

NORTH CAPE CORAL: EQUIPMENT IMPROVES FIRE INSURANCE RATING



STEPHEN HAYFORD/THE NEWS-PRESS

■ Lieutenant-in-training Hugo Sorenson of the Cape Coral Fire Department is responsible for training many firefighters, like Eric Chappelle, left, in the use of the TurboDraft Fire Eductor. The device allows firefighters to utilize available water resources such as canals, lakes, and swimming pools, when necessary.



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■ The TurboDraft Fire Eductor allows firefighters to draw water from canals, swimming pools and other bodies of water when necessary. The Cape Coral Fire Department currently has three of the devices.

Pumps aid firefighting by drawing from canal

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This pump can suck water out of Cape Coral canals at the rate of as much as 6,700 gallons in 10 minutes.

That type of power is a good thing when fighting fires in the northern part of the city, where hydrants are scarce, said David Vieceli, battalion chief of operations for the Cape Coral Fire Department.

The equipment has supplied water to fight house and brush fires in areas with no city water service and has played a major role in improving the city's fire-safety rating, which should lead to a reduction in homeowner insurance premiums.

The Turbo Draft pump, Vieceli said, is ideal for use in Cape Coral, a community with 165,000 people living within 116 square miles.

"We have over 400 miles of canals in the Cape and that gives us a vast, continuous water supply," said Vieceli.

To help improve firefighting capabilities in the area north of Pine Island Road — where there are few water lines to connect to, but many canals — the fire department bought

three of the Turbo Draft pumps — at \$3,000 apiece — three years ago. There is money in next year's budget to buy two more.

Since then, the three pumps — one in each of three stations on the north side off the city — have been used to fight four house fires and at least 40 brush fires, Vieceli said.

Mainly because of the pumps, the city's Insurance Service Office rating — with 10 being the worst to 1 being the best — dropped from 9 to 3 in north Cape Coral and from 4 to 3 in the rest of the city, Vieceli said.

The New Jersey-based ISO supplies the information to the insurance industry and local insurance agents estimate that homeowners in north Cape may save \$500 a year as a result of the improved rating that takes effect in November.

Indeed, fighting fires in north Cape Coral, said Vieceli, would have been much more difficult without the three pumps, manufactured by Schutte & Koerting, of Trevoise, Pa.

Before the pumps, a large tanker truck would have to be brought along to keep refilling the trucks fighting the fires.

The tanker would then have to go to the nearest hydrant — which could be several

miles away — to fill up and come back, Vieceli said.

Now a crew of three to five firefighters can set up the 50-pound pump — which is submerged into a canal at a depth of 2.5 feet — in five minutes, said Hugo Sorenson, a training lieutenant.

Two hoses up to 200 feet long are connected between a pumper truck and the pump.

Water from the truck is pumped from the truck into the pump, which creates suction, causing the equipment to pump water from the canal back to the truck, Sorenson said.

The procedure allows a steady flow of water from the canal — at a rate of between 250 to 670 gallons a minute — to the firetruck to fight the fire, Vieceli said. The pumper truck can also supply water to other trucks fighting the fire, he said.

With help from the Turbo Draft pumps, two of the four houses where fires broke out in remote parts of north Cape Coral were saved, Vieceli said.

The other two houses — where the fires were too far advanced — were lost, but the pumps helped supply the water to put out the flames and keep the fires from spreading, Vieceli said.

In one of those fires, which was extremely large and intense, "we had two of these pumps going at the same time," said fire department Lt. Paul Christman.

The pumps have also been used in helping other departments fight brush fires on Pine Island and in North Fort Myers and Charlotte County, Vieceli said.