

National Search Dog Alliance (NSDA)

Area Search I, II, Scent Discriminating & Night Field Tests

1. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

- This test has been promulgated by the NSDA to assess handler/K-9 teams as to operational suitability for typical area search incidents.
- The NSDA prerequisites represent those items that we believe will allow the candidate to have the opportunity to safely and successfully complete the area search test.

2. OBJECTIVE

The test of an Area Search K-9 team will demonstrate:

- The Daytime Area I Field Test: the team's ability to locate one (1) or two (2) hidden subject(s) in a 160 acre area within three (3) hours.
- The Area II Field Test: the team's ability to locate one (1) or two (2) subjects in an eighty (80) acre area within two (2) hours.
- The Scent Discriminating Field Test: the team's ability to locate one (1) subject with one (1) or two (2) decoys in an eighty (80) acre area within two (2) hours.
- The Night Search Field Test: the team's ability to locate one (1) subject in a forty (40) acre area within two (2) hours.
- Teams may elect to take the Night Search Field Test at any time within one (1) year after they have passed the Daytime Area Search Field Test. The night test may be taken at the same test event as the daytime test. If the night test is successfully completed at the same test event as the daytime test or at a later date in the year, the night test certification shall expire simultaneously with the expiration of the daytime test.
- The ability of an area search team to locate a specific hidden subject(s), combined with the demonstrated ability of the handler to correctly read the behavior of the K-9, the ability of the K-9 to perform a trained final response when it detects a person and the ability of the handler to formulate and execute a search plan constitutes the area search team field qualification certification for the NSDA.

3. GENERAL GUIDELINES

- You may be instructed to submit copies of your documents to the Evaluator via mail or e-mail prior to the test. If so, those documents may 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. Flankers are not permitted.
- This test is designed to simulate an actual search and not team training. The handler will be asked to approach it as such.

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- A team shall not be required to test in conditions other than those in which it would be reasonably expected to search.
- No e-collars (shock collars) are permitted to be operational while the team is being evaluated. A GPS collar with an e-collar feature may be worn if the contact pins are removed from the collar or that feature is otherwise disabled.
- Handlers may draw numbers for the order in which they are to be tested unless there is a strong, overriding reason for convenience of handler or Evaluator.
- The handler is responsible for the safety, health and behavior of their K-9 at all times.
- Females in season shall be tested last.

4. FINAL RESPONSE PRE-TEST

- Before the Area Search Field 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).
- The subject may be known to the K-9; family members, close friends or people who have been a subject for the testing team within the last forty-five (45) days may not be used as subjects.
- Pre-test subjects shall not be used as Field Test subjects.
- A pretest is not required for Area I, Area II or Scent Discrimination if the team is already currently NSDA certified to one of these standards.
- 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.

PRE-TEST

- The K-9 shall be started downwind and sent a minimum of 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 Final Response Pre-test shall be given only once to each 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.

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5. TEST SITE

- The Evaluator may adjust the size of the search area due to varying conditions. Adjustments to the search area size shall be made using the NSDA Daytime Acreage Adjustment Chart.
- The boundaries of the search area may be either obvious natural features (streams, ridgelines, etc.), manmade boundaries like roads or trails, or marked or flagged boundary lines. The corners of the search area shall be clearly marked. Boundary lines shall be marked on the map provided to the handler.
- Search areas should be comprised of light to medium cover, i.e. **grass but brush**, tall weeds, trees, etc.
- 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.

6. NIGHT AREA SEARCH FIELD QUALIFICATION TEST (OPTIONAL)

- Teams that have successfully completed any of the Daytime Area Search Field Tests may, at their option and within one (1) year of passing the Daytime Field Test, complete the additional Night Area Search Field Test. It is not necessary to retake the Indication Pre-test once the daytime test has been successfully completed.
- The same conditions apply as in the Daytime Area Search except that the test shall be taken at night, only one (1) search subject shall be used, the minimum acreage shall be twenty (20) acres and the maximum acreage shall be forty (40) acres.
- The exact acreage of the area shall be determined by the scenting and terrain conditions and adjusted using the NSDA Nighttime Acreage Adjustment Chart to provide for a test of two (2) hours duration. The experience and knowledge of the Evaluator will provide any changes to the NSDA Nighttime Acreage Adjustment Chart.
- The test must be completed in two (2) hours or less. Night shall be defined as ½ hour after sunset to ½ hour before sunrise.
- This certification shall expire simultaneously with the expiration of the daytime test.

7. EVALUATORS

- The evaluation shall be conducted by a designated NSDA Principal Evaluator, with the option of a second Evaluator or Apprentice Evaluator. Multiple Evaluators or Apprentice Evaluators may accompany the testing team.
- Third party observers are not allowed to accompany the Evaluators.
- The Evaluator(s) shall have discretion in the administration and evaluation of all portions of the test and/or re-test.
- The Evaluator(s) shall remain within normal speaking distance of the handler at all times during the evaluation, while positioning themselves so as not to interfere with the work of the handler/K-9 team.

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8. SUBJECTS

- The Evaluator shall not give descriptions of the subjects to the Handler.
- The Evaluator shall not reveal the exact number of subjects used in the Area I and II tests or the number of decoys used in the Scent discriminating test.

9. SCENT DISCRIMINATING

- A scent article of one of the subjects shall be given to the handler and the canine must perform its final response, called by the Handler, on the correct subject only.

10. DISTRACTIONS

- Clues and distractions shall not be intentionally placed in the search area. Although handlers should be clue aware, clue awareness is not criteria for successful completion of the Area Field Test.

11. EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS

- 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.
- The use of a compass or GPS by the handler is recommended but not required.

11. SAFETY

- The Evaluator shall be in radio contact with the subjects and base for safety.
- The Principal Evaluator may terminate the test if, in their opinion,
 - it becomes hazardous to the health or safety of any of the participants or to the K-9.
 - handler is abusive to their K-9, including but not limited to, verbal abuse or lack of proper supplies.
 - handler is unable to call the K-9 off wildlife or livestock in or near the search area. The K-9 must respond to the handler's command(s) to return to work.

12. HANDLER BRIEFING

- A briefing of the handler will be held at the test site or a briefing of a testing group will be held by previous arrangement, as close to test time as reasonable. The Evaluator shall brief the handler by reading the Handler Briefing.

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- The Evaluator shall carefully explain the area's boundaries and hazards, if any. The handler shall be provided a good quality aerial or topographic map of the area with the boundaries drawn on it. A hand drawn map, including boundaries and landmarks, may be used only if absolutely necessary.
- The handler shall address the Evaluator as though the Evaluator were a search manager unfamiliar with search K-9 teams and shall introduce the team, explain its capabilities, and ask questions pertinent to the assignment.
- 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 response.

13. TEST TIMING

- The handler shall have a maximum time of fifteen (15) minutes to develop a search plan, based upon the information provided and the existing conditions. 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.
- Timing for each type of search:
 - The Area Search I: the subject(s) shall be located within three (3) hours.
 - The Area Scent Discriminating Search: the correct subject shall be located within two (2) hours.
 - The Area Search II: the subject(s) shall be located within two (2) hours.
 - The Night search: the subject shall be located within two (2) hours.
- The handler may take breaks but they will be included in the time allowed.
- Conclusion of the test will occur when:
 - a. All subjects are located, or
 - b. The time allotted for the test has expired, or
 - c. The handler declares the area is "clear", i.e., in the case of only 1 subject, the handler continues to work and concludes he/she has worked the area sufficiently to decide that there are no other subjects in the test area.

14. TEST EVALUATION

- Scent articles are not available for the Area Search Tests I & II, but one shall be available for the Scent Discriminating Area Test.

15. KNOWLEDGE AND PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

- During the test, the handler shall simulate providing base with in-field progress checks at half-hour intervals by telling the Evaluator what their report would be to base.

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- The Handler shall inform the Evaluator of changes made to his/her initial search plan and provide the reason for the change of strategy.
- If the Evaluator for the field test is not the same as for the pre-test then, prior to the start of the evaluation, the handler shall describe to the other Evaluator how his/her K-9 indicates the presence of a hidden subject.
- K-9 may not demonstrate unwarranted aggressive behavior towards any person or K-9 while outside of its primary enclosure.
- The Handler may not behave in an abusive manner towards testing personnel or the K-9.
- The Handler shall behave professionally during the test

16. REQUIREMENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF ALL AREA SEARCH TESTS

The following requirements must be successfully completed in order to pass the Area Search Test.

During or at the conclusion of the test, as applicable, the team shall:

- The K-9 shall locate all Subject(s) within the allotted time.
- The K-9 shall perform a final trained response on Subject(s), as described by Handler
- The Handler shall demonstrate the ability to plan an efficient search, best utilizing wind, terrain, topography and existing environmental conditions to provide efficient and effective coverage of the terrain given the time constraints of the test.
- The Handler shall demonstrate the ability to work and control the K-9 to effectively search the area.
- The Handler shall demonstrate recognition of either member of the K-9 team working ineffectively and takes action to compensate for or remedy the situation.
- The Handler shall recognize and verbalize when the K-9 detects human scent.
- The Handler and K-9 shall demonstrate the ability to work effectively and find a subject, with an additional person or persons accompanying the K-9 team.
- The K-9 does not have a false alert that is called by the Handler
- The Handler does not cue the K-9 for a final response.
- The Handler will have adequate supplies/water/equipment for the conditions encountered.
- The handler shall report clearly and accurately on the map the following information (map documentation may be completed at the conclusion of the test):
 - A. Areas covered.
 - B. Routes taken.
 - C. Wind direction and other observed environmental factors that may be pertinent to the search effort.
 - D. Location(s) of the subject(s) found, within approximately 100 yards.

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17. RE-TESTS

- One testing fee covers an initial test and a retest, if necessary, within one year of the time of test payment.
- If a handler would like to re-test during the same testing event of an initial failure, 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 re-test during the same testing event and shall wait the required time to re-test.
- A re-test shall be of the entire test and not just the portion of the test that was failed. A new set of paperwork will be completed.
- Re-tests during the same testing event shall be at the discretion of the Evaluator, only if time permits and there is justification.
- A test that is discontinued and cannot be resumed due to weather, safety or health concerns of the handler or canine 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 re-test in the following six (6) months. The testing fee will be credited to the re-test but not refunded.
- If the team fails the test, the Evaluator shall mark on the Scoring Sheet when the team is eligible for a re-test. A copy of the Scoring Sheet shall be given to the handler.

18. RE-CERTIFICATION

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