

Firefighting takes a virtual turn

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Clay Township Firefighters plan to spend a lot more time putting out fires.

Clay has opened a new Command Training Center at its Auten Road station.

It is one of only 11 such centers in the United States.

While there will be a lot of smoke and fire at the training facility, there will not be the danger that usually goes along with it.

On Thursday, officials watched the Auto Zone on State Road 933 go up on flames -- at least a virtual version that had been plugged into a new computer simulator.

The fake fire gives commanders a chance to make some real firefighting decisions without the usual life or death consequences.

"We can expose them to situations 50-times in this facility before they have to be exposed to it on the streets," said Clay Fire Chief Timm Schabbel.

"Everything from a person trapped in a structure and how we would react to that, all the way up to firefighters becoming trapped in a structure, how we respond to one of our people getting lost in the building."

The first virtual training facility was established in Phoenix in 2000, under the direction of Don Abbott, who was there to open the Clay Township facility.

"You can modify it to look like the actual buildings in your own community," said Abbott, "what you do is go out and take the pictures of buildings in your area, and add the fire and smoke, you can cause them to explode."

The cost of the training facility was around 100-thousand dollars. Much of the money was covered by grants from the Indiana Department of Homeland Security.

Reported by WNDU-TV

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