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Fire-Fighting Dogs: Sniffing Out Arson, Wildfires, and More

By [Mary Robins](#)

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[working dogs](#), [wildfires](#), [detection dogs](#)

With wildfire season stretching longer each year, dog lovers in fire regions should always make sure they know [how to keep their dog safe](#) if a blaze breaks out. But what about all the ways dogs have kept humans safe from fire over the years?

That's right: man's best friend has long been a fire-fighting ally. Today, ingenious dog-canine teams are finding ever-newer ways to pair up against fire.

Dalmatians and the Fire Service

The [Dalmatian](#) running alongside the fire truck is [an American icon](#) . It all goes back to the 1700s, when English aristocrats would keep Dalmatians to run alongside their horse-drawn carts, chasing off other dogs and any other possible frights along the way. But why Dalmatians? Partly because they're excellent companions and very intelligent, with a lot of energy. Dalmatian lore, albeit unproven, also has it that these famously spotted dogs form especially close bonds with horses.

By the 1870s, the New York Fire Department was using Dalmatians to run ahead of their (still horse-drawn) fire trucks. It was the start of a lasting relationship. Even when engines replaced the horses, firefighters kept the Dalmatians around as faithful firehouse dogs. Famously, after the Ladder 20 division of FDNY lost seven members in the 9/11 attacks, the Rochester Fire Department gifted them a Dalmatian puppy as a support dog and companion. That happy dog, "Twenty," [lived until 2018](#) , enjoying a whole lot of love and attention from her firefighting friends.

Courtesy of the AKC Library and Archives

Swedish Dogs Prevent Wildfires

So we know dogs are super helpful in supporting the humans who fight fires. But can they fight fire themselves? You bet!

When firefighters tackle a wildfire, defeating the flames is only the first part of the job. Any embers or hotspots that aren't properly extinguished could flare up again in the coming days or weeks, and spark

another fire. The trouble is, it can be very hard to find these hotspots. Therefore, this last stage of firefighting is often a costly and time-consuming process. Unless you're a dog. We all know by now that dogs' senses of smell give them superhuman abilities to sniff out disease, drugs, explosives — and, it turns out, embers and hotspots, which they can smell days before they're likely to start burning again. In Sweden, [dog owners can now have their dogs certified to sniff out embers](#) and prevent wildfires before they start up again.