

National Search Dog Alliance (NSDA)

Area Search Field Test with Live Subject & Cadaver

1. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

- This test has been promulgated by NSDA to assess the handler/K-9 team's ability as to operational suitability for typical large area search incidents for a live subject with the possibility that the subject may be deceased.
- The NSDA prerequisites represent those items that we believe will allow the candidate to have the opportunity to safely and successfully complete this test.

2. OBJECTIVE

- This test of an Area Search K-9 team (handler/K-9) will demonstrate:
 - ✓ the team's ability to successfully search an eighty (80) acre wilderness area within a two (2) hour period,
 - ✓ the ability of the K-9 to identify the location of one (1) hidden subject and one (1) concealed cadaver source, with a trained final response that does not disturb the cadaver source.
- The handler shall be responsible for formulating, articulating and executing their search strategy and providing the Evaluator with a description of their K-9's final responses.

3. GENERAL GUIDELINES

- You may be instructed to submit copies of your documents to the Evaluator via mail or email prior to the testing event. The documentation shall not be returned.
- The test will not be given if all copies of the prerequisite paperwork have not been presented. Testing shall be of the handler and K-9 only.
- This test is designed to simulate an actual search and not team training. The handler will be asked to approach it as such.
- The handler shall deploy the K-9 on its wilderness search command.
- No electronic collars are permitted to be operational while the K-9 team is being evaluated. The K-9 may wear an electronic collar as long as the transmitter is turned off and given to the Evaluator until the test is completed.
- The location of the subject and cadaver source must be based on the K-9's trained final response.
- A team shall not be required to test in conditions other than those in which it would be reasonably expected to search.
- The handler shall mark the area of the K-9's final response within three (3) feet of the cadaver source, utilizing surveying flags or large washers with flagging tape attached.
- Females in season shall be tested last.

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4. FINAL RESPONSE PRE-TEST REQUIREMENT

- Before this test is taken, the testing team must demonstrate the K-9's "Final Response" behavior (the K-9's trained means of signaling to the handler that it has found the subject and is a clear, distinct, readable action not regularly displayed). A pre-test is not required if the team can show proof of NSDA certification in Area I or Area II.
- The pre-test is not a demonstration of the K-9's ability to search but rather a demonstration of the K-9's behavior and final response upon locating a hidden subject. Before deploying the K-9, the handler must be able to articulate how the K-9 will perform its final response when the K-9 has found a subject. The final response for the subject shall be consistent with that described by the handler.
- The K-9 shall be started downwind and sent a minimum of twenty-five (25) yards toward a specific hiding place to find a concealed subject. It does not matter if the K-9 finds the subject by tracking or by air scent, only that the K-9 have ample opportunity to be able to detect and find the subject by using scent, without help from the handler. The handler may only walk toward the subject enough to guide the K-9 into a downwind position. The handler may not approach the subject nor direct the K-9 to the subject. The handler will not in any way cue the K-9's final response.
- The pre-test subject may be known to the K-9, however the pre-test subject should not be used as the Field Test subject.
- The Final Response Pre-test should be given only once to the team and should be set up to be completed in less than five (5) minutes. In extenuating circumstances, it will be the Evaluator's decision to offer a re-test. If the pre-test is not passed, the team will not be allowed to take the Field Test.

5. EVALUATORS

- The evaluation shall be conducted by a designated NSDA Principal Evaluator, with the option of a second Evaluator or Apprentice Evaluator.
- The Evaluator(s) shall terminate the test if, in their opinion, it becomes hazardous to any of the participants.
- The Evaluator shall remain within normal speaking distance of the handler at all times during the evaluation, in a manner not to interfere with the work of the handler/K-9 team.
- The Evaluator(s) shall have discretion in the administration and evaluation of all portions of the test.

6. TEST SITE PREPARATION

- The optimum size of the search area shall be eighty (80) acres.
- Adjustments to the search area size shall be made using the NSDA Acreage Adjustment Chart for this test, along with the experience and knowledge of the Evaluator.
- Live Subject:
 - ✓ One (1) live subject will be placed in the area thirty (30) minutes to one (1) hour prior to testing.

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- ✓ The subject shall not be visible from a distance of twenty (20) feet.
- Cadaver Source:
 - ✓ One (1) cadaver source shall be well concealed on the surface.
 - ✓ The cadaver source shall be placed not less than one (1) hour prior to the test nor longer than twelve (12) hours.
 - ✓ Cadaver sources shall be comprised of one or more of the following. The total used will be no less than five (5) pounds.
 - a. Wet and/or dry bone.
 - b. Wet and/or dry blood. It could be fresh or old blood.
 - c. Tissue, no less than a pound and a half (i.e. whole placenta)
 - d. Other human matter.
 - ✓ An effort shall be made to utilize multiple sources on the test.
- The boundaries of the search area may be either obvious natural features (streams, ridgelines, etc.), manmade boundaries like roads or trails, marked or flagged. Boundary lines shall be marked on the map provided to the handler. The corners of the search area shall be clearly marked.
- If a boundary is not easily found or clearly marked, upon questioning by the handler, the Evaluator may assist the handler with finding the boundary.
- Search areas should be comprised of light to medium ground cover or trees.

7. DISTRACTIONS

- Clues and distractions shall not be intentionally placed in the search area. Although handlers should be clue aware, clue awareness is not a criterion for successful completion of this test.
- There may be natural distracters such as other animals (dead or alive), terrain, weather and any other distracter one would find on an actual search.

8. EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS

- NSDA has published a NSDA has published a recommended equipment list but a pack check is not a test prerequisite. For this test, it is the responsibility of the handler to be adequately equipped and attired, including adequate first aid supplies and water for the handler/K-9 team.
- The use of GPS by the handler is recommended; however, the use of GPS is not required.

9. SAFETY

- The handler and the subject must be properly dressed for the conditions and have adequate water and other necessary equipment for the duration of the test.
- Lack of adequate equipment by the handler may be a reason for the exam to be stopped and considered a failure. For example, if the handler runs out of water, the Evaluator may stop the test if there is a danger to the health or well-being of the handler and/or K-9.

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- The Evaluator must be able to contact the handler and the subject by radio, on separate channels. Any hazards in the area will be described to the handler and the subject before they enter the area.

10. BRIEFING OF HANDLER

- At the test site, the Evaluator shall carefully explain the area's boundaries and shall provide the handler with a good quality aerial or topographic map of the area with the boundaries drawn on it. The handler may request the GPS co-ordinates or have them downloaded into the handlers GPS unit.
- The handler shall address the Evaluator as though the Evaluator were a search manager unfamiliar with search K-9 teams. The handler shall then introduce the team, explain its capabilities, and ask questions pertinent to the assignment as though it were an actual search.
- The handler shall describe how the K-9 will indicate the presence of a live person and how the K-9 indicates the presence of a hidden cadaver source and what the trained final response(s) will be. The response must not overly disturb the source.

11. TEST TIMING

- The handler shall have a maximum time of fifteen (15) minutes to break the K-9 prior to the beginning of the test. The handler shall then explain their plan to the Evaluator.
- Timing shall commence after the handler has advised the Evaluator of the search plan and has deployed the K-9 in the search area.
- The live subject and the cadaver scent source shall both be located within two (2) hours. Breaks will be included in the two (2) hour time limit.
- Successful finding of the subject and the cadaver source results in the conclusion of the test, even if the target time limit has not elapsed.

12. KNOWLEDGE AND PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

- During or at the conclusion of the test, as applicable, the handler should demonstrate:
 - ✓ the ability to work and control the K-9 to effectively search the area.
 - ✓ that the handler and K-9 have adequate agility and stamina for a search of two (2) hours.
 - ✓ that the handler recognizes when the K-9 is alerting to cadaver scent and to human scent.
 - ✓ the handler demonstrates navigational skills in covering the area
 - ✓ the ability to judge sweeps of areas as to their suitability to the prevailing conditions.
 - ✓ that the handler recognizes when either member of the K-9 team is working ineffectively and take action to compensate for or remedy the situation.
 - ✓ that the handler and K-9 have the ability to work effectively to find a person and the cadaver source, with an additional person or persons accompanying the K-9 team.

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- ✓ that the handler behaves professionally during the test.
- The handler will also inform the Evaluator of changes made to his/her initial search plan.
- At the conclusion of the test, the handler shall report clearly on the map the following information:
 - ✓ areas searched
 - ✓ areas not searched
 - ✓ the location of the subject
 - ✓ the location of the cadaver source

12. TERMINATION OF FIELD TEST

- The test may be terminated and considered a failure under the following conditions:
 - ✓ A false final response is given by the K-9 and called by the handler.
 - ✓ The handler cues the K-9s final response.
 - ✓ The K-9 fails to give the final response when the subject is located or the cadaver source is located.
 - ✓ The K-9 is unable to work past a natural distracter.
 - ✓ The K-9 urinates/marks or defecates on or within three (3) feet of the cadaver source.
 - ✓ The handler marks the source outside of the three (3) foot radius.
 - ✓ The K-9 attempts to ingest cadaver source.
 - ✓ If needed during the test, the handler is not carrying the proper equipment (water, first aid, etc.).
 - ✓ The Evaluator determines the team has become lost.
 - ✓ The Evaluator observes a K-9, outside of its primary enclosure showing signs of unprovoked aggression (growling, snapping, lunging) towards another K-9 or person.
 - ✓ The handler allows his/her K-9 to work to such a point that, in the opinion of the Evaluator(s), the K-9's health is at risk.
 - ✓ Handler is abusive of the K-9 including, but not limited to, verbal abuse or lack of proper supplies.
 - ✓ The team is unable to successfully complete the test in the allotted time.

13. REQUIREMENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION

- The following requirements shall be successfully completed in order to pass this test.
 - ✓ The K-9 locates the cadaver source and gives the appropriate final response.
 - ✓ The handler marks the cadaver source within the allowable distance.
 - ✓ The K-9 locates the live subject and performs the appropriate final response.
 - ✓ The handler follows a search plan with no aimless wandering.
 - ✓ the handler demonstrates basic navigational skills

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- ✓ The test is completed successfully within the allotted time.
- ✓ The map is marked with the subject and cadaver source locations
- ✓ The handler understands how wind conditions, terrain, etc may affect search strategy.

14. RE-TESTS

- A re-test is an additional attempt of the entire test.
- One testing fee covers an initial test and a re-test if necessary within one (1) year of the time of the test payment.
- If a Handler would like to re-test during the same testing event, the scoring sheet of the initial test must be marked with “re-test immediately”. If the Evaluator marks the initial failed attempt as “re-test in three (3) or six (6) months”, the handler shall not be eligible to re-test during the same testing event.
- A re-test requires a new set of paperwork.
- Re-tests during the same testing event shall be at the discretion of the Evaluator, only if time permits and there is justification.
- A team that was unable to perform the search in the designated time allowed or called a false final response shall not necessarily warrant a re-test during the same testing event.
- A test that is discontinued and cannot be resumed due to weather or safety concerns shall not count as a failure. A re-test at the same testing event may be provided at the Evaluator’s discretion. If time does not allow for a re-test, the scoring sheet shall be marked “Discontinued” with the reason stated and the handler shall be allowed one attempt in the following six (6) months. The testing fee will be credited to the re-test but not refunded.
- A copy of the Scoring sheet shall be given to the handler.

15. RE-CERTIFICATION

- Re-Certification is required every two (2) years.