

COLUMNS

Notes From SEFD: Outfitting a Firefighter



by Eddie McArthur
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Taylor Glasser, one of the SEFD firefighters, in her gear. Behind Taylor is the custom drying rack. Photo by Eddie McArthur

The protective gear worn by our [Sonita-Elgin Fire District](#) (SEFD) firefighters is manufactured to standards set by the [National Fire Protection Association](#) (NFPA), and none of it is cheap.

This turnout gear can weigh 50 to 75 pounds, including helmet, gloves, boots, coats and pants. Three layers—the shell, moisture barrier, and thermal protection layer—can withstand temperatures up to 1600 degrees Fahrenheit. In general, turnout gear will last three to six years with proper maintenance. NFPA suggests gear be retired after 10 years.

In many instances, specialty cleaning is required (think exposure to bodily fluids or hazardous chemicals). For us, that means shipping to Phoenix. When washing can be done in house, we have a custom drying rack. Because we cannot afford more than one set of gear per firefighter—a common situation in agencies of our size—we need to be able to clean and dry the gear as quickly as possible.

Basic gear and its approximate cost is as follows:

A helmet designed to protect from debris, fire, scalding water, and extreme temperatures includes a chin strap, a visor for eye protection, and flaps to protect ears. Cost: \$480

Goggles provide additional eye protection. Cost: \$30

The self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) supplies air to a firefighter inside an area filled with toxic smoke. Cost: \$2,245

Gloves are made of thick leather to protect from burns, cuts, and scrapes as well as providing protection from chemicals and sharp objects. Cost: \$90

Turnout Pants made of several layers often have reinforced knees and leather cuffs. Built in suspenders and leg zippers are often included. Cost: \$1,490

The Turnout Coat, again consisting of several layers of fire resistant material, includes reflective strips to provide visibility. A wristlet fits around the firefighters' hands to hold the sleeve down. Special stitching causes the collar to remain up for added protection. Cost: \$2,430

Heavy leather boots provide protection from sharp objects, have steel toes, and are fire resistant. Cost: \$350

Additional gear can include a two-way radio for communication between firefighters (\$2,300), a flashlight (\$75), and headlamp (\$90). Wildland gear adds about \$950.

Cost for this basic outfitting is over \$10,500 and going up. One agency in New York reports an 18% increase in gear costs in 2023. Because the gear is so specialized, and must meet NFPA standards, there are no “cheap” versions available. Our goal, of course, is to protect the lives and welfare of our firefighters as we provide services to our communities.

SEFD's November service stats: 24 EMS calls, eight Fire calls, and 19 other services.

Please send any questions or comments to Meredith@sefd911.org

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