



Standard Guide for Demonstrating Minimum Skills of Search and Rescue Dogs and Handlers¹

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1. Scope

1.1 This guide covers voluntary uniform training guidelines for dogs and handlers who engage in search and rescue (SAR) activities throughout the United States.

1.2 This guide provides a minimum set of training goals against which SAR dog teams and organizations may voluntarily evaluate their own training programs.

1.3 This guide provides a means of documenting a minimum standard for those agencies who request SAR dog resources for SAR operations and require such documentation.

1.4 Local SAR dog handlers and parent organizations are responsible for testing and verification that individual resources meet or exceed these guidelines.

1.5 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:

F 1633 Standard Guide for Land Search Techniques²

F 1848 Classification for Search and Rescue Dog Crew/Teams²

F 1879 Standard Guide for Demonstrating Obedience and Agility in Search and Rescue Dogs²

3. Terminology

3.1 Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:

3.1.1 *alert*—an indication by a dog that signals the handler that the targeted scent has been found.

3.1.2 *bringsel*—an object carried by the dog or handler that is retrieved or tugged on by the dog when the dog finds its target.

3.1.3 *refind*—an action by a free-ranging dog that is initiated after the dog finds its target and results in the dog directing the handler back to the target.

3.1.4 *return*—an action of a free-ranging dog that brings the dog back to its handler after finding its target.

3.1.5 *scent article*—an object used by search personnel to familiarize a dog with the scent of a subject.

4. Summary of Guide

4.1 This guide provides dog handlers, units and organizations in differing locales with the ability to understand and replicate skills and training required to meet these minimum guidelines.

4.2 This guide identifies a minimum set of skills that will help establish the mission readiness of a search dog crew³ for search and rescue operations.

4.3 The dog and handler skills demonstrate the crew's abilities to estimate probabilities of detection.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 This guide may be used by units, handlers, and requesting agencies when evaluating dog resources or as a basis for establishing local minimum performance guidelines or standards. All or a subst of this guide may be utilized.

5.2 Agencies and organizations who have responsibility for search and rescue operations may use this guide as a basis for developing standardized testing and certification of search dog resources.

5.3 This guide does not provide a theoretical basis for how a search dog crew works, rather it describes the minimum results desired. Definitions that are referenced are provided to develop consistency in interpretation.

5.4 Each dog team, unit or organization wishing to use this guide has the responsibility of managing and administering it. Units may wish to use evaluators from other units or organizations, or, request assistance in obtaining qualified evaluators from organizations such as the SAR Dog Section of the National Association of Search and Rescue (NASAR). This decision however, rests solely with the individual team or organization. The method of evaluation is also entirely at the discretion of each user of this guide.

6. Dog Skills

6.1 Obedience and Agility Skills:

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² *Annual Book of ASTM Standards*, Vol 13.02.

³ These Guides are currently under development

6.1.1 Dogs used in SAR operations should possess an acceptable level of agility and obedience skills such as those listed in Guide F 1879.

6.1.2 Obedience skills should ensure that the SAR dog will be under the control of the handler in a manner that allows the dog to participate in SAR operations without interfering with other search resources.

6.1.3 Agility skills should ensure the dog's ability to traverse obstacles and terrain that may be present during SAR operations.

6.1.4 The sufficiency of a dog's agility and obedience skills should be at the discretion of the agency having jurisdiction over search and rescue operations.

6.2 Communication Skills:

6.2.1 The dog should be able to indicate that it has detected the object of its search. This indication may be in the form of a classic physical alert such as a bark, whine, jump or capture of bringsel, or, in some other predetermined response that is known and can be described by the handler.

6.2.2 The dog, on command, should be able to leave a person found in order to search for additional subjects.

6.2.3 Upon finding the subject of a search, the dog should be able to execute a refind.

6.3 Working Skills:

6.3.1 Dogs should be able to work for a set duration of time without a break while maintaining optimum performance. An acceptable duration of work should be established jointly by the agency or organization utilizing these guidelines and the dog handler.

6.3.2 The dog must be able to work both during day and night and under weather and terrain conditions specified by the agency who will use the resource.

6.3.3 The dog should be under the control of the handler at all times and in a manner consistent with local conditions.

6.3.4 The dog should have the ability to be easily transported by means common to the working environment in which it will be used. This may include the back of a pick-up truck, aircraft, watercraft, snowmobile, ski-lift, ATV, or a raising or lowering system in harness. The applicable means of transportation should be determined by the agency or organization utilizing the resource.

7. Handler Skills

7.1 It is recommended that dog handlers acquire basic search and rescue skills when possible through a local and national or state affiliated, search and rescue organization. Affiliation with local SAR organizations ensures that handler skills are appropriate for local conditions and achieves a level of familiarity among all parties engaged in SAR operations.

7.2 Basic SAR Skills:

7.2.1 First Aid/Survival/Safety Skills:

7.2.1.1 The handler should demonstrate an acceptable level of training and performance of both human and canine first aid. Acceptable levels of performance should mimic the standard of care in the local community where the dog handler will work.

7.2.1.2 A handler should have the knowledge and ability to sustain themselves AND a lost person for at least 24 h with equipment they normally carry.

7.2.1.3 A handler should have the knowledge and ability to evaluate hazards, select safe routes and follow safe procedures within their assigned working environment. This could include knowledge such as an awareness of avalanche potential, the use of flotation devices during water searches, the use of latex gloves in first aid or the preservation of evidence in cadaver searching, etc).

7.2.2 *Land Navigation*—The handler should with the aid of map and compass, be able to determine their location both during day and night, directing others to their location and find the best route of travel to a given location and for segmenting search areas.

7.2.3 *Communication Skills*—The handler should have the ability to use proper local agency radio protocols in radio communications and the ability to use available communications equipment properly.

7.3 Search Management Skills:

7.3.1 The handler should be able to work with each resource under the incident command system.

7.3.2 The handler should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the environmental conditions that affect the ability of the crew to locate lost people. These conditions include knowledge of scent transport, including the effect of terrain, vegetation, and weather conditions such as convection, wind and solar insolation; the dog's and handler's physical and mental energy applied to the search; the difficulty of the cover and terrain; and the length of time from the loss to the search. The handler should be able to give the planning section a report telling how well, in percentages the chance for detection was achieved. They must also be able to mark on a map their coverage, alerts, wind direction at the time of the alerts, clues, etc.

7.3.3 A handler should be able to analyze all factors that can affect probability of detection (POD)³, for a given assignment; terrain, vegetation, slope, sun angle, cloud cover, wind, size of assignment, travel aids - and be able to adjust the dog crew's operating procedures to achieve the highest POD within the time allotted, by the planning section.

7.3.4 Handlers should be familiar with all of the typical strategies used by search and rescue teams including hasty searching, perimeter searching, track and sign cutting, contour grid searching, running ridges, running canyon bottoms, geometric gridding and combinations thereof.

7.3.5 The handler should have the ability to communicate the results of the dog crew's search efforts to search management. This should include the location of clues, the route followed, relevant meteorological conditions and an estimated POD.

7.4 *Physical Conditioning*—The handler should have the ability to effectively search in working environments requiring extended periods of strenuous and physically demanding activity and foot travel. The handler must have the ability to carry adequate survival, first aid, communications, and personnel equipment on their person for the duration of the search.

7.5 Dog Handling Skills:

7.5.1 A handler should understand and can tell others how to collect and preserve scent articles for search work.



7.5.2 A handler should be able to interpret the body language or trained responses of the search and rescue dog which indicate that the dog has detected human scent.

7.5.3 The handler should be able to communicate to the dog the end or conclusion of a search or operational period in a positive manner. This communication may be in the form of a

reward such as play or food, or via some command or action, such as removal of a harness, coat, etc.

8. Keywords

8.1 dog training; handler skills; minimum training standards

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