

Help from above

Green Brook firefighters learn sprinklers good fire deterrents, too

By CELAMIE POLANICK
Staff Writer

GREEN BROOK — Water is a firefighter's best friend, whether it's coming from a hose or a sprinkler system.

On Wednesday night, at a public demonstration for Fire Prevention Week, Green Brook volunteer firefighters gathered to watch a demonstration of how sprinklers work in a burning living room.

Vinny Fichera, executive director of the New Jersey Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board in Waldwick, ignited a trash can stuffed with newspaper in a 16-foot-by-8-foot "burn trailer," which is specially designed to demonstrate how fast fire sprinklers can put out a house fire.

The fire spread to a curtain above the trash can, but within 50 seconds, the sprinkler system in the trailer had

doused the fire, Fichera said. "The burn room has Plexiglass on three sides so that people can get a good view of the action that's going on," he said. "It's a very compelling demonstration, if I do say so myself. People are very surprised about what happens. Afterward, (fire Chief Geno Panella) talked to all the guys, and they said they got a lot out of it."

Fire sprinklers are extremely efficient in extinguishing fires and can actually prevent water damage to your home, Fichera said.

While the average domestic sprinkler system discharges only 15 to 25 gallons of water per minute, about twice as much as a showerhead, a firefighter's hose sprays 200 to 250 gallons per minute, he said.

"The biggest myth that we attempt to dispel with a lot of the public outreach that we



TYLER REEDMAN OF GREEN BROOK, 11, WATCHES AS A GARBAGE CAN FILLED WITH NEWSPAPERS IGNITES A CURTAIN INSIDE A BURN TRAILER WEDNESDAY IN GREEN BROOK. MATTHEW APGAR/COURIER NEWS

AT A GLANCE

■ This year's Fire Prevention Week theme is "Prevent Cooking Fires: Watch What You Heat." For more information on Fire Prevention Week, visit the National Fire Protection Association's Web site at www.nfpa.org.



VINNY FICHERA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE NEW JERSEY FIRE SPRINKLER ADVISORY BOARD, TALKS WITH GREEN BROOK FIREFIGHTERS WEDNESDAY. FICHERA DEMONSTRATED THE USEFULNESS OF SPRINKLERS. MATTHEW APGAR/COURIER NEWS

do is, people tend to be fixated on water damage," Fichera said. "Unfortunately, the way that fire sprinklers are portrayed on television and in the movies, they make it seem like when one goes off, they all go off. That is not the case." Sprinklers are heat sensitive: even the rudimentary

sprinklers used in the 1880s to safeguard manufacturing facilities were heat sensitive, Fichera said. Most sprinkler heads react at or above 150 degrees

Fahrenheit, not a temperature that accidentally activates sprinklers very often, Fichera said.

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Burn

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The New Jersey Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board in is a nonprofit cooperative partnership of local officials, contractors, unionized installers, manufacturers and suppliers of fire sprinkler systems. The board works to publicize the safety benefits of sprinklers and to spread fire safety and prevention, which most people don't think enough about, Fichera said.

"People have enough to worry about — terrorism, smoking, things they shouldn't eat — that I don't think the dangers from fire are foremost on most people's minds, just because of the hustle and bustle of daily life," he said.

On Thursday, Green Brook firefighters will visit Irene E. Feldkirchner Elementary School

and Green Brook Middle School to present fire safety assemblies to students in grade five and below.

The Green Brook Fire Department also will hold a community open house from 3 to 5 p.m. Oct. 14 at the firehouse, 115 Greenbrook Road. Firefighters will teach children about fire equipment, prevention and safety tips, how to "stop, drop and roll" and when to call 911. Children also can meet the fire prevention mascot, Sparky the Fire Dog, Panella said.

At the events, children will be able to see firefighters in their full gear, Panella said.

"We tell them, 'If you see this person, don't be afraid — he's here to help,'" he said.

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