

## **Search and Rescue Council of New Jersey**

### **TRAINING STANDARDS For WATER K-9 SEARCH AND RESCUE DOG and HANDLER**

**I. Purpose:** To ensure a well trained handler/dog team's ability, working from a boat or shore, to effectively search for, locate and indicate subjects partially or totally submerged in water.

**Note:** Due to the increased demand for the use of dogs trained to assist in the location of drowned subjects, it is highly recommended that the operational human remains detection dog receive additional training specific to locating subjects partially or totally submerged in water.

#### **II. Evaluation**

##### **A. Setup**

1. At the discretion of the testing team, the scent source for the evaluation will be either:
  - a. A diver must be placed at a depth between 10 and 20 feet at least 10 minutes prior to the start of the evaluation. The depth may be varied to ensure the diver's safety.
  - b. Material of human origin (e.g. bone, tissue, hair) and of sufficient quantity as per depth concealed.
2. Current weather conditions, wind speed and wave height are to be taken into consideration with regard to safety of the test prior to and during the evaluation. Water evaluations are not to be conducted when wind speed exceeds 10 mph.
3. Efforts shall be made to ensure consistent test conditions for teams within each Unit.
4. Two to four null distractions (e.g. floats, buoys, etc.) will be added to the test area where the handler/dog team will be working from a boat. Distractions will be placed in such a way as to minimize the collection or retention of human scent from either the hidden scent source or the individual(s) placing the objects.
5. Prior to the evaluation starting, the evaluator will determine the time to be allowed for the team to cover each of the search areas.
6. The diver's safety is paramount. The time and depth of placement of the diver must be done in consultation with the diver, based on his/her assessment of the conditions, the air tank capacity, and other safety factors.

**B. Evaluation working from a boat.**

1. It is the responsibility of the evaluator(s) to ensure the boat provided for this evaluation is operated in a safe and skilled manner. If possible, the boat is to be driven by someone other than the evaluator.
2. The area searched by boat will be approximately 300 feet by 300 feet.
3. A diver must be placed at a depth between 10 and 20 feet at least 10 minutes prior to the start of the evaluation. The depth may be varied to ensure the diver's safety.
4. In order for the team to pass this evaluation:
  - a. The dog must perform its trained indication or exhibit a behavior that the handler can declare a find within a reasonable distance from the scent source.
  - b. The handler must not declare a "find" on anything except the area where the scent source is strongest
  - c. The evaluation must be completed within the allotted time.

**C. Evaluation working form shore.**

1. The shore search shall be no less than 150 feet no more than 500 feet in length. Evaluators must ensure wind direction allows for accurate and fair testing.
2. The water must be deep enough for the scent source to be completely submerged.
3. Scent source placement
  - a. A diver must be placed at a depth between 10 and 20 feet at least 10 minutes prior to the start of the evaluation. The depth may be varied to ensure the diver's safety.
  - b. Material of human origin (e.g. bone, tissue, hair) and of sufficient quantity as per depth concealed.
4. In order for the team to pass this evaluation:
  - a. The dog must perform its trained indication or exhibit a behavior that the handler can declare a find within a reasonable distance from the scent source.
  - b. The handler must not declare a "find" on anything except the area where the scent source is strongest.
  - c. The evaluation must be completed within the allotted time.

**D. Criteria**

1. The handler/dog team must successfully complete both the evaluation working from a boat and the evaluation working from shore for certification in water search. No partial certification is awarded for passing only one of the evaluations.
2. Dog Requirements

- a. The dog must show focus and enthusiasm for the mission, remaining alert and searching for the duration of the evaluation.
- b. The dog may use either an active or a passive indication.
  - 1) **Passive Indication** – the dog indicates to the handler the positive scent source through passive means, such as sitting or downing.
  - 2) **Active Indication** – The dog indicated to the handler the positive scent source through active means, such as barking, biting at the water, recall/refind, or entering the water (from shore). Active responses on a boat must be consistent with boat safety.

The dog's indication from shore may be the same or different from its indication from a boat.

- c. When evaluating the dog's response, evaluators must bear in mind that the scent drift may preclude the dog from indicating directly above the scent source and this must be considered in determining the success or failure of the team. The search shall be deemed successful if the dog strongly indicated scent downwind from the scent source, with a definite interest directed toward the correct location.
- d. The dog must exhibit a willingness to enter and work from a boat in both a confident and safe manner.
- e. The handler must "call" the dog's indication for a "find" to count. If the handler decides not to call what appears to be an indication by the dog, it will not count as an indication. Only the handler is qualified to interpret his/her dog's behavior and discern between the dog's behavior on a distraction as opposed to its behavior on a positive scent source. Upon calling the location, the handler has committed to declaring a "find."

### 3. Handler Requirements

- a. The handler must demonstrate a knowledge of working safely around water, both in a boat and from shore.
- b. The handler must demonstrate a thorough knowledge of how wind and current drift affects scent and how these factors can help or hinder the search.
- c. The handler must direct the boat operator in a manner which will ensure a complete search of the assigned area, taking into consideration wind and current.

- d. Based on wind and current drift, the handler should be able to give the evaluators an accurate estimate of the scent source location.
- e. The handler must be able to distinguish between the dog showing interest in any distraction and giving its trained indication on the positive scent source.

**E. Proof of the Test**

1. If the handler/dog team fails the evaluation because they were unable to locate the scent source, the handler may request a dog certified in water search work the area to prove the test.