

**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

**Section II Agency Expectations**

This section provides user agencies with the capabilities that are expected from the SAR Dog/Handler Teams and Units. Agencies are encouraged to identify local SAR Dog/Handler Units and develop a working relationship. Individuals not affiliated with a SAR Dog Unit should be scrutinized carefully.

**A. Definitions:**

Air Scent Dog / Area Search Dog – This canine is used to search a specified area. It is not expected that an area search dog will require a scent article prior to searching as he/she is generally not scent specific, but one may be used at the discretion of the handler. The air scent or area search dog generally 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. The canine performs a re-find, or provides another means of signaling the handler, until the handler and subject are together.

Bark Find – the canine remains at the found subject's location and barks until the handler or other searchers come to that location.

Re-find – This is a process that consists of the canine returning to the handler, after finding the lost subject, performing for the handler a definitive signal and leading the handler back to the subject.

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

Tracking/Trailing Dog – This type of canine is generally used to identify a particular subject by scent and is considered a scent specific canine. This canine, working on or off lead, requires a scent article from the lost subject to begin searching. The canine follows the scent trail until it identifies the lost subject.

Air Scent Team – For the purpose of this document, a team is defined as one dog and one handler who normally train and work together.

Trailing Team – Same as above, but may include one dog, one handler and one navigator.

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

Unit – A group of SAR Dog/Handler teams which normally train and work together. Support personnel may be included.

## **B. Performance:**

### **1. Handler**

A handler is cooperative and professional. He/She has met the qualifications of the organization to be assigned search responsibilities and is able to control the canine at all times. The handler does not participate in any search independent of the designated search management agency.

### **2. Canine**

The canine must be friendly with people and capable of working off lead (unless being used as a trailing dog). The canine is expected to be sufficiently obedience trained, to be under the handler's control at all times, and capable of being controlled by others, if necessary.

## **C. Adaptability:**

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

## **D. Portability:**

The SAR Dog Teams must be able to travel by boat, aircraft and a variety of ground vehicles. Training includes all transportation vehicles likely to be used by the unit. Special training is provided for operations in and around helicopters.

## **E. Equipment:**

The SAR Dog Team is equipped and clothed in a manner consistent with the search terrain and weather conditions. The handler provides equipment/supplies for his/her canine for the duration of his/her assignment at the search. The handler must be in proper field gear for the evaluation, appropriate to weather and terrain. Handler must assure that the appropriate field pack for the evaluation is with the team. The handler must carry supplies for self and canine rendering the team self sufficient in the field for 24 hours and on incident for 72 hours.

## **F. Communication:**

The SAR Dog Unit must be licensed and equipped to use portable communications network. All personnel in the unit are trained on proper communication protocol for their own use and for working with other agencies. Proper protocol and etiquette is practiced during training and carried over into actual missions.

## **Section III Performance Expectations**

### **A. Handler:**

1. The handler must demonstrate successful completion of the DCNR Field Team Leader or NASAR SAR-TECH II evaluation (card or certificate); and posses NIMS IS-100, IS-200 and IS-700 (certificates required).
2. The handler must demonstrate successful completion of an American Red Cross (or equivalent) Standard First Aid and CPR course (current card) and present evidence of the completion of training by a veterinarian in canine 1<sup>st</sup> aid and CPR demonstrating the following:
  - a. General health of the working dog including nutrition and physical fitness

- b. How to muzzle a dog / how to create a gauze muzzle. The importance of muzzling an injured dog and proper restraint.
- c. Normal ranges: heart rate, respiration, rectal temperature
- d. How to check: heart rate, pulse, capillary refill
- e. Life threatening Injuries: checking ABC's (Airways, Breathing, Circulation)
- f. How to perform CPR, rescue breathing, Heimlich
- g. Proper carry methods for sick/injured dogs from the field
- h. Wound Care(how to stop bleeding until veterinary care can be obtained): abrasions, lacerations, punctures, deep wounds, impalements
- i. Eye injuries
- j. Sprains, strains, fractures: how to splint
- k. Wild animal encounters: bite wounds(and Rabies), snakes, porcupines
- l. Insects: bee stings, spider bites, ticks(Lyme disease) and mosquitoes(heartworm)
- m. Vomiting / Diarrhea

(First Aid For Search and Rescue Canines and Other Working Dogs; written by Karen Dashfield DVM is highly regarded text on this subject)

3. The handler must be able to identify and protect the scene when a clue or the lost subject is found. It is suggested the Handler take a Scene Awareness and Preservation Course.
4. The handler must demonstrate sufficient knowledge in the following categories, by successfully completing a written exam (achieving a score of 80% or higher).
  - a. Canine Assessment and First Aid
  - b. Canine training and documentation
  - c. Scent Theory and Movement
  - d. Environmental Factors Affecting Scent
  - e. Search Strategy and Safety
  - f. Communications
5. The handler 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.
6. The handler must be able to recognize when the team is not working efficiently. The handler is a professional, and acts accordingly. It is the handler's responsibility to control their canine and 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.
7. The handler maintains a regular training log, which includes any training attended by the handler. This log includes date, time, location and type of training. If the particular training is with the canine, the log also includes a general description of the event such as the type of terrain and ground cover, time of day, how the canine worked, successes, challenges, areas for improvement and other information deemed appropriate. This log must be maintained neatly and made available for any evaluator or user agency upon their request.
8. The handler/team must be able to use a map and compass to navigate during the day or night, and identify and document the course taken during the search. The handler/team is able to read topographic maps and relate the actual terrain to the map. The handler/team 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/team will be prepared to be debriefed by the search planning section. The handler/team is able to translate their search activity onto an incident operational map, including route taken, areas left uncovered, alerts, clues, wind direction and probability of detection.

9. The handler is responsible for the care of himself, his canine, and the subject when found. The handler has a search pack capable of sustaining himself/herself and his/her canine for a twenty-four 24 hour period in the field.
10. It is recommended, but not required that the handler successfully complete courses such as Managing the Lost Person Incident.
11. In an area search situation, the handler is able to cover the area assigned and then determine the probability of detection for his/her search segment.

## **B. Canine**

1. All canines identified and used as SAR dogs must be non-aggressive to people and other animals. The canine is expected to be under the handler's control at all times and capable of being controlled by others, if necessary.
2. The canine must be in good physical condition and have all current vaccinations. The canine is capable of working with the handler in moderate terrain, a minimum of eight (8) hours in a twenty-four (24) hour period.
3. The handler and canine must have achieved the AKC-Canine Good Citizen certificate or nationally recognized equivalent prior to the date of evaluation and present a copy of the certificate; or pass an obedience/agility testing the day of the evaluation.

## **Section IV Search Applications**

### **A. Area Search – Rural or Wilderness:**

In addition to the requirements identified in Sections II and III, the team/unit is able to meet the following expectations for the specific types of search applications identified:

1. The handler understands search strategy and how best to utilize the canine in searching an assigned area. The handler is physically able to work the required shift(s) as determined by the Incident Commander.
2. The canine is physically able to work the required shift(s) as determined by the Incident Commander.
3. 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.
4. In addition to the requirements stated previously, the SAR dog Team must pass field evaluations, which replicate situations they are likely to encounter. They should be re-evaluated every three (3) years.

## Area Search Problems – Rural 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; walking; elevated in a tree / structure; 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 canine must locate the subject within about 30 feet off 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. Candidate handler and canine partner will be evaluated using a minimum and maximum time limit (10 minutes – 1 hour)

### 2. Area problem:

(An area of no less than 60 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 in to the subject. The handler must assess subject, identify location, contact base with location and medical assessment. The candidate handler and canine will be evaluated using a minimum and maximum time limit (20 minutes – 3 hours)

### 3. Night Problem:

(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 in to the subject. The handler must assess subject, identify location, contact base with location and medical assessment. The candidate handler and canine will be evaluated using a minimum and maximum time limit (20 minutes – 1 ½ hours)

## Section V 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 must at all times, demonstrate professionalism in handling the dog and support team.

### B Action that will result in failure of the team or immediate termination of the evaluation:

1. Rough or inappropriate treatment of the dog by the handler
2. Unsafe terrain or change in weather
3. Failure to complete the task in the designated time.
4. Inability of the team to locate the subject in the designated time.
5. Inability of the handler to report the location of the subject on the topo map to the evaluator.