

## Oxygen masks improve odds for injured pets

Currituck eyes set at all fire stations



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Thanks to specially manufactured oxygen masks, pets in Currituck County now have as much of a chance of surviving a house fire as their owners.

The Currituck County Fire-EMS Department recently received two sets of the oxygen masks from the Animal Lovers Assistance League. The masks are specifically designed to help fire and rescue personnel resuscitate cats, dogs and other household pets overcome by smoke during house fires.



STAFF PHOTO BY DIANA MAZZELLA  
([ENLARGE](#))

Currituck County Fire-EMS Capt. Lee Morris demonstrates one of the county's new pet oxygen masks on Cally, a 6-year-old beagle Thursday. The masks, donated by the Animal Lovers Assistance League, can be used to help dogs, cats and other pets overcome by smoke inhalation in house fires or that have difficulty breathing at the scene of other emergencies.

Michael Carter, Currituck Fire-EMS chief, said the Animal Lovers Assistance League donated the masks to the department about a month ago. Rescue officials are glad for the addition because they offer another way to deliver rescue services to residents, he said.

"I can see how this would definitely be used," Carter said, referring to one of the masks. "It's something pretty cool. It's not something you see every day."

The masks, manufactured by SurgiVet and ordered through a distributor, H.E.L.P. Animals Inc., come in three sizes, and can be used on animals ranging in size from a large dog to a ferret or rabbit. They would not be suitable for livestock, however.

"It's more geared to smoke inhalation problems with house fires," Fire-EMS Capt. Lee Morris said.

Morris, who has been with the department about five years, has seen a lot of pets at the scene of house fires. In fact, he estimates that about 60 percent of households in the United States have pets.

The masks have a pliable rubbery fitting used to secure the device to the animal's snout. The masks can be attached to a plastic hose that is connected to an oxygen tank.

Morris demonstrated the mask on Cally, a 6-year-old beagle. While Cally seemed reluctant to have the mask placed over her nose, Morris said in instances when a pet is suffering from smoke inhalation it will likely be more cooperative with rescue workers. If, however, an animal is aggressive with rescuers, animal control officers will be called.

Officials say the masks are simple to use and require the same steps as treating a human.

"It's not something we're going to have to go and teach our guys how to use," Carter said.

Carter said the Sligo fire station will get one set of the masks, while the other will be kept in the EMS supervisor's vehicle.

Georgia Sikes, president and founder of the Animal Lovers Assistance League, expects the pet oxygen masks will be used a lot.

"Currituck has a large number, above the national average, of animals per household," she said. "The odds of their getting used, I think, are great in Currituck."

Carter also expects the masks will be widely used, but he noted that humans will always be responders' first priority for medical treatment at fires and other emergencies.

The mask sets have to be ordered through H.E.L.P. Animals Inc. They cost \$55, which doesn't include a \$10 shipping and handling fee.

The Animal Lovers Assistance League paid for the first two sets, but Sikes is hoping private donations will pay to supply them to the county's other fire stations.

"We hope that the public will help supply the remaining five fire stations with these because the pets it saves could be their own," Sikes said. "What a shame it would be for somebody to lose their home and their belongings and lose their best friend as well."

Donations can be made to the Animal Lovers Assistance League at P.O. Box 266, Currituck, NC 27929 or by calling 457-0011. Donors may also make contributions for the pet oxygen masks through the county's volunteer fire departments.

For more information about the masks, visit [www.helpanimalsinc.org](http://www.helpanimalsinc.org).