

LAND SAR New Zealand Inc.



STANDARDS

Search and Rescue Dog Teams
Tracking Dog Teams

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This document specifies the standards of performance required by search and rescue dog teams used in Land SAR and details the process of evaluation used to determine the operational readiness of the teams.

1.1 Objectives

- Provide a fair and open process to determine operational readiness of search dog teams.
- Ensure consistency in the MINIMUM skills and abilities of operational SAR Dog teams nationally.
- Provide a clear direction to non-operational teams of the standard they must achieve in order to become operational, and to enable them to train accordingly to become a valuable resource to NZLSAR.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

SAR Dog	A dog that is certified operational for Search and Rescue (SAR) work.
SAR Dog Team	A SAR Dog and Handler combination that is certified operational for SAR.
Air-scent SAR Dog	A search dog specifically trained to locate human scent carried on the wind, and follow that scent to its source be it human or article.
Avalanche SAR Dog	A dog specifically trained to find people and articles buried under snow.
Ground-Scenting SAR Dog	A dog that is specifically trained to follow human scent left on or near to the ground by a person. This is not “footstep to footstep” tracking, but rather a dog that follows a “line of human scent”
Find	The dog’s location of the source of human scent.
Alert	A natural behaviour exhibited by the dog when it finds human scent. This behaviour may be subtle, but should be recognisable by the handler and considered a clue.
Indication	A trained response from the dog upon finding a source of scent (e.g. a person or article). Indications include:

(1) Barking on Find, (2) Recall-Refind, (3) Physical Indication.

Barking on Find	Dog remains at location of missing subject and barks. Handler locates subject and barking dog together.
Recall-Refind	Upon finding, dog returns to handler and indicates by barking, grabbing or some other trained response, and then returns handler to missing subject.
Physical Indication	In cases of buried, concealed or elevated subjects, dog indicates strongest source of scent by physically digging, scratching, and/or biting at ground or other materials.
Scent Article	An item of clothing or other item (e.g., car seat) bearing the scent of the missing subject (and no one else's). It is used to allow the dog to identify the specific scent to be located
Strike	The moment when an air-scent dog locates air-borne human scent and changes from searching for the scent to following that scent to its source.
PLS	Point Last Seen

3.0 PREREQUISITES

3.1 Handler

Before presenting for, or being accepted for operational assessment, handlers are required to:

- Be an active member of their local SAR group. The handler must make all possible attempts to be fully involved in their local SAR group and should if possible have been deployed operationally as a team member on at least one search.
- Have a current first aid certificate and have completed TCA 1
- Supply an endorsement signed by their local SAR Committee and Police SAR OC.
- Meet the handler standards as defined in “Standards for Operational Search Dog Handlers”

3.2 Dog

The dog should be:

- Registered with the local authority in which the handler is resident
- Be fully vaccinated or certified by a veterinary surgeon as disease free

4.0 CERTIFICATION PROCESS

4.1 Assessors

- The Assessment process is by joint agreement between NZLSAR appointed assessors and New Zealand Police Dog Section appointed assessors.
- The NZLSAR assessors are appointed by the National Committee upon the recommendation of the NZLSAR Search Dog sub-committee.
- NZLSAR assessors shall be current or past operational handlers (Police or LandSAR) in the discipline which they are assessing. e.g. a handler who is an operational air-scent handler may not assess tracking dogs unless that handler is also an operational tracking dog handler.
- Terms of appointment for NZLSAR (i.e. tenure) should be established for each assessor upon appointment. No single tenure period should exceed 3 years, although assessors would be eligible for re-appointment for further terms.
- New Zealand Police Dog section assessors will be appointed by recommendation of National Co-ordinator - Police Dogs, NZ Police.

4.2 Operational Status

Operational status shall be granted to teams deemed to have demonstrated that they have the competencies required by this standard. Operational status will be effective for 12 months from the date of evaluation, subject to the following:

- A team that is out of service for 90 days or more (e.g. due to injury) may be asked to attend a weekend training in order to allow assessors to satisfy themselves that the team's skills have been maintained.
- A team that fails an evaluation for operational status will immediately become non-operational, irrespective of any time remaining in the 12 months since operational status was granted.
- A team that has been operational, but fails a subsequent assessment, may, at the discretion of the assessors, be offered the chance to re-present at an "extraordinary evaluation" as defined in section 5.3

4.3 Eligibility for evaluation

Currently operational Search Dog teams are expected to attend the assessment course in order to recertify.

Non-operational Search Dog teams that have been observed in the six (6) months prior to the assessment course working at or close to the required

standard will be invited to participate in the course. These teams must have been observed working by an assessor, either in their regional training or at one of the NZLSAR training weekends. This observation can be made at any weekend training where an assessor is present. An assessor may be requested to attend a training event where there is no local assessor attending, in order to make recommendations to the NZLSAR Search Dog sub-committee.

NOTE: Assessors should err on the side of including borderline teams rather than excluding them; the course is a training and assessment course and teams may potentially make significant progress between being observed and the course.

Assessors will make recommendations to the NZLSAR Search Dog sub-committee, who will invite suitable teams to participate.

5.0 EVALUATION PROCEDURE

Evaluations to determine suitability for operational status will be carried out annually at two courses, one on each island.

5.1 Format of course

5.1.1 The course shall be run over four consecutive days.

5.1.2 There shall be a number of sessions during the course - morning, afternoon and possibly one or more evening (dark) sessions.

5.1.3 Each session will be designed to train and assess specific competencies. Many competencies may be trained and assessed in a single session.

5.1.4 NZLSAR assessors will be present to observe all dogs during all sessions.

Assessors presenting a dog for operational assessment must be observed by another assessor on a minimum number of sessions as appropriate to initial assessment or recertification.

5.1.5 Police assessors will observe each dog at least one, preferably two sessions.

5.1.6 Assessors will debrief each team observed.

5.1.7 At the end of the course, assessors will have a meeting to agree upon the suitability of each team for operational status.

5.2 Re-evaluation

5.2.1 Currently operational handlers are required to recertify within 12 months of their last assessment in order to retain their operational status. They are therefore expected to attend the annual course for their island in order to re-certify

5.2.2 In the case of exceptional circumstances preventing the team attending the annual course, the team may be eligible for assessment at an extraordinary evaluation as defined in section 5.3

5.3 Extraordinary Evaluations

In some cases, evaluations may be arranged outside the annual course. There is significant cost, both monetary and in assessors and Police time involved in this.

Therefore, it is entirely at the assessors and NZLSAR Search Dog sub-committee's discretion whether such an evaluation will be offered to teams.

5.3.1 Extraordinary evaluation may be offered to:

a) Teams who were operational but fail to subsequently recertify. It is expected that this option will only be exercised for teams who were very close to the required standard at the annual evaluation.

b) Operational teams who due to exceptional circumstances were unable to attend the annual evaluation.

5.3.2 Extraordinary evaluations will, wherever possible, be arranged to take place at a weekend training event, either national or regional, in order to reduce costs and workload.

5.3.3 Whenever possible, more than one NZLSAR assessor will be present to observe teams.

5.3.4 Teams being recertified at such an extraordinary evaluation will be required to be observed by the NZLSAR assessor and by the Police assessor.

6.0 COMPETENCIES

In order to be deemed operational, the Search Dog team must demonstrate during the course certain handler and dog competencies. These competencies are related to Tracking dogs and the handling thereof.

Note: There is no attempt to assess the handler's general bush/mountain or SAR skills during the course. However, assessors will have the discretion to provisionally certify a team as 'ready to be operational' on the proviso that prior to full operational status the handler is able to demonstrate to their local SAR organisation that they have addressed a particular essential SAR skill or skills, that were identified as requiring improvement. This should be regarded as a health and safety matter. Once the local SAR organisation has certified the handler's skill is at a level acceptable to them then they will notify the assessors of such and the dog team will be deemed as 'operational' and ready to be deployed.

6.1 TRACKING STANDARD

Purpose

The assessment is to test that a team can locate a line of human scent from an approximate starting point and to follow that line of scent to a successful conclusion under assessment conditions. The assessment is to test that a handler can plan and systematically cast for ground scent and follow it, and manage the dog while working ground scent.

Assessment conditions

6.1.1 In a simulated situation, one person lays a track; the age is timed from when it is commenced. All tracks are to be single laid, and should be laid if possible in a down- wind direction to prevent air-scent contamination from the subject.

6.1.2 New Zealand bush /rural terrain should be varied and may include the following - grass paddocks, bush, gullies, ridges, steep areas and / or open tussock areas. Length up to 1 1/2 km with 5 - 6 directional changes and 3hrs old.

6.1.3 Casting is a systematic process used to enable the dog to locate a track.

6.1.4 At the start of the track the handler will be given an area approx 20m x 20m as PLS.

6.1.5 Finding the track is a recognisable reaction by the dog on finding human scent on the ground.

6.1.6 On finding the track the dog is to follow the line of human scent to its conclusion.

6.1.7 Upon reaching the end of the track the dog is to provide to the handler a recognisable indication of the presence of the human subject.

Performance Criteria.

6.1.8 Dog is trained to find and follow on command a track unknown to the handler and to complete this within 30 minutes.

6.1.9 The dog is cast with the handler in stationary position, in a manner which allows the dog to find then follow the track.

6.1.10 The handler maintains even contact and control of the tracking line throughout tracking.

6.1.11 Commands given to the dog provide direction and encouragement.

6.1.12 Tracking speed and general direction of travel is maintained. In the event the dog loses the scent, the handler must be able to recognise this. Handlers are permitted to rework a part of the track to re-find the scent/track. AIMLESS WANDERING HOWEVER IS NOT PERMITTED.

6.1.13 Dog is trained to respond immediately to handler's commands in the presence of distractions. Distractions may include but are not limited to - other dogs, people, food, wildlife and farm animals.

6.1.14 Handlers on completion of their search task should be capable of being debriefed. At such a debriefing the handler should be able to describe and show on a map their route and any indications made by the dog.

7.0 OPERATIONAL

7.1 Operational Deployment Policy

7.1.1 Only SAR dog teams which have met the Tracking assessment standard (or Area Search standard) will be used for SAR Operations.

7.1.2 Operational SAR dog teams must always be deployed with at least one other NZLSAR or Police team member and ideally two. Team members can be responsible for Navigation and communications.

7.2 Operational expertise

7.2.1 The operational handler is able to demonstrate a careful and systematic "casting" procedure to locate ground scent at point last seen (PLS)

7.2.2 The operational handler understands the basic theory of scent, and the possible impact of climatic conditions on scent distribution to formulate an understanding of the likelihood of the dog being able to find ground scent.

7.2.3 The operational handler is able to recognise when the dog has NOT located ground scent or has lost the track.

7.2.4 The operational handler marks on map and radios Search Base the location of any articles, items or clues found during a search. Base will instruct the handler regarding this.

7.2.5 If the dog is worked on line, the handler is physically capable of handling a 25 - 30 foot line in rough and varied terrain and handling the dog on tracks of 3 to 4 hours duration.

7.2.6 The handler is able to recognise scent pools and dead ends and be able to assist their dog as necessary

7.2.7 The handler is capable of assisting their dog over, under or across, fences, streams, swing bridges, bluffs and breaks in terrain.

7.2.8 The handler recognises when their dog needs a break during the search. The dog demonstrates a willingness to resume tracking after being rested.

7.2.9 On completion of their task the handler will be debriefed by the SAR IC. The handler is able to describe and show on a map; the route and assessment of their confidence regarding the tracks location and person's direction of travel.

7.2.10 The Operational handler carries enough equipment to be self supporting for 48 hours.

7.2.11 The Operational dog team is capable of finding the track of a subject leaving from a contaminated area. This may mean casting the dog in a large (100m or more) circle in order to cut the track.

7.2.12 Search Dogs should be comfortable in all types of transport with their handlers. This may involve being winched into and out of helicopters.

NB SAR dog handlers often liaise directly with Search management to establish a search plan. Therefore knowledge of the following are highly recommended: tracking (TCA 2), search methods, lost person behaviour, team leading and managing search operations.