



Managing SAR Dogs for Incident Staff



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SAR dogs offer advantages in locating non-responsive, hidden, or inaccessible subjects. They tend to be force-multipliers, allowing search managers to stretch human searchers available to other segments and so capture a larger chunk of POC. Many search managers get inconsistent results from SAR dogs, sometimes not understanding how to use them. This primer to helps you get the most out of your canine resources.

HOW THEY WORK

Dog handlers will talk search managers' ears off about scent and how their dog works it. This is important for dog handlers, but it's more important for you to think of mission:

- Airscent dogs are area- and reflex-search resources. Where you'd task a human grid or hasty team, you can task an airscents team.
- Trailing dogs are direction-of-travel resources. You'd task them to follow a subject from an LKP or through a bottleneck, much as you'd use a mantracker or a track trap.

- HRD (human remains detection) dogs are basically airscents dogs specifically trained and/or tested to find human remains instead of live humans.

Many dog teams will cross-train specialties. Often they will carry separate certifications in each, though many airscents teams will cross-train on HRD without a separate certification in the latter. Use your best judgment on which to use and when based on the scenario.

LIMITATIONS OF SEARCH DOGS

Like any SAR resource, search dogs are limited by their training and tasking. Dogs are more vulnerable to heat illness than human searchers. Specific advantages and disadvantages:

TRAILING DOGS

- Rapid find possible
- Less distractable
- Need uncontaminated scent article
- Trails degrade with time

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Working with SAR Dogs for Incident Staff



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- Need good starting point!

AIRSCENT DOGS

- Useful any time in search
- More weather resistant
- No scent article needed
- More distracted by contamination
- Not as fast

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Dog handlers have for some time been in the midst of a debate over whether the dog handler should also be the team leader. Rather than get pulled into this debate, search management staff should focus on what a particular team's handlers feel confident in doing. Many will insist on being the team leader; others may request a separate team leader or even a navigator. Within the bounds of operational necessity - no single team is so valuable that it should strip resources from a stretched search effort - operations staff should make an effort

to provide whatever resources are needed to support individual dog teams.

HOW TO EVALUATE SAR DOG TEAMS

By far the best way to evaluate a SAR dog team is to train with them. But if you have to assess on the fly there are a few things you can check. Most competent dog teams are:

- Professional
- Properly equipped
- Cooperative with incident management
- Willing to show written standards
- Externally certified
- NIMS compliant
- Not making unlikely claims
- Not giving you a nervous feeling