

KNOWING THE RIGHT PATH – Firefighter Compass by Northern Star Fire provides directional information in chaotic environment.

By Chief Travis Hollis, Deputy Chief – Rogers (AR) Fire Department

Northern Star Fire was founded by Captain Jeff Dykes. Northern Star is a small quarter sized digital compass that gives firefighters a visual indicator of the cardinal direction that they are facing. Captain Dyles started Northern Star Fire because he saw a need to help firefighters have situational awareness of their orientation while in low visibility conditions. He explained that an overwhelming number of line of duty deaths that occur while inside of a structure is contributed to disorientation. Citing that many are found within just fifteen feet of the front door.



Use of the Northern Star is quite simple, it is a tap of the on button located in the middle of the device and a simple shake of the mask to wake it up. Once activated the device simply gives the user a LED light indicating which direction that they are facing. The developer stated that the next generation of product will give the user the ability to dial the compass to Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, or Delta. The compass utilizes fire-rated 3M tape to adhere to the inside of the mask.

While the compass was developed for the use inside of the SCBA mask, they can be used in other applications. One such application is with SCUBA masks for rescue divers. While their applications are limited to full-face masks they are another great tool for the divers as most diving compasses require the diver to stop operations and level out their compasses for use. Northern Star is always on and giving a continuous indication to the diver.

Currently, a few departments have fully adopted the technology and several others have implemented them in specialized operations. The technology is gaining traction outside of the fire service as the United States Navy SEALs are testing out the devices. The biggest obstacle facing the device is pushback from SCBA manufacturers that don't want the device adhered to the inside of their masks. Considering the cost of a firefighter's protective ensemble today, the \$150 Northern Star Fire Firefighter Compass can be a cost effective tool to enhance the firefighter's toolbox.

