

DRAFT BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR DETECTOR DOG TEAMS

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A certification is documentation that the detection team has satisfactorily passed all applicable standards published by the certifying organization.

There are three main areas which should be tested during a certification as follows:

1. Odor Recognition - Can the dog detect the odors on which the dog was trained?
2. Systematic Search Pattern - Does the detection team search and clear an area in a systematic fashion that exposes the dog to all the productive areas?
3. Final Response Interpretation - Can the handler accurately interpret his dog's change in behavior and is he able to articulate when his dog has made a final response (alerted)?

The essential aspects of certifications include the following:

1. A certification is valid for one year from the date of issuance and non-transferable.
2. Certification is for the handler and the dog as a team and if the dog changes handlers then a new certification is required.
3. Certifying officials must be independent (i.e. were not involved in the training of the team).
4. Only actual parent substances must be used for certification tests.
5. The handler must maintain training/seizure records.
6. The handler must conduct regular maintenance training.
7. Training aids should be stored in a manner to prevent cross contamination of odors and should be handled in such a way to minimize human scent on the aids.

Examples of best practices for detector dog trainers include:

- A minimum of five (5) years experience as a detection canine handler or equivalent education, training and experience.
- A minimum of 200 hours of formalized training by recognized detection canine trainers.
- Completion of a 40 hour Trainer Certification Course approved by the certifying organization which should include instruction by a recognized detection canine trainer(s), law enforcement, legal and scientific experts in the area of detection canines.
- Supplying the certifying organization with standardized detector dog school certification guidelines relevant to the trainers agency approved by an external review panel of at least two (2) individuals from outside the trainer's agency.
- Demonstrated proficiency by training multiple teams using the approved guidelines as determined by a review team of at least two approved individuals from outside the trainer's agency.
- Separate guidelines should be developed and separate detection teams trained for each class of odors such as Accelerants, Cadavers, Currency, Explosives, Hidden persons, Narcotics, etc.
- Multiple specific odors, varying amounts of target odors, and varying conditions should be incorporated into the trainer's course and testing protocols.
- Occasional videotaping of training sessions is recommended for trainer/handler critiquing. Archiving of videotapes is not recommended.

Examples of best practices for detector dog team certifications:

- Prior experience of at least 400 hours working as a team under the supervision of a recognized detection canine trainer.
- Training aids may be provided by the certifying organization or the requesting agency.
- Training aids provided should come from agency with guidelines for the storage and transport of aids minimizing the possibility of contamination issues.
- Scented rewards must not be used during the tests.
- There should be only one target of each type in each designated area.
- At least one blank search area/item should be incorporated into the certification tests for each different search area/item.
- Distractors should normally be part of the certification test and should be widely employed in training and results documented in training records.
- All training aids should be placed in the search area at least thirty (30) minutes prior to the test.
- Ideally, the search area should be previously swept by the dog(s) to be tested to reduce the potential of contamination interference and to randomize dog odor if multiple dogs are to be tested in the same area.
- Ideally, find(s) should be confirmed with an already certified team prior to certification testing after randomizing dog odor if multiple dogs are to be tested in the same area.
- There should be a minimum of 10 total finds (including blanks) and the team should accurately locate 9 finds out of 10 (90%) or greater for certification.
- Results of the certification tests should be pass or fail rather than judgments of style. If judgments of style are used these should be separate from the certification with certification based on accurate location of finds (see above).
- The maximum time to complete an individual search should be less than five minutes but disqualification due to time should be left to the discretion of the certifiers.
- At least two different search areas/items should be incorporated into the certification tests such as building, vehicle, luggage, open areas, etc. with examples as follows:
Vehicles – at least 3 vehicles including one interior, one exterior and one blank;
Building – each room 200 to 1200 sq. ft. (with furniture) including at least one blank room;
Baggage – 10 to 25 articles; Open area – 1000 to 3000 sq. ft.
- The certification team should include at least one individual from outside the trainer's agency and should include at least one trainer.
- The outside person should be responsible for placement of the aids.
- Documentation of the team's detection proficiency training should be maintained by the certified trainer and available for inspection including the certification documents, training records and a certificate of completion of an approved detector dog academy which includes the number of hours the team attended the school.
- A detection team which fails to complete the certification process should complete a corrective action plan before making another attempt to certify.
- Any complaints or suggestions regarding how the certification was conducted should be sent in writing to the trainer and certification team within two weeks of the completion of the test.
- Determination of the reliability of the detection team should be based primarily on the certification records and secondarily on the regular training records but should not use deployment logs as unconfirmed alerts do not accurately evaluate a detection team's performance (i.e. residual odor can be present or concealment may preclude discovery).

Examples of best practices for narcotics training aids:

- Each training aid should be rotated at least every two years or authenticated by an approved local, State or Federal lab prior to use in a certification. Purity should be representative of substances the teams encounter operationally.
- Each training aid should contain at least one (1) gram with a maximum of 1000 grams for any one test.
- Teams should be certified on the drugs of most interest to the agency where the team will be deployed with typical drugs being cocaine, heroin, marijuana and methamphetamine with other drugs added depending on agency needs including opium, hash and MDMA (ecstasy).
- Separate storage containers should be used for marijuana and the other drugs to minimize possible cross contamination issues with the strongest odor aids.

Examples of best practices for explosives training aids:

- Each training aid should be rotated on an annual basis.
- Each training aid should contain at least one (1) gram with a maximum of 1000 grams for any one test.
- Teams should be certified on the explosives of most interest to the agency where the team will be deployed with typical explosives being representatives from the five major classes as follows (with examples): Aliphatic nitro (nitromethane); Aromatic nitro (TNT); Nitrate ester (Nitroglycerin, EGDN, PETN); Nitramines (Tetryl, RDX, HMX, CL20); and Acid salts (Ammonium nitrate; Ammonium perchlorate; Potassium nitrate (in black powder) with other explosives added depending on agency needs.
- Separate storage containers should be used for to separate the explosives with the strongest odors (i.e. EGDN, NG, DNT) to minimize any possible cross contamination.

Examples of best practices for detector dog maintenance and deployment records:

- Daily to weekly training records should be recorded as soon as possible after completion and reviewed by a supervisor.
- Deployment records should be kept separately and recorded as soon as possible after completion and reviewed by a supervisor.
- Training records should include the following basic information: Department name; Handler's name/ID number/signature space; K9 name; Supervisor name/signature space; date; total search time.
- Training records should include the following specific information for each search:
Location; Type of search (Vehicle [interior/exterior], Building [company/residence, high/low], Parcel/luggage; Area (outside/covered); Other _____), Scenario _____.
Type of substance (i.e. Blank; Drugs: MJ, HA, OP, HE, CO, METH, MDMA, LSD, other)
Amount of substance; time placed before search; time of search; Narrative/Remarks; Totals
- Deployment records should include the following specific information for each search:
Location; Type of search (Vehicle [interior/exterior], Building [company/residence, high/low], Parcel/luggage; Area (outside/covered); Other _____), Scenario _____.
Alerts; Finds; Types of finds; Amounts (in grams)/Value of finds; Location; time of search; Arrest?; Charges; Suspect info.; Vehicle info.; Narrative/Remarks; Totals