

Special oxygen masks help fires' other victims

Photo from Wag'n O2 Fur Life



Pet oxygen masks come in three sizes that can be used on many species of animals.

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When firefighters rush into a burning home, it's not just the human residents they rescue. Frequently, they carry out pets.

When an animal is overcome by smoke in a house fire, Tampa firefighters do all they can to help, including administering oxygen. It's not easy; oxygen masks for humans don't fit well over muzzles.

The Tampa Bay Kennel Club has come to the rescue. It recently donated 32 pet oxygen mask kits to Hillsborough County and Tampa fire rescues.

"With the masks donated by the Tampa Bay Kennel Club, we will be able to administer a higher level of oxygen to pets suffering from smoke inhalation," said Tampa Capt. Bill Wade. "Additionally, the club members provided a training video that offers training and tips for firefighters to use to help prevent further trauma to pets during treatment, and also help protect the firefighter from being bitten or scratched by a stressed animal."

Kennel Club Secretary Linda Lopez got the idea for the gift after she read about a similar donation in Sarasota. The club purchased the mask kits through the Wag'N O2 Fur Life Program. Since its inception in 2008, the

program has provided more than 190 fire departments across the United States and Canada with oxygen masks and "Pet Oxygen Masks on Board" decals for their stations and vehicles.

"We're quickly finding out just how great of a need this is," said Ines de Pablo of Wag'N Enterprises, a pet emergency management company. "Dryer fires, furnace fires, pets knocking candles over with their tails, you name it, fires are started because of it. We were shocked to find that most fire departments aren't equipped to save your pet's life in an emergency. These pet oxygen masks can be used on dogs, cats, ferrets, birds, hamsters, alpacas, wolves and many more species."

Included in each of the kits is a set of three pet oxygen masks and corresponding oxygen tubes, a CPR For Cats & Dogs magnet and laminated instructions to remind first responders of the techniques for animals, a leash, two "Pet Oxygen Masks On Board" decals, an instructional DVD and a PowerPoint presentation for training. It's all wrapped up in a Wag'N O2 Fur Life bag that can also be used to contain small animals.

In past years the Kennel Club has donated bulletproof vests for police dogs and provided money to purchase a search and rescue dog. Each month, members also bring dog and cat food to their meetings. The club matches the donations pound for pound and gives it all to the Humane Society. The club also sponsors a seminar for young people to learn about caring for and exhibiting their dogs, and awards an annual scholarship to a student.

Watch for a Responsible Dog Owners Day event sponsored by the club, the first week of September at the Florida State Fairgrounds in Tampa. For information about the Tampa Bay Kennel Club, visit www.TampaBayKennelClub.com.

If you would like to donate a pet oxygen mask kit to a fire, K9, EMS, military or other unit, first contact the unit to see whether it can and will use the masks. Then visit www.wagn4u.com/O2FurLife to order the kit