



## **Saving animals in distress**

### **PetSafe donates 33 sets of petoxygen masks to firefighters**

By Matt Lakin

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Every life matters to a firefighter — even if fuzzy, feathered or covered with scales.

Saving those lives got a little easier Tuesday as Knoxville and Rural/Metro firefighters picked up 33 donated sets of oxygen masks for pets — one for each agency's fire engine.

"This is going to be incredible," said Vicki Cheesman, a Knoxville Fire Department master firefighter. "It gives us an opportunity to save more pets. After all, pets are people, too."

The masks came as a gift from PetSafe, a Knoxville-based maker of pet supplies such as grooming products, collars and invisible fencing. The company plans to launch a nationwide campaign to supply the kits to fire departments around the country, company spokeswoman Amanda Leesburg said.

"We're using Knoxville as a test market," she said. "There's definitely a need for it."

Knoxville fire crews rescue at least a dozen pets each year from burning homes, KFD Assistant Chief Fred Baty said. That's not counting those rescued by Rural/Metro crews.

"A lot of the time, you'll get to a fire, and the owner is not concerned about the house itself or their possessions," Baty said. "The main thing they're concerned about is their pets."

The standard oxygen mask fits a human just fine but won't fit a cat or dog. Firefighters end up squeezing the mask to cup it around the pet's muzzle, with much of the oxygen going anywhere but the animal's lungs.

“I’ve never seen it work,” Cheesman said.

That can mean sad news for a pet’s owners.

“If the animal doesn’t make it, it’s like telling them that their child died,” said Marybeth Rood, a Rural/Metro firefighter and paramedic.

She estimates she’s performed CPR on animals about eight times in her career — on dogs, cats, birds and once on an iguana.

“I actually performed it on a fish once,” she said. “We pumped the oxygen into the water.”

The donated masks came in sets of three — one size each for large dogs, small dogs and cats — at a total cost of about \$2,300.

Rood and Cheesman tested the new masks Tuesday on Penny, an 11-year-old Greyhound. They gave the gear two thumbs-up.

“Hopefully this will save a couple of owners’ lives too, because often they’re the first ones to run in to save their pets,” said Penny’s owner, Laurie MacNair, director of talent development for PetSafe.

Fire crews said they’ll keep the masks handy on each call.



Photo by Saul Young

The use of a pet oxygen mask is demonstrated on Penny, an 11-year-old Greyhound, at PetSafe Village in West Knox County on Tuesday. PetSafe donated 33 pet oxygen masks to Knoxville and Rural/Metro fire departments.



Photo by Saul Young

Laurie Macnair, Director of Talent Development at PetSafe, Rural Metro Fire Department Firefighter-Paramedic Mary Beth Hood, and Knoxville Fire Department Master Firefighter Vicki Cheesman thank Penny for demonstrating the use of a pet oxygen mask Tuesday at PetSafe Village in West Knox county. Thirty-three pet oxygen masks were donated to the Knoxville Fire Department and Rural Metro Fire Department by PetSafe. The masks are being demonstrated at PetSafe Village in West Knox County.