

Police Service Dogs Killed in an Over-heated Vehicle

By Terry Fleck

Although no one tracks this information, I would estimate that about twelve (12) to eighteen (18) police service dogs are killed per year in an over-heated vehicle, in the United States. Although those numbers are small in relationship to the total amount of dogs in our industry, this is not acceptable.

First, let's look at the negative consequences:

- The financial loss of a \$20,000 law enforcement tool;
- The psychological effects of the dog's death on the dog's handler;
- The negative local, State and national media attention;
- Powerful animal rights activists, such as PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), becoming involved in both expanded media coverage and possible criminal prosecution of the dog's handler for animal abuse / neglect;
- The potential State criminal ramifications upon the handler for animal abuse / neglect;
- The K-9 has suffered a horrific way of dying.

It is time to recognize and deal with the fact that any K-9 unit vehicle's air conditioning system can, and has, failed. Relying solely upon a vehicle's air conditioning system has proven to be fatal to numerous police service dogs. Your dog could be next to die, with you facing the consequences, as stated above.

In addition, there is a Code of Federal Regulations that gives us guidance on proper temperature ranges for a dog:

Code of Federal Regulations Section 9 CFR 3.15:

Primary conveyances (motor vehicle, rail, air, and marine).

(e) During surface transportation, auxiliary ventilation, such as fans, blowers or air conditioning, must be used in any animal cargo space containing live dogs or

cats when the ambient temperature within the animal cargo space reaches 85 [degrees]F (29.5 [degrees]C). Moreover, the ambient temperature may not exceed 85 [degrees]F (29.5 [degrees]C) for a period of more than 4 hours; nor fall below 45 [degrees]F (7.2 [degrees]C) for a period of more than 4 hours. The preceding requirements are in addition to, not in place of, all other requirements pertaining to climatic conditions in parts 2 and 3 of this chapter.

These accidental police service dog deaths can be reduced in several ways:

K-9 VEHICLE HEAT ALARM SYSTEMS:

There are several of these heat alarm systems. It is my opinion that any heat alarm system requires a minimum of five (5) components:

1. At least two (2) windows that automatically roll down, allowing air to enter and exit the vehicle;
2. Multiple alerting systems, to notify the handler;
3. Minimally, one (1) high-output fan that automatically activates to assist with the exchange of air;
4. The system activates at approximate eighty-five (85) degrees F (climate specific to your area);
5. An internal system test, to insure proper operation.

I would estimate that most heat alarm system failures are a result of two issues:

1. Improper installation:
The system must be installed to the manufacturer's specifications;
2. Operator (handler) error:
The handler must operate the system to manufacturer's recommendations.

K-9 VEHICLE HEAT ALARM SYSTEM MANUFACTURERS:

Although there are several manufacturers, I believe the three largest manufacturers of these systems are listed below. These systems contain the five

(5) minimum system requirements, as described above. They are listed with their recommendations of the system. They are listed in alphabetical order:

Ace K-9:

www.acek9.com

* Heat Alarm System: Model "K9 Heat Alarm® PRO" (includes pager), price \$639.

* Fan: Model "HA-FKT-I", price \$225.

Total price: \$864.

* Other options:

* K-9 Cellular Communicator: (the alarm calls a phone number(s) to notify), price \$499.

* K-9 Radio Voice Module: (the alarm is broadcast over the agency's radio system to notify), price \$420.

Criminalistics, Inc:

www.criminalisticsinc.com

* Heat Alarm System: Model "Hotdog", price \$366.46.

* Fan: Model "Maxi Thin", 10" fan, price \$320, 15" fan, price \$325 (15" recommended, if the vehicle will accommodate the larger fan).

* Pager system: price \$241.50.

Total price: \$932.96

* Other options:

* Call Out (Cellular) System: (the alarm calls a phone number(s) to notify), price \$420.

* Radio Alert System: (the alarm is broadcast over the agency's radio system to notify), price varies dependent on vehicle / radio system.

Ray Allen:

www.rayallen.com

* Heat Alert System: Model "F2" (includes pager), price \$695.

* Fan: Model "MD 10 F", price \$59.95.

Total price: \$754.95.

* Other options:

* Cell phone based notification system is currently being developed.

NOTE: It should be noted that as technology continues to improve, all heat alarm system manufacturers are reporting less "false alarms" in their systems. This is significant, as these "false alarms" have historically frustrated handlers and their solution was to shut the heat alarm system off.

ADDITIONAL K-9 VEHICLE EQUIPMENT OPTIONS:

In addition, there are other options to reduce temperature in a K-9 vehicle that are worth considering:

- Window tint;
- K-9 vehicle hood louvers that allow heat to dissipate from the engine compartment;
- A large electric radiator fan that draws additional air into the radiator.

REMOVING THE DOG FROM THE VEHICLE:

This is an obvious solution. Unfortunately, the reality of our industry is that this simply may not be possible in an in-field situation. However, it could be an excellent solution at a fixed work place site.

CANINE INSERT (CAGE):

The U.S. canine industry standard is a canine insert (cage) within the K-9 vehicle. There are several reasons for this, one of which is this over-heating issue.

About 80% of U.S. agencies have a full size insert, allowing maximum room for the dog. The balance of the agencies, 20%, have "split" inserts, typically giving two-thirds of the back area for the dog and one-third of the back area for a

prisoner. These “split” inserts only allow about three (3) feet of room for the dog in a law enforcement sedan. That is why their main usage has been in SUV’s.

Most veterinarians agree that having the dog in this cramped space for prolonged periods, such as a handler’s shift, is not healthy for the dog. In addition, a critical issue is the body temperature of a working dog. A working dog must be able to dissipate heat. Heat may build up in the dog from working activity or heat in the vehicle. One of the ways a dog dissipates heat is stretching out. The dog should have enough room in the insert to stretch out to dissipate heat.

There is a Code of Federal Regulations that addresses this issue:

Code of Federal Regulations Section 9 CFR 3.14:

Primary enclosures used to transport live dogs and cats.

(e) Space and placement. (1) Primary enclosures used to transport live dogs and cats must be large enough to ensure that each animal contained in the primary enclosure has enough space to turn about normally while standing, to stand and sit erect, and to lie in a natural position.

Most veterinarians agree that a “natural position” is described two-fold. In a cold environment, the natural position of a dog is to curl up, to preserve heat. In a hot environment, the natural position of a dog is to lay on their side and stretch out, to dissipate heat.

Most of the “split” inserts manufacturers do not make them for sedans. If they do make them for sedans, they do not recommend them for this usage and only recommend them for SUV’s.

SUMMARY:

As temperatures continue to rise nationwide, the number of police service dogs killed in an over-heated vehicle will probably increase. It is time for K-9 handlers

and their agencies to realize and deal with this fact. This is a two-fold responsibility, the handler and the agency's.

One of the biggest issues that agencies experience is lack of money. As you see, these heat alarm systems are not inexpensive. However, in my opinion, our industry will lose more dogs in heated-related death, than any other cause each year. Therefore, common sense would dictate that the number one priority in saving our dog's life is preventing this heat-related cause of death.

Many agencies conduct fund raisers to raise money to purchase these heat alarm systems. Preventing a police service dog's death is normally an easy sell to the public that the dog serves. Many of us have already personally experienced this in obtaining donations for bullet-resistant K-9 vests.

I strongly urge K-9 handlers, supervisors and administrators to realize the consequences of the result of killing a police service dog in this situation, and use their common sense and monies to help resolve this extremely important humane issue.