

Joe McGough
Chief Minor Heights Fire Department
Minor Heights, AL

Hospital Visits, Expenses & Lost Man Hours go Down When Masimo Goes In

The calls: House Fires Take Firefighters Off Shift for CO Testing

Approximately two years ago, the Minor Heights Fire Department, a combination paid and volunteer department serving the Birmingham, Alabama metro area, responded to two structure fire calls that taxed both the department's staff and financial resources. At the time, our department had two Advanced Life Support engines, a paid staff of 10, two paramedics, and 25 volunteers.

During fire operations at the first structure fire, one of our firefighters entered the basement of the house and breathed in a significant amount of smoke before pulling down his mask. He later emerged exhausted and appeared disoriented. While all his vitals were normal, we transported him by ambulance to the local hospital to be screened for potential CO poisoning before having him continue his shift.

As it turned out, he was cleared and sent home a few hours later—but it cost the department several thousand dollars for the hospital tests and lost man hours. In addition, we were down two men for the duration of the shift, since department regulations require that a fellow officer accompany another member to the hospital.

About one month later, we experienced a similar incident with a different firefighter. On his second call of the day, his SCBA mask slipped off. To ensure his safety, we sent him to the hospital to be checked for potential CO poisoning. Once again, the department had to pay for an emergency department visit and send along an accompanying officer that left us two men down for the rest of the shift.

Masimo Rad-57 Immediately Rules Out CO Poisoning

After attending a demo of the noninvasive Masimo Rad-57 Pulse CO-Oximeter, I thought this could be the answer to our problems. Not only could it save us thousands in hospital bills, but it could also provide the department with a way to instantly check if a firefighter has CO poisoning. And, to top it all off, it's pain-free (no needles), fast (just seconds for results) and easy-to-use (slip on the sensor and push a button). I ordered a unit for my department and realized what a difference it made. Had we been equipped with a Rad-57 during the previous two incidents, we could have immediately ruled out CO poisoning without several trips to the hospital, the temporary loss of men, and the additional cost associated with covering those lost man hours.

Requesting Masimo Rad-57 Reinforcements

Our department serves a district that's over 50 years-old. We cover over 2,000 rooftops and many of these dwellings have older gas appliances. So we absolutely cannot afford to be short on equipment or manpower. We've only had the Rad-57 for a few weeks now, but it's been such a proactive and cost-effective diagnostic tool that I've already put in a request for two more. They're a great investment for any fire department. Right now, we are one of four fire departments in Alabama that have Rad-57s. It is great to have this life-, resource-, and cost-saving technology on our side. I hope to have one for each of my ALS engines so that I can quickly screen a firefighter for CO poisoning on the scene, and if he's clear, keep him—along with the accompanying officer



The Minor Heights Fire District is a rural fire district, providing fire suppression and Advanced Life Support non-transport services along with fire prevention and education to the communities west of the City of Birmingham, Alabama. The district has an ISO class 5 rating. The district's first run coverage is just over 15 square miles with 2000 + rooftops and a population of approximately 4600 people. Minor Heights provides automatic & mutual aid to nine other fire department and two private ambulance companies.

who would have needed to go with him to the hospital—on shift. What a difference the Masimo Rad-57 makes!