



Pennsylvania Search and Rescue Council (PSARC)

Air Scent K-9 Specialist

Performance Expectation Guidelines

Section I - General

A. Purpose:

The Pennsylvania Search and Rescue Council Search and Rescue Dog (canine) / Handler performance expectations are developed:

1. To provide user agencies and SAR managers with recommended performance expectations for both the SAR dog and the handler at a search scene
2. To provide an operating guideline for teams that are in line with nationally accepted guidelines for the performance of SAR teams
3. To designate minimum skill standards for Search and Rescue Canines in Pennsylvania
4. For the purpose of this document, an Air Scent Team is defined as one dog and one handler who train and work together.

Section II – Definitions:

Air Scent Dog / Area Search Dog – This canine is used to search a specified area. The air scent or area search dog works off lead and searches for clues such as human scent in the area. The canine has a distinct human scent indication readable by the handler. When the canine finds a missing person he/she will perform a re-find, or provide another means of signaling the handler, until the handler and subject are together.

Handler – The human member of the team. This person is responsible for the canine at all times

Human Scent Indication/Alert – A readable action performed by the canine which indicates to the handler that the canine has located the lost subject.

- Passive Indication – the canine indicates to the handler the positive scent source through a passive act such as sit or down.
- Active Indication – the canine indicates to the handler positive scent source through active means such as barking touching or refind.
- Bark Alert - after finding the lost subject, the canine remains at the subject's location and barks until the handler or other searchers come to that location.

Re-find – After finding the lost subject, the canine will return to the handler, perform a distinct trained indication.

Unit – A group of SAR handlers and their canine partners that train and work together. Support personnel may be included.

Section III - Performance Expectations Guidelines:

1. Handler

A handler is cooperative and professional. He/She has must meet the qualifications of their Team for search/evaluation. The handler must not participate in any search efforts independent of their search team/unit. This must be confirmed verbally or in writing with an office from the Handler/Canine, Team prior to testing.

2. Canine

The canine is friendly with people, non-aggressive toward other animals, and capable of working off lead (unless being used as a trailing dog). The canine is 18 months or older. The canine is expected to be under the handler's control at all times, and capable of being controlled by others, if necessary.

Adaptability: Responding SAR Dog Teams are expected to search under all weather conditions, and at night as well as day. The dog teams are required to work regardless of distracting conditions such as dust, noise, crowds, machinery, and the presence of other animals or humans.

Portability: The SAR Dog Teams must be able to travel in all vehicles likely to be used by the unit. Special training is provided for operations in and around helicopters.

Equipment: The handler is equipped and clothed in a manner consistent with the search terrain and weather conditions. Handler must assure that the appropriate field pack is available to the team and contain supplies for self and canine, rendering the team self-sufficient on a task in the field for 24 hours.

Documentation: The handler must present a minimum of six months (recent) training log. This log must include date, time, location and type of training, as well as a general description of the event such as ground cover, time of day, how the canine worked, successes, challenges, areas for improvement and other information deemed appropriate.

Communication: The SAR Dog Unit must be proficient in proper communication protocol.

Section IV - K-9 Air Scent Specialist Evaluation Prerequisites:

A. The handler will provide the proper documentation to show the successful completion of:

1. NASAR SARTECH II or other acceptable standards as defined by PSARC (card or certificate)
2. NIMS IS-100, IS-200 and IS-700 (certificate required)
3. American Red Cross (or equivalent) CPR (current card)
4. Wilderness First Aid (current card)
5. AKC-Canine Good Citizen (certificate) required for all canines who will work off-leash.
6. Caine Health certificate from a licensed veterinarian listing current vaccines and/or titers. Current Rabies vaccine is required by law in the state of PA.
7. Crime Scene Preservation

B. The handler will present evidence of the completion of training by a veterinarian, or other qualified individual in canine first aid and CPR demonstrating the following:

1. General health of the working dog including nutrition and physical fitness
2. How to muzzle a dog / how to create a gauze muzzle. The importance of muzzling an injured dog and proper restraint.

3. Normal ranges: heart rate, respiration, rectal temperature
4. How to check: heart rate, pulse, capillary refill
5. Life threatening Injuries: hypothermia, hyperthermia, checking ABC's (Airways, Breathing, Circulation)
6. How to perform CPR, rescue breathing, Heimlich
7. Proper carry methods for sick/injured dogs from the field
8. Wound Care (how to stop bleeding until veterinary care can be obtained): abrasions, lacerations, punctures, deep wounds,
9. Impalements
10. Eye injuries
11. Sprains, strains, fractures: how to splint
12. Wild animal encounters: bite wounds (Rabies), snakes, porcupines
13. Insects: bee stings, spider bites, ticks (Lyme disease) and mosquitoes (heartworm)
14. Vomiting / Diarrhea

C. The handler will demonstrate sufficient knowledge in the following categories, by successfully completing a written exam administered by the PSARC evaluator(s) during the evaluation process and achieve a score of 80% or higher.

1. Canine Assessment and First Aid
2. Canine training and documentation
3. Scent Theory and Movement
4. Environmental Factors Affecting Scent
5. Search Strategy and Safety
6. Communications
7. Crime Scene Preservation

D The Handler will present all training log documentation as outlined in section III to the PSARC evaluator(s) upon request.

E. The handler and canine must be in good physical condition and able to complete an assigned task. The handler must be able to work a SAR dog in moderate terrain for a minimum of eight (8) hours in a twenty-four (24) hour period.

F. The handler must demonstrate the canine's agility on unusual or unsteady surfaces, such as slippery wood, loose gravel, boulders or debris; and exhibit the canine's willingness to cross streams. The canine must demonstrate a willingness to respond to handler instruction and direction.

G. The handler must be able to recognize when the team is not working efficiently. It is the handler's responsibility to control their canine and always provide for its care and safety at all times. If any behavior problems arise, it is the handler's responsibility to resolve the problem. The handler must be able to interact and work effectively with other SAR resources.

H. The handler can demonstrate reading a map and compass/GPS unit to navigate during the day or night and identify and document the course taken during the search. The handler is able to read topographic maps and relate the actual terrain to the map. The handler is able to report to the command post, their location and the location of clues in terms of map coordinates. At the end of their operation period, the handler will be prepared to be debriefed by the search planning section. The handler is able to demonstrate how to document their search activity onto an incident operational map, including route taken, areas left uncovered, alerts, clues, wind direction and probability of detection

- I. The handler will be able to identify and protect the scene when a clue or the lost subject is found.
- J. The handler is responsible, as task leader, for ensuring the highest level of medical care available is provided to the subject until further assistance arrives.
- K. It is recommended, that the handler successfully complete courses such as Managing the Lost Person Incident or Managing Search Operations to fully understand the handling of the lost person incident.

Section V - Search Applications - Testing

A. Area Search – Rural or Wilderness

The following problems represent typical searching scenarios in rural or wilderness situations.

In each of the problems the subject must be:

- Placed a minimum of 30 minutes prior to the start of the search.
- Either camouflaged / hidden from view under natural material; elevated in a tree / structure no higher than 5 ft; or well-hidden in dark clothing.

1. Hasty Search problem:

(A path, trail, logging road or the like, not less than one-half (1/2) mile long and not longer than one (1) mile long.) The subject will be placed within 30 feet off of the trail. The handler must describe the canine's human scent indication, recognize the human scent indication and follow the canine to the subject. The handler must assess the subject for injury, accurately place the subject on the map, call the coordinates into the base and recommend any medical assistance required. handler and canine partner will be evaluated using a maximum time limit (1 hour)

2. Area problem:

(An area of no less than 80 acres to 120 acres, dependent on terrain.) The Handler must evaluate information provided regarding missing subject, determine search strategy, and search the area for the subject. The handler directs search activity according to wind, terrain and cover. The handler must identify canine's human scent indication and follow the canine to the subject. The canine must make a clear indication, re-find or bark and eagerly move into the subject. The handler must assess subject, identify location, contact base with location and medical assessment. The handler and canine will be evaluated using a maximum time limit (3 hours)

3. Night Problem: - Required for first time PSARC evaluation or additional PSARC evaluations that are expired by more than six months

(An area no less than 20 acres.) The handler must evaluate information provided regarding missing subject, determine search strategy, and search the area for the subject. The handler directs search activity according to wind, terrain and cover. The handler must identify the canine's human scent indication and follow the canine to the subject. The canine must make a clear indication, re-find or bark and eagerly move into the subject. The handler must assess subject, identify location, contact base with location and medical assessment. The handler and canine will be evaluated using maximum time limit (1 ½ hours)

Section VI Evaluation Procedure:

A. Briefing:

The Evaluator will brief the handler on subject description, condition, point last seen, mental state, known hazards, and other important data. Handler will be provided with a topographical map of the area to be searched. The handler will provide briefing as the task leader and describe his or her search strategy.

B. The evaluation will be terminated under the following conditions:

1. Failure by handler to present for evaluation with appropriate attire and supplies for self and canine partner
2. Rough or inappropriate treatment of the dog by the handler
3. Unsafe changes in terrain or weather
4. Failure to complete the task and locate the subject in the designated time.
5. Inability of the handler to report the location of the subject on the map to the evaluator.
6. Evaluator can stop test if the dog appears to be suffering from heat exhaustion or has an injury that the handler does not recognize or ignores.

PSARC Evaluations will NOT be performed for independent Canine Handlers.

The SAR Canine Team must pass field evaluations, which replicate situations they are likely to encounter during a search.

The SAR Canine Team shall pass a re-evaluation every two (2) years.