



Fire Training Toolbox "Free Training for Firefighters"

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Hidden Security Mesh **Presents Dangers to Firefighters**

By Chris Sterricker

I recently became aware of a building material being used for security purposes that I had never before heard of. Many firefighters I both work with and know had never heard of it either. It is an in-wall security mesh hidden behind the dry wall intended to prevent security breaches.

This particular product is manufactured by AMICO Security Products, <http://www.amico-securityproducts.com/mesh.htm>, although there are a few different manufacturers out there providing similar products. The product is nothing more than a steel or aluminum sheet-good that looks like the wire mesh typically used for plaster work or other masonry projects. It has been adapted and/or improved to serve in this security capacity. According to AMICO's website the product has been used for over 20 years and is typically installed in, "...government buildings, courthouses, retail stores, money rooms, hospitals, banks, police stations, or any application where a heightened level of security is required." Manufacturers offer many different gauges of thickness and materials depending on the level of security needed.

The security mesh is installed between layers of drywall on top of either wood or metal studs. Purpose-developed fasteners called Secura-Clips by AMICO are used to hold the mesh to the studs and pieces of mesh to each other. Once the mesh is in place, the drywall is placed over the top and finished as normal. Once complete the exterior, or interior of the room, looks no different from any other room. there is no way to tell that the security mesh is present. AMICO as well as the other manufacturers have cable and steel c-channel systems for securing window areas, ceilings, corners and doorways. There are specific installer instructions for dealing with cut-out areas of specific kinds and how to maintain the most amount of security possible using their product around these potential security gaps. There are even systems for plaster applications as well as interior and exterior security fences.





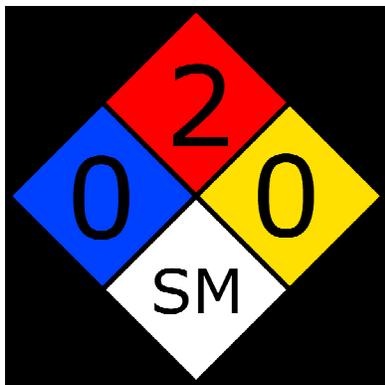
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It is obvious to see how unsuspecting firefighters crawling into an otherwise typically constructed modern building would believe that refuge from a rapidly advancing fire would be able to be achieved by a wall-breach and maneuvering through the stud-space to the next room and relative safety. With this security mesh in place, however, this will not be possible. According to the manufacturer's website the mesh can only be cut utilizing, "...hand-held circular saw with an abrasive or carbide tip blade, heavy-duty nibbler, hand-held grinder with cutting wheel, or cutting torch." Most fire departments in the U.S. and Canada certainly carry a rotary saw with either abrasive or multi-purpose blades but how many carry them inside on the attack line or during a search? The heavy-duty nibblers? Maybe some of our more heavy-duty cutters many of us carry for entrapment purposes may cut through some of the lighter gauge meshes the manufacturers make but the heaviest gauge I was able to locate for sale was almost one-half inch thick at .480 and was pure steel! I do not think our cutters will hold up very long to that. Maybe the heat from the fire will weaken it for us? No such luck, according to the MSDS for AMICO's product the melting point of Security Mesh is 2,800 degrees Fahrenheit. The best option for dealing with this threat is to know it is there prior to any emergency.



Much like the NFPA 704 system, we may need to implement an additional warning on buildings that contain these mesh security systems. Many departments have already done this in the case of lightweight truss construction; this may be another example of the next step in information pre-



planning that allows first-in officers and Incident Commanders to make solid decisions about strategy and tactics.