we can leave the tower at the scene and get back to the station. That way we don't have to tie up a truck for so long and we can prepare for the next call."

In addition, the KFD uses the light tower when conducting training for its large number of volunteers. The department employs eight full-time firefighters but has nearly 80 volunteer members. Since the volunteers have other daytime commitments, most of the department's training takes place during the evening. "Our evening trainings can run a lot longer with the light tower," said Rich. "It's especially helpful in the fall and winter when the sun goes down earlier because it extends our training time."

"It's very easy to set up," added Johnson. "When we take the tower out for training, we show everyone how to use it. We're pretty comfortable that anyone on our crew can run it without any problem."

### **Not Just for Emergencies**

The department has also discovered the Night Responder comes in handy in non-emergency situations. "One night after a big fire, we were in front of our station washing our trucks," said Eirich. "We don't have very good lighting in front of the station, so someone suggested setting up the light tower. We ended up lighting up the whole city block."

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Clearly the light tower has made a big impact on the KFD. The portability, high light output and additional safety this new technology offers have helped the department continue to provide Kearney and its surrounding communities the highest levels of service. “It’s a great tool to have at our disposal,” said Johnson. “I wouldn’t want to be without it.”

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