



Middle Creek Search & Rescue
...where teamwork is a tradition.

Dedicated and trained volunteers providing community support to South Central PA.

CANINE TEAM STANDARDS



PURPOSE

- I. To provide an operating guideline that is in line with nationally accepted guidelines (DCNR, NASAR) for the performance of MIDSAR Canine teams.
- II. The MIDSAR Canine Level 1 - Certification is designed to identify the minimum knowledge and performance skills needed by an individual and their canine partner to perform as a MIDSAR Canine Unit, and to allow that canine to be present on a search scene.
- III. The MIDSAR Canine Level 2 – Certification defines minimum performance and skill levels needed by an individual and their canine partner to perform as a fully operational MIDSAR Canine Unit. Fully operational units will be given priority during search calls.

DEFINITIONS

Air Scent Dog/Area Search Dog - This canine is used to search a specific area. It is not expected that an area search dog will require a scent article prior to searching, but one may be used at the discretion of the handler. The air scent or area search dog should generally work off lead and search for live human scent in an area. The canine should have a distinct alert readable by the handler. The canine should do a re-find, bark alert, or provide other means of alerting the handler, until the handler and subject are together.

Alert – A recognizable action initiated by the canine which indicates to the handler that the canine has located the subject.

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

Evaluator – An individual who is qualified to participate in MIDSAR Dog Team screenings, testing, and certification processes.

Re-find - This is an alert method employed by canines working off lead. After the canine has located the subject, it returns to the handler (one or more times) and leads him/her back to the lost subject.

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

Scent Discriminating Dog - This type of canine is generally used to identify a particular subject by scent. This canine, working on or off lead, requires a scent article from the lost subject to begin searching. The canine should follow the scent trail until it identifies the lost subject, or until it indicates that the trail has suddenly ended.

Tracking Dog – This scent discriminating dog traditionally works on lead and actually follows the person's footsteps in a step by step pursuit and seldom strays more than a few feet from the track. He will use both the human scent left by the passing individual and the track scent of the disturbed vegetation and soil to track his subject.

Trailing Dog – The scent discriminating trailing dog may work on or off lead. He normally works with his head down, but will raise it when crossing or working into the wind. His focus is on human scent that has settled on the ground around where the subject has traveled. He may work some distance from the actual trail, depending on the wind conditions when the trail was laid, and the age of the trail. He will tend to work the downwind side of the trail and may either cut or overshoot the corners of the subject's trail.

Training Log – Handlers are expected to keep a training log. This log should include date, time, location, and type of training. It should also include 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 should be maintained neatly and made available for any evaluator or user agency upon their request.

SAR Dog Team - For the purpose of this document, a SAR Dog (Search and Rescue Dog) team is defined as one dog and one handler who normally train and work together.

Subject – The lost or missing person(s) that the canine is trying to locate

Unit - A group of SAR Dog/Handler Teams who are assigned to work together. Support personnel who are non-canine handlers may be included.

Canine Team Active Status - In order to remain on an active status, the canine team must:

- Attend and participate in a minimum of **50%** of the MIDSAR canine team exercises each year if in training or if MIDSAR Level 1 certified
- Attend and participate in a minimum of **25%** of the MIDSAR canine team exercises each year if MIDSAR Level 2 certified
- Be a MIDSAR member in good standing
- Adhere to all guidelines in this Standard
- Pass Canine Level 1 Certification within 2 years of team participation

Canine Review Board – An appointed board of Canine Team Leaders and qualified Evaluators (must include at least one Chief Officer). The purpose of the Canine Review Board is to assist in facilitating canine team procedures, objectives and continued team development. The Canine Review Board meets at the request of MIDSAR officers and/or canine team members.

GENERAL QUALIFICATIONS

Handler

- A handler must be cooperative, professional and willing to work as a “team” member.
- Handler has met the membership qualifications of the MIDSAR organization.
- Handler is able to control the canine at all times.

Canine

- The canine must be friendly with people and tolerant of other canines.
- 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, when necessary.

GENERAL QUALIFICATIONS (continued)

Adaptability

- Responding SAR Dog Teams must be able to search under all weather conditions, and shall be able to search during the night as well as during the day.
- Canine and handler must be able to negotiate adverse terrain and work through or around barriers, whether natural or man-made.
- The dog teams must be able to work regardless of distracting conditions such as, noise, crowds, traffic, people, machinery, and the presence of other animals.

Portability

- The SAR Dog Teams should be able to travel by boat, aircraft, and a variety of motor vehicles.
- Training should include all transportation vehicles likely to be used by the unit.

Equipment

- The SAR Dog Teams must be equipped and clothed in a manner consistent with the search terrain, weather conditions, and safety standards.
- The handler must provide transportation, shelter, equipment, basic first aid, food and water for their canine during all team activities.
- Handlers shall provide a hard sided crate to be used in their vehicle for transportation and safe confinement for their dog during times of inactivity.

GENERAL PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS

Also see: "MIDSAR Canine Team New Handler Checklist"
"Proper Care and Handling of dogs at Events"

HANDLER

- The handler must meet the training qualifications as defined in the MIDSAR Standards.
- MIDSAR Canine Teams must attend a minimum of 50% of the MIDSAR Canine training events per year to remain on canine team 'active status.'
- MIDSAR Canine Teams must be minimally at a MIDSAR Level 1 Certification in order to have their canine on a search scene.
- The handler must be able to recognize when the team is not working efficiently and report that condition to the team leaders.
- The handler is a professional, and should act 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, or the canine will be dismissed.
- The handler needs to be able to recognize signs of stress, illness or fatigue in their canine and respond appropriately.
- The handler must be able to interact and work effectively with other SAR resources.
- The handler must be in good physical condition and should be able to complete an assigned task. The handler should be able to work a SAR Dog in moderate terrain for a minimum 6 hours in a 24-hour period.

GENERAL PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS (continued)

- The handler must successfully complete an American Red Cross standard first aid and CPR course (or other equivalent) and understand basic canine first aid.
- The handler must be able to report to the command post their location and the location of clues. At the end of their operation period, the handler must be prepared to be de-briefed by the search Planning Section. The handler must be 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.
- The handler is responsible for the care of himself, his canine, and the subject when found. The handler must have enough food and water, plus a search pack capable of sustaining himself and his canine, for a 24-hour period. (See equipment list in MIDSAR SOG's.)
- The handler must be able to identify and protect the crime scene when a clue or the lost subject is found. In an area search situation, the handler must be able to cover the area assigned and then be able to determine the probability of detection for his search segment.

Canine

- All canines identified as SAR Dogs, whether certified or in training, must be non-aggressive to people and tolerant of other animals. Any aggression issues will be addressed; canines who display aggressive behavior toward people will not be tolerated and will be removed from the team. Canines who display aggressive behavior towards other canines or animals will be dismissed at the discretion of the Canine Review Board.
- The canine must be sufficiently obedience trained to be under the handler's control at all times, and capable of being controlled by others, if necessary. The canine should respond quickly and eagerly to voice commands or hand signals while in the presence of other canines and people, and while under the duress of unusual noises and situations.
- The canine must be in good physical condition and have all current vaccinations. Documentation of vaccinations must be available upon request, and at time of Certification Testing. The canine must be capable of working with the handler in moderate terrain, a minimum of 6 hours in a 24-hour period.

Attendance at other team events

- A Canine must be certified in either the AKC Canine Good Citizen (CGC) or through a Therapy program such as TDI (Therapy Dog International) or Delta, before a canine will be permitted to attend team events such as fundraisers, demonstrations and team meets & greets. Puppies and young dogs that have been successfully evaluated by MIDSAR will have a grace period to attain these certifications since they are age limited, and still attend team events.
- Retired, MIDSAR-certified search canines, therapy and SAR dogs in training are permitted to attend fundraisers and demonstrations.

CERTIFICATION PROCEDURES

- Canines should take the level 1 test within one to two years from the first training session with MIDSAR.
- If a canine fails a test, they should be re-tested within 6 months.
- If a handler uses multiple canines, each canine must be tested with the handler as a team.
- If a canine has multiple handlers, each handler must be tested with the canine as a team.
- The Canine Review Board shall review the status of a canine who has not achieved MIDSAR Level 1 status within 2 years from the date of first team participation, to make a recommendation for continuing or discontinuing active status with MIDSAR.
- Testing is the responsibility of the handler who must contact team officers to request a test or re-test.
- MIDSAR will not be responsible for giving reminders or prompting the handlers about testing.
- If a team has been dropped from Canine Team Active Status, at the discretion of the MIDSAR Canine Team Officers, they may be required to be re-evaluated and/or re-tested to regain their active status.
- MIDSAR K9 Review Board may review and possibly accept a handler team's successful certification testing performed by recognized SAR K9 "master" trainers as an equivalent to MIDSAR's Level I certification. The authority to grant Level I certification based on certification testing obtained outside of MIDSAR's standards will occur on a case-by-case basis, will require the approval of the K9 team captain and either the MIDSAR chief or deputy chief, will be granted only if the certification was determined (by the MIDSAR officers) to be equal to, or more difficult than the current MIDSAR K9 standards,...

Note: Level II certification still must be completed to MIDSAR K9 standards and confirmed by MIDSAR officers.

Evaluators

- Evaluators will not assist the handler in any way including, but not limited to coaching, directing, interfering or handling the canine. Any assistance given by any evaluator will be taken as an unsuccessful attempt of the canine team and the problem being worked.
- Testing evaluations will be administered by two MIDSAR Officers who are familiar with working search dogs, including at least one Canine Team Leader, and at least one MIDSAR Chief. (Note: The MIDSAR Chief may appoint a qualified MIDSAR Officer as an evaluator in their place).

CERTIFICATION

SCENT DISCRIMINATING DOGS

- Handlers must demonstrate proficiency in collecting and handling scent material. If worked on lead, handler must be physically capable of handling a 20-30 foot lead in rough and varied terrain and handling their canine on trails of 2 to 4 hours duration. Handlers must be capable of assisting their canine over or under fences, across streams or breaks in the terrain, must be knowledgeable about and aware of visual clues in the urban and wilderness environments, and should be able to describe how their canine behaves when a subject is located. Handlers must be able to recognize scent pools and be able to assist their canine out of it if necessary.
- Canine must demonstrate the ability to take scent from a variety of scent articles. Wood, metal, soil or any material presented to it by the handler whether it is bagged or in contact with a larger object such as a door handle, windowsill, footprint on the trail, or car seat may be used. Canine must be able to find the most recent trail of a subject leaving the area from a contaminated area at least 100 feet in diameter. Canine should demonstrate a willingness to resume trailing after being rested by the handler without being re-scented (it is recommended to work towards the ability to start without re-scenting. If canine must be re-scented, handler must understand the limitations).
- The team must be able to follow a trail to locate and accurately identify the subject. Once located, the handler must notify base of the find, accurately identify the location on the map, assess the medical condition of the subject(s) and assist if necessary in removing the subject(s) from the area.
- The handler must protect any crime scene as appropriate.
- The handler must be able to tell when the canine is no longer working the trail.
- In addition to the requirements stated previously, the canine and handler, as a team, must pass field evaluations that occur in their normal geographical area of work and which replicate situations they are likely to encounter. All canine teams must be re-evaluated every two years.

AIR SCENT DOGS

- The team must be able to effectively cover their entire assigned area to locate and accurately identify the subject. Once located, the handler must notify base of the find, accurately identify the location on the map, assess the medical condition of the subject(s) and assist if necessary in removing the subject(s) from the area.
- The handler must protect any crime scene as appropriate.
- The handler must be able to tell when the canine is no longer working.
- In addition to the requirements stated previously, the canine and handler, as a team, must pass field evaluations that occur in their normal geographical area of work and which replicate situations they are likely to encounter. All canine teams must be re-evaluated every two years.

CERTIFICATION (continued)**LEVEL 1 – AIR SCENTING**

Area problem: An area of approximately – 30 acres. Handler should evaluate information provided regarding missing subjects, determine search strategy, and search the area for the subjects. One subject will be placed at least 30 minutes prior to the start of the search. The subject will be well-hidden, wearing dark or camouflage clothing, and will remain stationary until found. Handler should direct search activity according to wind, terrain and cover. Handler must identify canine's alert and should follow the canine in to the subject. The canine should make a clear alert, and should eagerly move in to the subject. The handler should assess the subject, accurately place the subject on the map, and call this information into command. Handler and canine must complete this scenario and report the area has been cleared within the **maximum time limit of 90 minutes**

LEVEL 2 – AIR SCENTING

Area problem: An area of approximately - 40 acres. Handler should evaluate information provided regarding missing subjects, determine search strategy, and search the area for the subjects. Two to four subjects (actual number not known to the handler) will be placed at least 30 minutes prior to the start of the search. The subjects will be -hidden, wearing dark or camouflage clothing, and will remain stationary until found. Handler should direct search activity according to wind, terrain and cover. Handler must identify canine's alert and should follow the canine in to the subjects. The canine should make a clear alert and should eagerly move in to subjects. The handler should assess each subject, accurately place the subject on the map, and call this information into command. Handler and canine must complete this scenario and report that the area has been cleared within the **maximum time limit of 3 hours**.

Re-evaluation: Documented every two years by MIDSAR officers. A six month grace period for re-evaluation may be granted at the discretion of the Canine Review Board.

LEVEL 1 – TRAILING

Semi-Rural Trail: A trail that is at least 4 to 8 hours old, approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile in length, over varied terrain, in a semi-rural environment. It should cross at least one road (paved or gravel) or stream. It may or may not follow a wood's trail and shall have at least 3 turns. The canine should make a clear alert on the subject, provide a re-find if necessary, and should eagerly move in to subject. Handler should assess the subject; identify their location, contact base with location and medical assessment. Handler and canine must complete this scenario within the **maximum time limit of 90 minutes**.

CERTIFICATION (continued)**LEVEL 2 – TRAILING**

Wilderness Trail: A trail that is at least 12 to 18 hours old, 1 to 1½ miles in length through varied terrain and vegetation. It should follow a dirt road or trail for part of it, have at least 5 turns and generally meander as a lost person may do. The subject and a second person will start walking together and split apart at some point along the trail. The subject will be concealed and not readily visible from 50 feet. The canine must clearly identify the correct subject, provide a clear alert, and should eagerly move in to subject. Handler should assess the subject; identify their location, contact base with location and medical assessment. Handlers must acquire their own scent article. Handler and canine must complete this scenario within the **maximum time limit of 2 hours**.

OR

Urban Trail: A trail that is at least 10 to 12 hours old and ¾ to 1 miles in length. It should start in a paved and highly contaminated area, contain a variety of surfaces including but not exclusively, macadam, pavement, grass (field), foot trails and sidewalks, and follow a meandering course. The subject will be concealed and not readily visible from 50 feet. The canine should make a clear alert, perform a re-find if needed, and should eagerly move in to subject. Handler should assess the subject; identify their location, contact base with location and medical assessment. Handlers must acquire their own scent article. Handler and canine must complete this scenario within the **maximum time limit of 2 hours**.

Re-evaluation: Documented every two years by MIDSAR officers. A six month grace period for re-evaluation may be granted at the discretion of the Canine Review Board.

Note: MIDSAR photo ID cards, identifying the handler and the canine, with a description of their certification, will be issued to canine teams after successfully completing one of the above testing scenarios. Team identification shall be brought to searches, trainings, demonstrations, meets & greets and fundraisers.