

**MOHAVE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE SEARCH AND RESCUE**  
**STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE**  
**FOR SEARCH DOGS (K9)**

**February 2, 2021**

**SCOPE AND PURPOSE**

This MCSO SAR procedure establishes a standard structure and guideline to be used for search dog teams operating within search and rescue. This procedure outlines the responsibilities for search dog teams and search personnel. These guidelines are to be used for establishing initial certification and maintaining training proficiency of the search dog team. These procedures identify some of the critical issues, which must be included in managing search dog teams effectively. All other MCSO SAR procedures must apply to these search operations, where applicable. While a useful tool in search and rescue operations, the search dog team may be requested to assist to support other areas of the Sheriff's office – such as an evidence search. All requests for search dog teams shall be directed to the Search and Rescue Coordinators.

**REQUIREMENTS**

Search dog teams must meet and maintain the following requirements for mission readiness.

**Certification:** All search dog teams must attain and maintain certification in each specialization through a certifier approved by the Agency.

**Handler Requirements:** In addition to the mandatory training required by the MCSO SAR SOP, search dog handlers are responsible for completing the following:

- a) Tracker II
- b) AZ SAR II
- c) Completed probationary period
- d) Maintain log book for missions and training activities.

**Dog Requirements:** In addition to certification approved by the Agency, the search dog shall have the following:

- a) Current immunizations and vaccines to include distemper, rabies and kennel cough. A written copy shall be kept in the file.
- b) Completion of the AKC Canine Good Citizen Evaluation, or equivalent.
- c) Canine shall not be less than 12 months of age.

**Proficiency:** All search dog teams shall maintain proficiency in their specialized area of certification.

- a) Minimum of 16-hours a month of documented training.
- b) Identify strengths and weaknesses of the search dog team and address training for improvement.

**Equipment:** The search dog team shall have, at minimum, the following equipment:

- a) Harness
- b) Collar
- c) Lead
- d) First Aid kit

## **OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS**

When using search dog teams on a search, when and how to use the team is determined by the on-scene Coordinator.

At times, a “comms searcher” may be assigned to the search dog team to allow the handler complete focus on the search dog, while the comms searcher will manage all communications for the search team.

It is also important to take other team assignments into consideration before deploying a search dog team – as introducing the least amount of contamination into the search area can become critical in protecting the scene.

Weather conditions may also affect a search dog team’s ability to perform effectively and should be considered before deploying the team into the search area. Extreme heat and cold conditions can also lead to serious health deterioration of the dog team.

## **SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS**

The handler managing the dog is responsible to ensure the safety to all search team members. If the dog is acting differently or showing signs of aggression, it shall be removed from the search area.

## **MEDICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Each search dog team shall have a first aid kit that includes equipment for both the handler and the dog. A medical plan should be in effect prior to inserting a search dog team into the field, in the event a medical situation arises. If the handler becomes injured, it should be noted who should take over responsibility of the dog until such time it can be removed from the search area. All searchers in the search area should have familiarity with this plan and understand any necessary precautions if the dog were to become injured.

## HELICOPTER CONSIDERATION

Each search dog team shall attempt ingress / egress training with the DPS Air Rescue Ranger helicopter crew. It is imperative that the search dog handler and the search Coordinators have a good understanding of how the search dog reacts to the helicopter – in the event it is necessary to remove the search dog team from the field using a helicopter.

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