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Pet oxygen masks coming to the rescue in fires

Life-saving devices becoming standard for fire departments across country



Alden Pellett / AP

Maple, a sheperd mix dog belonging to Firefighter Will Berkovits, left, demonstrates an oxygen mask made for pets.

AP Associated Press

updated 3:23 p.m. CT, Thurs., Jan. 25, 2007

CLARENDON, Vt. - Fire helmet? Check. Gloves? Check. Axe? Check. Pet oxygen masks? Check.

Increasingly, little oxygen masks for pets are becoming standard equipment for firefighters. Hoping to save cats, dogs and other pets caught in house fires, animal advocacy groups and pet-products suppliers are equipping departments all over the country with them.

The cone-shaped plastic masks, which come in three sizes and fit snugly on snouts, can resuscitate animals suffering from smoke inhalation. They can be used on dogs, cats, ferrets, rabbits, guinea pigs, even birds.

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"In the past, we used regular air masks like the firefighters use. In a pinch, it works," said

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Norman Flanders, fire chief in this small Vermont town, which was given a set of pet masks by a local animal welfare group Tuesday. "But these masks are designed specifically to fit over the muzzle of a cat or a dog."

Pet rescues difficult

An estimated 60 million U.S. households have pets, but statistics on how many die in house fires are hard to come by. Frequently, house pets hide during a fire, making rescues difficult.

Exactly how many pets have been saved with animal oxygen masks is unclear, too. But the fire department in Prospect, Conn., received two donated sets in 2004, and two days later used one to resuscitate a Yorkshire terrier pulled from a fire.

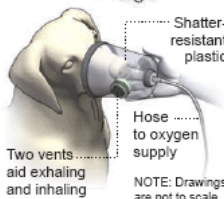
"He was wobbly and he had very shallow breathing," said Fire Chief Robert

Chatfield. "The owner held him and we got the mask on him and in about 2½ minutes, he was fine."

Pet rescue device

Pet oxygen masks allow firefighters to give oxygen more easily to pets rescued from fires. The masks come in three sizes.

Masks for people don't fit as securely



SOURCE: Smiths Veterinary Medical PM Inc. AP

From vet use to rescue tool

The masks were originally developed for use by [veterinarians](#) but have evolved into rescue tools over the past several years, according to Brandi Marks of Smiths Veterinary Medical PM Inc., of Waukesha, Wis., which distributes them.

More than 2,500 sets have been distributed by Best Friends Pet Care, a kennel company that set up a matching-donation campaign to buy the masks, which cost about \$60 per three-mask set.

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The campaign began after a firefighter told Best Friends employees of his frustration watching pets die, according to Debra Bennetts, a Best Friends spokeswoman.

H.E.L.P. Animals, an Orange City, Fla., nonprofit group, has also distributed the masks.

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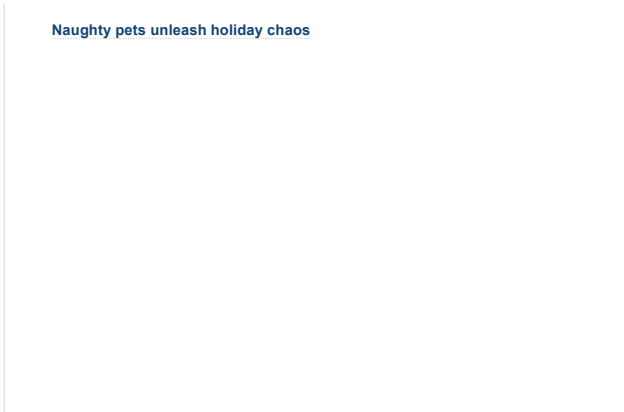
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