


Firefighter credits new gear with saving his life

 By Leah Hope

January 30, 2007 - A Chicago firefighter credits new protective gear for saving his life. He fought a fire Monday that was so fierce it melted his radio and boots.

Firefighter Jeff Spaargaren wasn't crazy about his new gear until Monday night.

"It is beautiful. It saved my life. The other old equipment, no way," said Spaargaren.

Spaargaren's Truck 28 responded to a house fire at 36th and Union. He searched the first floor, found no one and went to the second floor. Once upstairs, the conditions suddenly shifted, and he was in the middle of a flashover.

"It came up real fast and smoke started, and it was burning and you got to get out," said Spaargaren.

He was wearing newly issued "bunker gear." It's designed to cover a firefighter completely. Looking at his gear Tuesday night you see the hat is singed and the radio cords melted. But, on the bunker gear, only the reflective material is singed.

District Chief Cortez Holland says nearly all Chicago firefighters have the new bunker gear and it will make a difference.

"We will have less firemen getting burned or killed," said District Chief Cortez Holland, Chicago Fire Department.

As for Spaargaren, he is taking it easy with his family and is nursing some bad burns on his ears. But he feels fortunate that he is home at all.

"It was heavy and hard to put on, but I thank God I had it that day. It could have come out a lot worse than what it was," said Spaargaren.



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