

Four-Legged Heroes

Not all of the heroes in a rescue are firefighters, police officers, or medical personnel. Some aren't even humans. They're dogs, most of them specially trained to search for humans who need help. Rescue dogs also help comfort victims and escort people out of danger.

Dogs such as Gus, a yellow Labrador retriever, appear on the scenes of disasters in the United States, often within hours of an event. Gus and his owner, Ed Apple, are part of the Tennessee Task Force One Urban Search and Rescue Team. Gus is trained to work closely with Ed, who uses hand signals and voice commands to guide Gus over surfaces such as unstable concrete and other wreckage. Gus's job is to sniff the air for the scent of a human trapped beneath the rubble.

According to Ed, rescue dogs love their work. "They'll keep looking until you call them off," he says. Rescue dogs usually work in shifts and take time out for rest and play. Some rescue dogs are specially trained to help comfort people. The dogs are brought to the site of a disaster so that victims can hug and talk to them. This helps people who are suffering from the fear and sadness of having gone through a disaster.

After undergoing special training for two years or more, rescue dogs have to pass difficult tests, such as safely climbing up ladders and through tunnels. They must obey a handler's commands without being distracted by other sounds or activities, and they must go only where their handlers indicate. When rescue dogs find survivors, they are trained to stay in one place and bark for thirty seconds.

Four-Legged Heroes (Continued)

Rescue dogs have saved hundreds of lives, and are important members of rescue teams. To Ed, Gus is far more than just a pet. "Gus really lives up to being called man's best friend," he says with pride.

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