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In case of fire, pets can breathe a little easier

September 29, 2010 02:09 PM

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David L. Ryan/Globe Staff

A demonstration of how the pet oxygen mask works today at the Engine 10 firehouse on Purchase Street.

By **L. Finch**, *Globe Correspondent*

With their choking clouds of smoke, fires pose a serious threat to pets just as they do to humans. Now, the animals can breathe a little easier.

Every Boston Fire Department engine, ladder and rescue truck will now carry oxygen masks specifically made for pets, the department announced today. The department received the 60 pet oxygen masks as a donation from WellPet, a natural pet food company based in Tewksbury, and the Massachusetts Veterinary Medical Association Charities.

"Smoke doesn't discriminate," said Stephen MacDonald, a department spokesman. "It affects everyone that relies on oxygen to breathe. Having a specific mask geared toward pets will go a long way to helping pets survive smoky conditions."

Before, firefighters would make do with oxygen masks made for humans, but the masks were not a good fit for most pets and much of the oxygen blew away, MacDonald said. Fires involving pets, though not common, happen often enough that it was a problem, he said.

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Fire Commissioner Roderick Fraser began pursuing the masks after a department administrative employee, concerned about her own German shepherd, told him how other departments around the country use special oxygen masks to help pets affected by fire, MacDonald said.

It wasn't long before the commissioner found organizations willing to donate them, he said.

"We're proud to donate these pet oxygen masks to the Boston Fire Department," WellPet spokeswoman Chanda Leary-Coutu said in a statement, "so that the city's firefighting heroes have the tools they need to save the lives of every member of our families, including our pets."

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