



Massachusetts Veterinary Medical Association donates pet oxygen mask to Dedham fire station

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Wicked Local Dedham

Posted Aug 06, 2011 @ 07:00 AM

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DEDHAM — Members of the Massachusetts Veterinary Medical Association said they knew they had to do something when they saw the disturbing image of a cat being rescued from a Massachusetts house fire.

The image showed firefighters trying to fit the animal with an oxygen mask, which was far too large for its small face, as the cat gasped futilely for air.

With this picture in mind, the Massachusetts Veterinary Medical Association set out to create oxygen masks designed specifically for pets.

Its goal reached fruition in July 2009 when the first set of pet masks was given to the Needham Fire Department. Two years later, the masks have made their way to Dedham.

Veterinarian Jill Depto presented the pet masks to Dedham Fire Chief Bill Cullinane last month. A member of the association and a Dedham resident, Depto said she was given a set of masks to donate to the firehouse of her choice.

"I live in Dedham, and I had asked the Dedham firefighters one day if they had the masks," Depto said. "They said no, so I thought it would be the best place for me to donate them to."

She said the pet masks function similarly to human masks, except they are designed to fit over an animal's snout. Each set of masks costs \$100 and includes three sizes—small, medium, and large—to accommodate anything from a large dog to a small cat.

"We were quite pleased," Chief Cullinane said of the donation. "Due to the constraints with the economic environment we're in right now, we don't have the money to buy those kinds of things. So when we get a donation like that, we really appreciate it."

Though Cullinane said the Dedham Fire Department has yet to use the donated masks, he said he knows from past experience that the special design makes them very effective.

"It's not an issue that we run into very often, but when you do need them you need them right away, so it's important to have them," Cullinane said.

Headquartered in Marlborough, the Massachusetts Veterinary Medical Association is a 900-member organization that represents the majority of Massachusetts's practicing veterinarians.

The Pet Oxygen Mask Program, which is part of the association's charity foundation, has provided pet masks to over 150 fire departments in Massachusetts.

Its goal is for each of the state's 351 cities and towns to own at least one set of masks.

For more information about the Massachusetts Veterinary Medical Association, or to make a donation to one of its charity programs, call 508-460-9333 or visit <http://www.massvet.org>.

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