



POST Law Enforcement K-9 Guidelines





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Produced by

POST Training Program Services Bureau

Foreword by

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POST Executive Director

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Published January 2014

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Special thanks to Chief David M. Brown, Hemet Police Department.

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Acknowledgements

POST appreciates the efforts of the 2011-2013 subject matter expert group who assisted in the development of this voluntary program.

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Officer Glen Anderson

Rialto Police Department

Lieutenant Gary Aulis

Fontana Police Department

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In 1991, a group of K-9 Officers, Law Enforcement Managers, and K-9 Trainers from throughout the state met to discuss the need for K-9 Team Standards in California. The group believed that local liability would be reduced if statewide K-9 Team Standards were available. They further believed that these standards, to be acceptable and have impact, should be supported by the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

In February 1992, POST brought this committee and other interested experts together, and they agreed to develop guidelines in the area of Obedience, Search, Apprehension, Handler Protection, Handler Selection, and Evaluation. After initial development work and following several reviews which resulted in consensus, the proposed guidelines were submitted to and approved by the POST Commission in July 1992.

Following Commission action, POST brought the subject matter experts together again and developed suggested scenarios to test the recommended minimum K-9 Team Standards contained within the approved guidelines. POST developed a one-day Evaluator's Course and accompanying evaluation forms to train officers evaluating K-9 Teams.

This update, developed between November 2011 and October 2013, aims to refine and streamline the guidelines which were in use for more than a decade. POST recognized that agencies utilize K-9 teams in various capacities and with differing expectations. Additionally, many more specialized K-9 team functions have developed in the two decades since POST first created the guidelines. As a result, POST determined it would not attempt to comprehensively standardize all functions. Instead, these guidelines recommend minimum training and evaluation benchmarks for K-9 Patrol and Detection functions. They are for the voluntary use of law enforcement agencies and are sufficiently general to accommodate differing agencies' policies regarding operational deployment of K-9 teams.

Questions regarding the POST Law Enforcement K-9 Guidelines should be directed to the [Training Program Services Bureau](#) at 916 227-4885. Questions regarding certification of K-9 training courses should be directed to the [Training Delivery and Compliance Bureau](#) at 916 227-4863.

Robert A. Stresak
POST Executive Director

Introduction

These guidelines are designed to assist agencies with minimum training and performance standards for patrol and detection K-9 teams. Patrol K-9 teams should meet minimum standards with regard to obedience, search, apprehension, and handler protection. Detection K-9 teams should meet minimum standards with regard to detections of the odor(s) the K-9 is trained to detect.

This categorization (patrol and detection) is intentionally basic. POST recognizes that there are many specializations among law enforcement canines. Specializations include explosives detection, cadaver detection, search and rescue, SWAT, and airport operations, among others. There are many resources and industry standards that may be relevant and useful to agencies engaged in these or other K-9 specialties. Many are identified in [Appendix 3 – Resources](#).



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POST has not established a recommended minimum standard for basic K-9 handler/team training.

POST recommends that an in-service K-9 team complete 16 hours of documented training monthly to maintain basic patrol and/or detection proficiency.

A K-9 team with multiple/added specializations (e.g., SWAT K-9, bomb detection, search and rescue) may require additional training to maintain proficiency.

Patrol Guidelines

The following four K-9 team competencies outline minimum “patrol” performance standards that a K-9 team should be able to demonstrate when adopting these voluntary guidelines.

1. Obedience

The handler will demonstrate the ability to control the K-9 during an obedience performance test. Testing will be conducted using reasonable job-related distractions.

- 1.1. The K-9 will perform a basic routine of left, right, and about turns, at slow, normal, and quick pace, both on and off leash.
- 1.2. The handler will “down” the K-9 in motion and then recall the dog to a “heel” position from a distance.
- 1.3. The handler will “down” the K-9 from a distance and then recall the dog to a “heel” position.

2. Search

Under the direction and reasonable control of the handler, the K-9 will independently locate a hidden person in a structure or building and in an outdoor area within a reasonable period of time. The dog will “alert” the handler after finding the person. The “alert” will be a recognized signal from the dog to the handler which indicates the presence of a hidden person. The handler will notify the evaluator of the recognizable signal prior to testing.

- 2.1. In a structure or building with multiple rooms and hiding places, the dog will locate a hidden person and “alert” the handler.
- 2.2. In a large outdoor area, at least one acre in size with multiple hiding locations, the dog will locate a hidden person and “alert” the handler.

3. Apprehension

Under the direction of the handler and while off leash, the K-9 will pursue and apprehend a person acting as a “suspect” (agitator/decoy).

- 3.1. The K-9 team will demonstrate a pursuit and call off prior to apprehension.
- 3.2. On command from the handler, the K-9 will pursue and apprehend the agitator/decoy.
- 3.3. From a reasonable distance and on verbal command only, the K-9 will cease the apprehension.

4. Handler Protection

The K-9 will demonstrate the ability to defend the handler during a physical attack.

- 4.1. During a testing scenario simulating an attack on the handler, the K-9 will defend the handler against the physical attack.
- 4.2. On verbal command from the handler, the K-9 will cease physical contact with the attacking person.

Detection Guidelines

The following K-9 team competency outlines minimum “detection” performance standards that a K-9 team should be able to demonstrate when adopting these voluntary guidelines.

Search

While demonstrating reasonable control and coordination between the handler and K-9 used in detection, the K-9 must find (within a reasonable period of time as determined by the evaluator) the odor(s) they have been trained to find in the environment(s) they have been trained to search.

1. The K-9 should not “alert” to anything that it is not trained to find
2. A false “alert” (as determined by the evaluator) is a failure



Scenarios for K-9 Team Evaluation

Following are scenarios for K-9 team evaluation in each of the competency areas. These scenarios contain minimum elements for evaluation.

Obedience

The evaluator will be fully apprised of the pertinent agency policies and regulations prior to commencement of the exercise. The “correct” response or reaction of the handler, the dog, or the two acting together, may differ from agency to agency, based on prevailing agency policy.

Handlers will report to the evaluator with the dog on a leash. At the direction of the evaluator, the team will complete the following exercises as called for by the evaluator. During the exercise the dog will be under the handler’s control at the “heel” position.

At the “forward” direction of the evaluator, handlers will proceed ahead with their dogs at the “heel” position and at a slow, normal, and/or quick pace at the direction of the evaluator. The evaluator will direct the handler-canine team through a series of turns and movements including the following:

1. On leash:
 - 1.1. Two right turns
 - 1.2. Two left turns
 - 1.3. Two about-turns
 - 1.4. Two stop/sits
2. Off leash (with distraction):
 - 2.1. Two right turns
 - 2.2. Two left turns
 - 2.3. Two about-turns
 - 2.4. Two stop/sits
 - 2.5. Down in motion:

While continuing forward at a quick pace, the handler will “down” the dog on the evaluator’s command and continue to jog forward until reaching a designated point (at least 30 paces away). The handler will then turn and face the dog. At the evaluator’s command, the handler will recall the dog to their location by means of voice and/or hand signal(s) to finish “heel” position.

- 2.6.** With the dog in stand/stay or sit/stay position:
The handler, from a location at least 30 paces away, will face the dog, wait for the evaluator's command, then "down" the dog by means of voice and/or hand signals. The handler will then recall the dog upon the command of the evaluator.

The obedience exercises should be conducted in an environment closely simulating realistic job conditions and distractions.

Search

The evaluator will be fully apprised of the pertinent agency policies and regulations prior to commencement of the exercise. The "correct" response or reaction of the handler, the dog, or the two acting together, may differ from agency to agency, based on prevailing agency policy.

Upon command of the evaluator, the K-9 team will approach the designated search area on foot. At the handler's direction and command, the dog shall actively and independently search the test area until the decoy is located or the evaluator terminates the exercise.

There should be a recognized signal ("alert") from the dog to the handler which indicates that the dog has located a hidden person. The handler must be able to interpret the dog's "alert" clearly enough to be able to inform the evaluator of the decoy's actual location. Once a handler has signaled the "alert" of their K-9 to the evaluator, the exercise is complete. The handler should demonstrate the ability to control the dog fully throughout all phases of the search.

Apprehension (*without contact*)

The evaluator will be fully apprised of the pertinent agency policies and regulations prior to commencement of the exercise. The "correct" response or reaction of the handler, the dog, or the two acting together, may differ from agency to agency, based on prevailing agency policy.

The K-9 team will begin the exercise "off-leash" from a designated starting position. The handler will ensure that the dog remains with them and may hold the dog's collar if needed. Upon the evaluator's signal, a person acting as a "suspect" (agitator/decoy) will present himself visually at a reasonable distance (25-30 yards) from the K-9 team and begin running away. The handler will verbally order the "suspect" to stop. The "suspect" will ignore the order and continue flight. The handler will then send the dog in pursuit of the suspect and may join in the pursuit to ensure full view of the dog and "suspect." Allowing a reasonable distance (20-30 yards), the "suspect" will stop in mid-flight at the evaluator's command and stand still. When the dog is approximately half way to the decoy, the handler will verbally order the dog to abandon the apprehension. The dog must not physically contact the decoy after the "call off" command from the handler.

Apprehension (with contact)

The evaluator will be fully apprised of the pertinent agency policies and regulations prior to commencement of the exercise. The “correct” response or reaction of the handler, the dog, or the two acting together, may differ from agency to agency, based on prevailing agency policy.

This exercise will duplicate the above procedure, except in this scenario the agitator/decoy will not stop and the handler will send the dog to pursue, contact, and apprehend the agitator/decoy. The handler may join in the pursuit. The dog will contact and control the agitator/decoy until called off by the handler.

During the apprehension and on verbal command only from the handler, the dog will disengage the contact.

Handler Protection

The evaluator will be fully apprised of the pertinent agency policies and regulations prior to commencement of the exercise. The “correct” response or reaction of the handler, the dog, or the two acting together, may differ from agency to agency, based on prevailing agency policy.

The handler approaches an individual (agitator/decoy) standing nearby and initiates a field interview contact. After approximately 30 seconds the agitator/decoy suddenly physically assaults the handler. The dog should react to the attack by either of the following actions:

1. “Conditioned” defense of handler, no command given;
2. Respond when called upon by the handler’s verbal command.

The dog will defend the handler by making physical contact with the agitator/decoy. The dog must disengage upon a verbal command by the handler. Upon release, the dog will remain under control of the handler.

Detection

The evaluator will be fully apprised of the pertinent agency policies and regulations prior to commencement of the exercise. The “correct” response or reaction of the handler, the dog, or the two acting together, may differ from agency to agency, based on prevailing agency policy.

While demonstrating reasonable control and coordination between the handler and K-9 used in detection, the K-9 must find—within a reasonable period of time—the odor(s) identified.

There should be a recognized signal “alert” from the dog to the handler which indicates that the dog has located each odor. The handler must be able to interpret the dog’s “alert” clearly enough to be able to inform the evaluator of the substance’s location. Once a handler has signaled their canine’s “alert” to the evaluator, the exercise is complete.

The handler must demonstrate the ability to control the dog fully throughout all phases of the search.

The evaluation should contain at least one blank odor in each environment evaluated.

To ensure adequate scent dispersion, setup time for each sample should be a minimum of 30 minutes prior to the actual search.

The actual target odor should be present for the evaluation.



K-9 Team Evaluation

The K-9 Team should be evaluated by a POST-trained evaluator prior to general law enforcement deployment and at least once annually.

Minimum requirements for law enforcement K-9 evaluators:

1. Should have a minimum of five years experience as a Law Enforcement K-9 Handler or Law Enforcement K-9 Trainer, and a minimum of 200 hours of documented training in the area they are evaluating.
2. Should pass a POST-certified K-9 Team Evaluator's Course. (Trainees in the course must provide verification of prerequisites to the course presenter prior to the beginning of the course.)
3. In order to preserve the highest standards of professionalism and to avoid any perceived conflict of interest between the Evaluator and the K-9 Team, the Evaluator:
 - 3.1. Should not have a monetary interest in breeding/selling/training of the dog being evaluated.
 - 3.2. Should not be the handler of the dog being evaluated.



K-9 Team Evaluator's Course (8 hours)

Objectives

1. Train students to evaluate a K-9 team's performance under POST guidelines.
2. Train students how to interpret and apply a reasonable and uniform evaluation of standards set forth in POST guidelines for patrol and detection dogs.
3. Conduct an evaluation as a final test. At course completion, students must have demonstrated the ability to properly apply POST K-9 team guidelines in the evaluation process to the course provider's satisfaction.

Expanded Course Outline

1. Introduction
 - 1.1. Objectives
 - 1.2. Overview of course
 - 1.3. Review POST Law Enforcement K-9 Guidelines
2. Demonstration
 - 2.1. Demonstrate a K-9 team completing scenarios that meet recommended guidelines.
3. Scenarios (take into account agency differences)
 - 3.1. Equipment
 - 3.1.1. Use actual field equipment deployed by agency being evaluated throughout the testing process.
 - 3.1.1.1. Dog
 - 3.1.1.2. Handler
 - 3.1.1.3. Training
 - 3.1.1.4. Materials needed for evaluation (narcotic aids, etc.)
 - 3.2. Use of agitators/decoys
 - 3.2.1. Agency being tested should provide agitators/decoys to work under direction of the evaluator.

6. Testing

6.1. How to use the scenarios

6.1.1. Refer to [Scenarios for K-9 Team Evaluation](#)

6.2. Evaluator's discretion

6.2.1. Minor mistakes (second commands, etc.)

6.2.2. Reasonable time

6.2.3. Test termination

6.2.4. Time given/needed before a retest

6.3. Failure of test

6.3.1. Retest only the major topic failed

6.3.2. Failure of any required portion of detection evaluation necessitates a retest for that portion of the evaluation.

7. Evaluation forms

7.1. How to use forms

7.2. Use comments section only if there is a failure

7.2.1. Write brief comments

7.2.2. Avoid training recommendations

7.3. Signed evaluation forms are to be left with the agency being evaluated.

7.4. Indicate on the evaluation form the type of agency equipment used during the testing process.

7.5. Describe environment of evaluation (e.g., vehicle, plane, field, building, etc.).

8. Reasonable application of POST guidelines

8.1. Do not dictate agency policy

8.2. Work within agency policy



Glossary

Alert	A recognized signal from the dog to the handler.
Blank	The absence of the target odor.
Call Off	A voice command, from handler to dog, which results in the dog ceasing an activity.
Field Equipment	The equipment used by the dog or the handler while performing normal duties.
Handler	The person that deploys the dog as part of the K-9 team.



Evaluation Forms

The forms on the following pages are samples/templates for agency use/modification. They indicate basic data elements that should be documented during K-9 team evaluation.

Click the thumbnail to go to a full sized version; click the download button for an editable Word version, and click the pencil button for a fillable version.







K-9 Team Evaluation

Obedience

Critical Tasks: Obedience and Control of K-9

Date	/	/
------	---	---

Handler	K-9
Evaluator	Evaluator signature
Location	Equipment

		Pass	Fail		
1. On leash		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Left turn				
	Right turn				
	About turn				
Slow	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Normal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Quick	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
2. Off leash		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Left turn				
	Right turn				
	About turn				
Slow	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Normal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Quick	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
3. Down in motion		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Down/stay				
	Recall				
	Finish				
Slow	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Normal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Quick	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
4. Down from a distance		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Stand/sit				
	Sit				
	Down				
	Recall				
	Finish				
Slow	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Normal	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Quick	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Distractions

Comments

River City Police Department

K-9 Team Evaluation

Search

Critical Tasks: Reasonable Control, Suspect Location, Signal Recognition

Date
/ /

Handler	K-9
Evaluator	Evaluator signature
Location	Equipment

				Pass	Fail
1. Building search				<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Control	Locate	Recognition	Reasonable search time		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
2. Outdoor search				<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Control	Locate	Recognition	Reasonable search time		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Comments

River City Police Department

K-9 Team Evaluation

Apprehension

Critical Tasks: Control, Pursuit, Call Off

Date
/ /

Handler	K-9
Evaluator	Evaluator signature
Location	Equipment

	Pass	Fail
1. Apprehension without contact	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Control	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Pursuit on command	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Call off without contact	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2. Apprehension with contact	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Control	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Pursuit on command	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Contact	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Call off	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3. Call off	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Control	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4. Disengage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Control	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Comments

K-9 Team Evaluation

Handler Protection

Critical Tasks: The dog makes physical contact with the agitator/decoy, the dog “disengages” on verbal command, the dog remains under control.

Date
/ /

Handler	K-9
Evaluator	Evaluator signature
Location	Equipment

	Pass	Fail
1. Physical Contact	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Call Off	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Remains Under Control	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments

River City Police Department

K-9 Team Evaluation

Detection

Critical Tasks: Reasonable control, find substances.

Date / /

Handler	K-9
Evaluator	Evaluator signature
Location	Equipment

	Pass	Fail
1. Building search Substances detected:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Vehicle search Substances detected:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Outside area search Substances detected:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Other area search (describe in <i>Comments</i>) Substances detected:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments

Resources

The following resources provide potentially valuable information relating to law enforcement K-9 training. Not all content has been reviewed. Sources listed here are recognized for their subject matter, but are not specifically endorsed by POST.

California Narcotic Canine Association

<http://cnca.com/home/>

International Working Dog Breeding Association

<http://www.iwdba.org/>

National Police Bloodhound Association

<http://www.npba.com/>

National Police Canine Association

<http://www.npca.net/>

National Narcotic Detector Dog Association

<http://www.nndda.org/>

North American Police Work Dog Association

<http://www.napwda.com/>

Penn Vet Working Dog Center

<http://pennvetwdc.org/>

Scientific Working Group on Dog and Orthogonal Detector Guidelines

<http://swgdog.fu.edu/>

United States Police Canine Association

<http://www.uspcak9.com/>

Western States Police Canine Association

<http://www.wspca.net/>