

Breath for Pets

Sixty-eight percent of U.S. households own at least one pet. That comes to a minimum of about 82.5 million pets! ("Pet Industry Market Size & Ownership Statistics," 2015)

That is a staggering number and every single one of those pets need to be properly taken care of and protected. Our communities have a responsibility to help provide some of that protection. In an event of a home fire or catastrophe it is very important that our first responders have the proper equipment available to them to assist in lifesaving protection. We assume that our first responders carry the necessary equipment to assist the rescue of those involved in a fire however it has come to our attention that many of our first responders on the Kenai and even across Alaska do not have the specialized equipment to protect our animal population.

In 2013, U.S. fire departments responded to an estimated 369,500 home structure fires. ("Facts about Fire," 2015) With all these fires, firefighters and first responders are left struggling to revive animals with oxygen masks fit for humans, leaving countless animals dead that could have been saved had the proper equipment been made available. Through our project, we provide our fire departments with specialized pet emergency oxygen masks. This will help the people in our community who have pets and love them. An added benefit is that the equipment provided to protect our pets can also be utilized in the lifesaving protection of our wildlife.

When a house fire occurs humans automatically search for a way out. Instinctively, animals do the opposite. In looking for a hiding place to protect them from the fire, the animals get trapped in the flames and most commonly suffocate from lack of oxygen. (Bush, 2015) In fact, approximately 40,000 dogs and cats die in house fires each year (Becker, 2014).

When a firefighter locates a pet in a burning building they try to revive them, but the masks they use are made for the human face. Lake Hills firefighter/EMT of 17 years, Debbie Lowe, explained this to the Chicago Tribune, "We tried to use a (human) oxygen mask, but it was very difficult. It didn't fit right." (Ross, 2015) Our firefighters work so hard rescuing people and pets that the Pet Oxygen Mask Kits will help make their job easier while saving lives.

Pet Oxygen Masks are specifically made to fit animals' muzzles. There are three sizes: small which can revive puppies to ferrets to parrots, medium for regular pets, and large which can even revive miniature horses. Each kit contains:

- 3 Oxygen Masks - 1 small, 1 medium & 1 large
- 3 Oxygen Air Tubes - 1 for each mask, 22 mm diameter
- 1 Wag'N O2 Fur Life® Carry Bag for easy storage & mobility
- 1 Laminated Instruction Sheet which includes ABCs of CPR For Cats & Dogs
- 1 Kennel Lead for animal restraint & control

- 2 Animal Incident Report (AIR)[™] Forms for First Responders - carbonless 3-part form
- 1 Pet Rescue Notice Form provided in electronic format
- 1 PowerPoint Presentation provided in electronic format
- 2 "Pet Oxygen Masks On Board"[™] Decals
- 1 Wag'N Instructional DVD "Pets Need Oxygen Too"[™]

Inside the kits along with the oxygen masks there is a leash for restraining the animal, necessary tubing, vehicle stickers indicating Pet Masks on Board, training booklets including a PowerPoint presentation for first responders, and various forms. All the firefighters need is the oxygen or an "Ambu-bag" should the pet require manual breathing assistance. Currently, there are over 7,000 pet oxygen masks kits in Fire & EMS departments across all of North America. ("About Us!," 2016) Yet, very few of those are in Alaska.

To help decrease the amount of animal deaths relating to fires in Alaska, we bought twenty-one kits for the Kenai Peninsula and beyond. The leading retailer that we bought the kits from is Wag N' O2. With each kit being \$80, the large amount of money that was needed to purchase the kits was all produced from fundraising. Throughout the year (s), we set up bake sales at the local grocery store, set up booths at multiple craft fairs around our community and took in donations. We were so grateful to all the donors, that we even made custom made tags that included the donor's name. We then attached these tags to each kit acknowledging the donor's concern and generosity.

Our last leg of the project was to donate these kits to all the fire stations in our community. We contacted every fire station on the Kenai Peninsula, sadly ending up with only two that were interested in them. We gave as many kits as they requested, donating enough kits to the Nikiski fire department to place a kit on every vehicle and six kits to the Kenai fire department. It's been two years since we started and we are now fundraising to donate additional emergency pet oxygen mask kits to every fire station in Alaska. This is one small way we are helping animals, their families and our first responders.

References

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