

News Release

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Technology Used to Train Staff Working Remotely

Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service is leading the way for UK fire and rescue services with the development and production of virtual reality training.

The Service has embraced new technology and developed a way of training its officers to keep in line with the current Coronavirus pandemic social distancing guidance, put in place by the Government. Now, by using virtual reality for fire investigation, training can take place whilst staff work remotely from different locations. This method has never been tried before in the UK, and after conversations with colleagues in America it could well possibly be a first in fire investigation worldwide.

The new virtual reality training utilises experiential learning as this method of training is through first-hand experience, whilst it engages trainees' emotions and enhances their skills, knowledge and experience that are developed outside of the traditional academic classroom.

This training method has been trailed with great success, and will be used for real on Wednesday 29 April, at Birstall Service Headquarters, where Callum Faint, Assistant Chief Fire and Rescue Officer, will be the first to be put through his paces and guided through a fire investigation in the virtual world.

All other trainees and instructors will dial in to the training and be transferred into the virtual world, allowing them to see what the Assistant Chief Fire and Rescue Officer can see. They will also have the ability to communicate with him through the communication system built into the virtual reality headset, assisting with the investigation. Once the investigation is complete, the trainees can watch a video which shows how the fire started (all in 360 virtual reality) to see if it matches with their conclusion.

Paul Speight, Watch Manager Virtual Reality, said: "This is a very exciting time for Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service and it is one I am looking forward to.

"Virtual reality has been around for a while now, and as a Service we are always looking for ways in which it can be utilised.

“Due to the current pandemic, we are having to work remotely and are always looking at ways to improve how we do this – virtual reality remote training is one of them, which will help keep officers up-to-date with their training.

To ensure the Service doesn't put all trainees through the same fire investigation scene, a system call RiVR (Reality in Virtual Reality) Investigate is used. This allows the Service to switch between a set of scenes, which will be refreshed accordingly.

Within the scenes, participants in the virtual world can utilise a number of things, including:

- Marker number plates to indicate potential evidence
- A camera to record the evidence
- A Dictaphone so you can make notes for your written report
- A torch for lighting up dark areas or for looking under furniture
- Scene lighting
- A gas monitoring device to ensure there are no invisible hazards
- The fire dog to check the scene to see if any ignitable liquids have been used

Paul Speight, added: “There are a number of benefits associated with virtual reality which include enhanced cognitive learning, quality repeatable and realistic training, increased knowledge retention compared to traditional methods as well as the big one which is that it allows firefighters access to virtual burns and investigations without the risk of being exposed to real fire.

“All these make virtual reality a valuable resource for the Service, and one which we will look to use wherever possible.”

We are looking to both local and national media to help and raise the awareness of this new way of training and how the Service is utilising virtual reality through this challenging time. We welcome your attendance/coverage at the first training session. There will be the opportunity to enter the virtual world and be talked through a part of the investigation, seeing the massive potential this has to change training in the future.

For more information about how the Service uses virtual reality in training, please contact us via leics-fire.gov.uk/contact-us and ask for Paul Speight.

For more information about Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service, visit leics-fire.gov.uk.

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Notes to Editors:

Interviews can be arranged through prior arrangement with Corporate Communications on the details below.

About the Service

Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service provides emergency response, prevention and protection services from 20 stations across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Its headquarters is based in Birstall, Leicester.

During 2018/19, the Service attended 762 road traffic collisions, of which 125 were extrications from vehicles, in addition to 2,569 fires. We carried out 6,746 home safety checks and fitted 4,790 smoke alarms. 279 schools were visited as part of the Service's

schools programme, delivering fire and road safety education to pupils. Staff organised or took part in 1,068 community safety events, promoting fire and road safety and arson prevention, and 134 Virtual Fatal Four (VF4) events as part of the Service's young drivers' road safety project.

The Service's prevention, education, enforcement and inspection programmes have resulted in significant reductions in the number of incidents. In the last ten years, fire-related incidents have reduced by over 30 percent.

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