

Live in This State? Your Pet Can Now Be Treated by EMTs and First Responders

This humane treatment option may become a new trend, but so far it's only available in a few states, like this one. Now animals can receive critical care in time to save their life or relieve suffering. But there's an important caveat you should know — what the new law does not allow.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- A new law was passed in Ohio, effectively allowing first responders to help injured or sick dogs and cats that are victims of fires or car accidents
- Up until the Ohio General Assembly passed the new law, only licensed veterinarians were deemed qualified to treat sick or injured animals
- First responders are now able to give oxygen, perform mouth-to-snout resuscitation, stem bleeding, bandage and administer the antidote naloxone to dogs or cats that have ingested opiates
- This will give families peace of mind to know that pets have the opportunity to be treated sooner rather than later
- The thing to do when someone's pet needs treatment is like it's always been — call a veterinarian or animal hospital if there's a pet emergency

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If you can believe it, until very recently it was against the law for a firefighter or first responder to give cats or dogs the basic first aid care they needed after being rescued from a house fire, car crash or other emergency that might be life threatening to the animal.

This was the case in Ohio and still is in several other states. The reasoning was that only licensed veterinarians were deemed qualified.

But fortunately, a new law¹ was passed in mid-2016, making the Buckeye State one of the first in the union to have this law passed, in effect protecting first responders who acted as Good Samaritans to helpless animals who might die or suffer debilitating injuries without their aid.

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), Ohio Voters for Companion Animals, Inc. (OVCA), the Ohio Fire Chiefs' Association (OFCA) and Ohio Veterinary Medical Association (OVMA) all supported the bill, passed unanimously out of the General Assembly, and subsequently signed by Gov. John Kasich.

“The bill simply allows animals to receive critical care at the earliest possible moment, which is in the best interest of the animal,” said Jack Advent, executive director of the OVMA.

“The intent is to allow emergency responders to provide basic first aid so the animal can be safely transported to a veterinarian for further care and treatment.”²

Now Reversed ‘Missed Loophole’ Was Responsible for Bad Law

Animal advocates of all stripes are applauding the humane measure to protect animals and hope that any first responders who might be hesitant to lend a hand to injured or otherwise at-risk animals will feel confident to step in when needed.

According to AP News, fear of liability was an issue because pet owners have sued first responders who treated animals that ended up dying.

“The law will allow first responders to, without fear of liability, provide oxygen, perform mouth-to-snout resuscitation, try to stem bleeding, bandage and even administer the overdose antidote naloxone to dogs or cats that have ingested opiates.”³

Naloxone can only be administered if the proper protocol and guidelines are followed. Personnel at the scene of a crisis can also open and manually maintain an airway and immobilize fractures, EMS1.com reported.⁴

Colorado was the first state to draw such a measure, in 2014, followed by Oklahoma.⁵ Ohio’s change came about after an EMS director, Bob Swickard, from a small town in Ohio, contacted state Republican Rep. Tim Ginter and shared concerns about a number of injuries police dogs in his district had experienced while on duty.

The law came clear to him when talking with a local veterinarian regarding administering first aid to police dogs who had come into contact with prescription pain medicines or heroin. The “missed loophole” that made it illegal to treat such animals was of particular concern to both Swickard and Ginter.

“There is the possibility that a dog could get a snout full of something and go down,” Ginter said. “The best that they could do before this law was to call either a veterinarian to come to the scene or call for transport.”

‘Another Layer of Protection for the Good Guys’

The new law took effect on August 31, and, as a result, veterinarians began contacting first responders and other personnel to begin a training program to get rescue crews, firefighters and other first responders ready for the moment they’d be free to step in and help an animal in distress.

Even better news is that the first responders are seeking it out on their own, and at least two counties in the area have kits that can be used for mouth-to-snout resuscitation and the ability to provide oxygen to a dog or cat.

Dr. Ed Cooper, head of emergency and critical care at Ohio State University’s Veterinary Medical Center, told the AP it’s evident that veterinarians see the new law as a good thing.

“The hope in having this law passed is really just to give first responders the opportunity and extend the option without the potential for recourse to assist pets as well as people in these kinds of crisis situations,” Cooper said.⁶

Cory Smith, director of public policy for companion animals at The Humane Society of the United States, commented to the AP, "It's another layer of protection for the good guys."

Meg Stephenson, executive director of the Animal Friends Humane Society, noted that besides being a huge benefit to the community, it would be a great benefit to anyone with a pet.

“It’s going to give those animals that instant treatment, that life-supportive care.”⁷ Further, she noted, this will give families peace of mind to know that pets have the opportunity to be treated sooner rather than later.

What the New Law Doesn’t Do

According to the new law, one thing that is not in place is a requirement that first responders treat animals. It also doesn’t give people carte blanche to call 911 when their pet is sick or injured.

The thing to do when someone’s pet needs treatment is like it’s always been — call a veterinarian or animal hospital if there’s a **pet emergency**.

Still, there’s the very real chance that first responders will encounter sick or injured animals at some point while they’re on the job, especially because around two-thirds of U.S. households include one or more pets.

"Really, it's just about building humane communities," Stephenson told the AP. "I think when first-response agencies and local governments and especially state governments plan around the fact that animals are such a huge part of our lives, it can only lead to good things."⁸

Sources and References

¹ [HB 187 General Assembly State of Ohio](#)

^{2,4,7} [EMS1.com May 28, 2016](#)

^{3,6,8} [AP News June 26, 2016 \(Archived\)](#)

⁵ [Care2 August 2, 2016 \(Archived\)](#)
