

How can I buy SCBA on a shoestring budget?

Jürgen Boss, Marketing Manager of Supplied Air Respirators, MSA EUROPE, tackles this thorny issue.

In today's world of shopping for bargains, decisions on crucial safety equipment are often taken with too close a look on the price tag. However, a more long-sighted and holistic approach would typically lead to increased value.

In many cases, budgets for equipment procurement and for maintenance are split. This often leads to focussing exclusively on low initial investment cost. Yet again, labour efforts and cost for spare parts and services might quickly add up to excessive total cost of ownership. It is recommended that a prospective buyer considers the cost of ownership to the whole organisation over a considerable period of time, eg 10 years. The potential suppliers should be challenged to come up with figures regarding cost for recommended component exchanges and typical service efforts.

Modern fire scene operating procedures demand sophisticated monitoring and documentation techniques. More and more, electronic devices are used to assist in that regard. While appreciating the benefit of these tools, a major concern is often the cost involved. Again, a more holistic approach should be taken when considering this investment beyond the dramatically increase in the safety of personnel – eg a good monitoring system enables to spend more time on more useful activities than writing reports. The MSA alpha Personal Network monitoring system, for example, automatically generates reports for persons and devices.

Furthermore, the investment level can be minimised by the right choice of system. Typically, particularly in urban brigades, the amount of breathing apparatus on stock is significantly higher than the amount of potential BA users per shift. This means that cost intensive components like SCBA electronics should only be stocked to the required amount. This is provided that the devices can easily be attached and detached from the BA set in order to be shared.

Time to replenish BA sets after use is typically a considerable cost factor. Exchanging cylinders with charged ones takes minutes per set. The MSA alphaCLICK high pressure quick connect allows cylinders to be taken off the set and attached to a filling panel within seconds. The ROI into the components is quickly realised.

An elegant way of making the most of an annual budget is to invest in equipment that can be upgraded at a later stage when needs rise or further funding is available. If a BA system allows for easy add-on of components, the devices can be rolled out in full quantity in a basic configuration in one year. More functionality, such as training harness or electronic monitoring can be added at a later stage. MSA's Modular SCBA System enables more than 4,000 configurations with most components being retrofittable.

All these examples illustrate that by widening the focus from initial procurement cost to a long-term system consideration cater for more value based decisions.



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London takes on telemetric BA

The London Fire Brigade has placed a major order with Draeger for both breathing apparatus and monitoring systems. Representing a significant level of investment, even for the UK's largest fire service, the order also reflects a major commitment on behalf of both parties to work closely together to ensure even greater protection for the country's leading fire brigade.

The substantial order encompasses Draeger PSS 7000 Breathing Apparatus sets together with FPS 7000 Face Masks, PSS Bodyguard 7000 electronic monitoring systems and innovative PSS Merlin Telemetry boards. Believed to be unique, the order also includes newly developed eight-litre 300 bar cylinders which provide half an hour working duration at 50-litres/minute breathing rate. The new equipment will be in use by January 2011.

Perry Jones, Sales and Marketing Director at Draeger, commented, "We are obviously very pleased that the London Fire Brigade has recognised the benefits of our modular system approach. By choosing the Draeger PSS range, the Brigade has selected a system that will successfully meet its' needs today whilst continuing to grow to meet its' needs well into the future. Combining innovative comfort and performance that has been borne from years of product research and development, the PSS system is the result of our work with different Brigades in all kinds of applications. Bringing real-time monitoring to the fore, it has also helped to revolutionise communications as well as firefighter safety."

London Fire Commissioner Ron Dobson said: "I am delighted that we are working in partnership with Draeger to take advantage of technological advances made over the last ten years and further enhance the safety of London's firefighters."

This contract has been awarded through the national purchasing body for UK firefighters, Firebuy.

