

# Area Search Certification Evaluation

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## Purpose

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The purpose of the Area Search Certification Evaluation is to accurately and uniformly assess a canine team's capability to perform the skills necessary to locate missing persons in a wilderness or rural environment.

## Objectives

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- Provide uniform methods to determine the current operational readiness of an area search canine team.
- Develop a fair and objective process to certify an Area Search Canine Search Specialist Team.
- Evaluate the ability of the canine team to:
  - Assess the situation
  - Plan, brief and conduct an effective search
  - Demonstrate land navigation skills
  - Demonstrate medical skills to include basic assessment and initial treatment.
  - Demonstrate knowledge of appropriate radio protocol
  - Document search results and effectively debrief

- Remain effective in a long-term working situation to include the ability to continue working after locating 1 or more persons.

## Criteria

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In order to be eligible for the Area Search Certification Evaluation the canine team must have successfully completed:

- Prerequisites as stated in *Section 2.2*
- Canine Obedience Evaluation (see Section 3)
- Canine Agility Evaluation (see Section 4)
- Basic Area Search Field Assessments (see Section 5)

## Evaluation Procedures

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- A minimum of two (2) ARDA Team Evaluators are required to conduct the Area Search Certification Evaluation.
- The evaluation must last a minimum of 4 hours and a maximum of 6 hours.
- The total search area will consist of terrain typical to that encountered in the region where the evaluation is being conducted. It is preferable that the area consists of mixed terrain (e.g., mixture of light and dense brush). The total size (acreage) of the search area may vary by region (e.g., for daylight conditions in areas with moderate ground cover and changes in elevation under moderate weather conditions, 80 to 120 acres is suggested). It is the responsibility of the evaluators to determine the size of the search area based on the terrain, weather, and light conditions and to ensure that the total size of the search area is such that it can be reasonably searched within 4 to 6 hours.
- The testing team must be actively searching for a minimum of 2 hours under night-time conditions. The night requirement may be incorporated into this evaluation or it may be met by completing the Night Assessment (see criteria as referenced at the end of this document).
- There will be a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 4 subjects, who are unfamiliar to the canine, placed within the search area. The subjects will be placed a minimum of 30 minutes prior the start of the evaluation. Each subject is to remain at the location placed (e.g., subjects are to remain stationary) until released from duty by the evaluator.

- At least one subject is to require medical assistance. The evaluator may indicate that a subject is deceased, in which case, the handler will be expected to demonstrate appropriate crime scene preservation techniques.
- The evaluators will conduct a brief uniform and equipment check of the team before starting the evaluation. If the team is lacking in any important clothing or equipment that renders the team ineffective or unsafe in the field, the evaluation will be terminated immediately.
- The evaluators will conduct a briefing in which the handler will be given pertinent information about the search scenario. The evaluators will answer any questions that the handler asks. The evaluators will assign the handler one or more tasks during the search, and will accompany the team on its tasks and observe its performance. The evaluators may or may not provide additional information and tasking as the search progresses.
- The evaluators will provide the handler with a topographic map of the search area and a radio for the evaluation. If possible, a base camp radio will be manned by an assistant during the evaluation. If a base camp radio operator is not available, one of the evaluators will simulate this role during the evaluation.
- A maximum of 30 minutes will be allowed from end of the briefing process until the team heads into the field.
- The handler must begin their initial search task within 30 minutes of leaving base.
- Prior to starting their search task(s), the handler is required to communicate to the evaluators their search strategy. The handler is then to execute that strategy. Changes in strategy are permissible; however, the handler is to communicate their reasoning to the evaluators.
- The measured time for the evaluation will begin when the team begins their initial search task and ends when either the team locates all of the missing subjects, the evaluator informs the handler that the final task is complete, or the maximum time limit has been met.
- After returning to base the handler will have a maximum of 30 minutes to prepare for debrief.
- At the conclusion of the field evaluation, the evaluators will conduct a debrief of the assigned search task(s). The handler is responsible to provide information about the search task(s) the team performed, to include the search area covered, times, clues, weather, and any other important information. The handler shall draw a map or maps of areas searched.

- At the conclusion of the evaluation, each evaluator is responsible for filling out the appropriate evaluation form and debriefing the handler on their performance. One of the evaluators will be responsible for collecting all paperwork from the handler (e.g., maps and notes) and distributing the paperwork to the appropriate person within their unit (typically the evaluation director or secretary). The designated individual within the ARDA member unit will then be responsible for submitting the appropriate paperwork to the ARDA Evaluation Director.

## Evaluation Guidelines

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Evaluators will consider not only the successful conclusion of the evaluation, but also the following:

- The handler must plan and execute a good search strategy based on a correct analysis of the situation, the conditions, and the detection capabilities of the canine.
- The handler must use correct radio protocol.
- The handler must demonstrate the ability to use a map and compass to:
  - Orient themselves
  - Get to and stay in their assigned search area(s)
  - Grid the search area(s)
  - Identify their location using appropriate map coordinates
- The team must search the assigned area within the time limit with no significant gaps (e.g., areas inadequately covered by the handler and/or canine).

**Note:** The exception to this is an area that it is impossible to or not safe to search. Such areas are to be left unsearched, but the handler is to mark the area on their map and be prepared to explain this omission during the search debrief.

- The handler must use flagging tape appropriately (e.g., mark area covered, alerts, clues, etc.).
- The team should be prepared to search in all types of terrain typical for their region as well as in varying weather and light conditions.

- The canine must range at a distance appropriate for the wind, terrain, ground cover, weather, and light conditions.
- The handler must recognize and correctly interpret the behavior of the canine.
- The canine must demonstrate the ability to detect human scent and the persistence to work the scent from the point of detection to the scent source (the subject).
- The canine must be willing to leave the handler and approach the subject.
- The canine must demonstrate an easily identifiable trained indication of a "find" (e.g., bark alert or recall/refind).
- The canine must not show aversion to approaching the subject.
- The canine must demonstrate good behavior toward the subject and may not do anything that might injure the subject.
- The handler must provide appropriate aid to the subjects.
- If it appears to be a potential crime scene, the handler is to use good crime scene preservation methods and minimize disturbance of the area where the "find" is made.
- The canine must demonstrate the ability and willingness to return to work, after making a find, and focus on finding additional subjects.
- The canine must locate all of the subjects and indicate to the handler that each subject has been located within the allotted time.
- The canine and handler are to demonstrate good working stamina for the duration of the search. This element includes the maintenance of an acceptable working pace for the duration of the evaluation.
- While in the field, the handler must exhibit team leadership skills by taking proper care of themselves, their dog and any escorts on the team. This should include:
  - Ensuring the humans and the canine stay properly hydrated
  - Ensuring that neither humans or the dog become dangerously overheated or cold
  - Taking appropriate breaks

- The handler must draw maps of the areas searched, including all pertinent information such as:
  - Name of handler, canine and date
  - North arrow
  - Wind direction and speed
  - Start location and time
  - Point Last Seen (PLS) and/or Last Know Point (LKP)
  - Probability of Detection (POD)
  - Terrain and other prominent features
  - Hazards
  - Path and direction of travel
  - Give appropriate map coordinates or mark on the map the location of alerts and clues as well as the time they were located.
  - Give appropriate map coordinates or mark on the map the location of the subjects and the time they were located.
  - Finish location and time
- The handler must be able to relate, to the evaluators during debrief, the pertinent information about the task(s) they performed.

## Recertification

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Upon the successful completion of the Area Search Certification Evaluation, the Area Search Canine Search Specialist Team will receive a certificate of completion which will be valid for two (2) years from the date of the certification evaluation. In order to retain this certification the Area Search Canine Search Specialist Team will be required to successfully complete the Area Search Recertification Evaluation (see Appendix 3) every two (2) years. Once the canine is 10 years old, the Canine Search Specialist Team must recertify annually.

# Night Assessment

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## Description

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An area primarily covered in light brush that can be reasonably searched at night in a minimum of 2 hours and a maximum of 4 hours (e.g., 40 to 80 acres in size).

**Note:** 40 acres = 16 hectares, 80 acres = 32 hectares. A hectare = 100 meters X 100 meters.

## Objective

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Observe the handler's ability to effectively plan and the team's ability to execute an area grid search at night.

## Procedures

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- **This assessment must be conducted by 2 ARDA Team Evaluators.**
- The subject must be placed in light brush within the search area.
- Prior to the start of the task, the handler will receive a briefing from the evaluator(s).
- The problem may contain either a medical emergency or a potential crime scene.
- The handler is to be provided a hand-held radio and a base camp communications officer is to be provided or at least simulated.

## Critical Elements

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- All critical elements from previous assessments.
- Handler asks appropriate questions during the initial briefing.
- Handler's ability to plan and execute a search strategy based on the correct analysis of the situation, taking into account nighttime conditions.
- Handler's ability to navigate at night.

- Team's ability to grid search at night.
- Appropriate use of flagging tape or equivalent marking material to mark sector boundaries and canine alerts.
- Appropriate use of radio protocol.
- Given changes in search conditions and canine behavior, the handler takes the correct actions.
- Canine's willingness to leave the handler and work through brush at night to locate the subject.
- Demonstration of the canine's trained indication.
- Canine shows no aversion to approaching the subject.
- Canine demonstrates good behavior toward the subject. The canine does nothing that might injure the subject.
- Handler's ability to handle a medical emergency or crime scene (if applicable).

### **Pass/ Fail Criteria**

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The following criteria must be met at a satisfactory level in order to pass this assessment.

- The handler must plan and execute a search strategy based on the briefing, assessment of the terrain, ground cover, wind conditions, and detection capabilities of the canine in these conditions.
- The handler must demonstrate the ability to navigate in light brush at night. He is to use the topographic map to identify sector boundaries and get to and stay within the assigned search area. The handler must be able to determine his appropriate map coordinates.
- The canine team must grid the assigned area so as to provide adequate coverage given the wind conditions, temperature, terrain, ground cover, and nighttime conditions.
- The handler must use flagging tape appropriately or equivalent (e.g., mark area covered, canine alerts, etc.).
- The handler is to use correct radio protocol.

- Canine must work willingly, focus on the task, and range from the handler, while still maintaining appropriate contact.
- The handler must recognize and correctly interpret the behavior of the canine.
- Handler takes correct actions to give his canine the best chance for success in locating the lost subject. This applies especially if the canine alerts or shows interest in an area and is unsuccessful in working out the scent on its own.
- The canine must demonstrate the ability to detect human scent in light brush and the persistence to work the scent from the point of detection to the scent source (the subject).
- The canine must locate the subject by air-scenting or by picking up the fresh trail of the subject within an acceptable time limit, based on the demonstration of the canine team's ability to search the assigned area at a reasonable pace.
- The canine must demonstrate its trained indication when it finds the subject.
- Upon locating the subject, the canine must eagerly accept its reward.
- Upon making the find, the handler is to correctly identify the location of the subject using appropriate map coordinates.
- If the scenario involves a medical emergency, the handler must provide proper aid to the subject.
- If this is a potential crime scene, the handler must use crime scene preservation methods.
- The handler is to complete a hand-drawn map of the assigned area. The map should include all pertinent information: North arrow, wind direction and speed, PLS (if in sector), POD, terrain and prominent features, the track of the canine team, location of alerts, indication, and the subject.
- The handler is to relate all pertinent information during the debriefing.