

N.Z. LAND SAR Inc.

STANDARDS

Search and Rescue Dog Teams

Area Search Dog Teams

Revision 2.0.0c

1 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 view to non-operational teams of the standard they must achieve in order to enable them to train accordingly to become a valuable resource to NZLSAR.

2 Definitions

SAR Dog	A dog that is being trained for Search and Rescue (SAR) work.
SAR Dog Team	A SAR Dog and Handler combination being trained 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 – the 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 “corridor 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 Discriminating	SAR Dogs may be trained to locate and follow an “identified individual human scent”. These dogs require a Scent Article .
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 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.
- 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 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 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 the New Zealand Police Dog representative on the NZLSAR Search Dog sub-committee.

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 14 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 14 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 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 at least one evening (dark) session.
- 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.
The participant will be informed about the training objectives of the session prior to the exercise. The participant may also be made aware of specific competencies being assessed during the exercise.
- 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, as defined in 5.1.7 and 5.1.8

- 5.1.5 Police assessors will observe each dog at at least one, preferably two sessions.
- 5.1.6 Assessors will complete an "Assessment Sheet" for each team observed on each session. An example sheet is included in Appendix A
- 5.1.7 Teams not currently operational must be observed demonstrating all mandatory competencies in order to be considered for operational status. These teams will be expected to be observed on no fewer than six(6) sessions over the period of the course.
- 5.1.8 Teams which are currently operational at the time of the evaluation must, as a minimum, be observed on all modules designated as "Skills Maintenance". This should be over a minimum of two training sessions.
- 5.1.9 Assessors will meet each evening to discuss the progress of each team. If there is doubt (e.g. due to missed finds) the handler may be called into the meeting to discuss particular circumstances or unusual problems that arose in the session.
Individual feedback will be given to each handler to ensure that they are aware of any problems and have rectification plans in place.
Assessors will agree appropriate exercises on which to observe any marginal teams.
- 5.1.10 At the end of the course, assessors will have a final 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 14 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 on a minimum of three exercises, and by the Police assessor on at least one exercise.
- 5.3.5 Teams will be required to demonstrate as a minimum the “skills maintenance” competencies as defined in section 6 of this document.
- 5.3.6 Where a team is being reassessed due to a failure at the annual evaluation, sessions to exercise the areas of the teams weaknesses that caused the failure will be designed.
- 5.3.7 Where a team is being assessed due to non attendance at the annual evaluation, general search exercises to test all mandatory competencies shall be designed.
- 5.3.8 Assessors will complete an “Assessment Sheet” for each team observed on each session.

6 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 search dogs and the handling thereof.

Note: There is no attempt to assess the handlers general bush/mountain or SAR skills during the course. However, assessors will have discretion to fail a team due to lack of handler skills if during the course, it becomes apparent that the handler is indeed severely lacking in an essential handler skill (e.g. clearly does not have the ability to navigate safely).

6.1 Skill Maintenance Competencies

The following competencies are designated “skills maintenance” and as such must be demonstrated by all teams including currently operational teams.

(NOTE: Assessors are at liberty to request **any** team, whether currently operational or not, to attend a particular session to demonstrate a specific competency.)

6.1.1 Spontaneous indication

The trained indication (see definitions) must be spontaneous and in no way induced by the handler, either consciously or subconsciously.

6.1.2 **Consistent Indication**

The dog must demonstrate a consistent trained indication upon locating subjects. The indication should not alter or degrade significantly on subsequent 'finds'

6.1.3 **Ranging**

The dog must be comfortable working at a distance from the handler. The distance will vary with terrain and individual dogs, but should be upwards of 50m in open country. Most dogs will work closer to the handler in particularly thick vegetation.

6.1.4 **Ability to successfully locate multiple subjects**

Reliably finding multiple subjects during a single search. There should be no significant change in performance between finds.

6.1.5 **Endurance**

The search dog team must be sufficiently fit, both mentally and physically to search for extended periods, without detrimentally affecting the performance. Operationally, the team will be expected to work for many hours (e.g. a six or eight hour shift) and as such the team must demonstrate the stamina to search for several hours in a single day.

6.1.6 **Efficient Searching**

Searches must be carried out efficiently; thoroughly enough such that an acceptable POD is achieved but in a timely manner, without over searching or over working the dog. Generally, teams should not take longer than 150% of the time a known operational search dog team takes to complete the search.

6.2 **Other Mandatory Competencies**

The following competencies must be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the assessors by all teams presenting for assessment for the first time. Currently operational teams may also be required to demonstrate these competencies at the discretion of the assessor panel.

6.2.1 **Plan and implement a search strategy**

The ability to plan logical and efficient coverage of search areas which give their team the best possible P.O.D, and to implement the plan effectively. Successful implementation of the plan includes changing the plan appropriately if required (e.g. due to environmental changes), coverage of ground missed due to dog striking on scent. The search must be planned and implemented such no significant portion of the area designated is omitted, subject to assessors' instructions.

6.2.2 **Debrief a search**

The ability to realistically and accurately debrief to SAR managers the area searched, including an estimate of achieved POD, notification of any sections not covered, and any sections that would be worthy of another resource (either due to interest shown by the dog, or because the POD achieved was low, but the POA maybe high).

6.2.3 **Search during darkness**

The best time of day for a search dog to operate is often during the hours of darkness, when the missing party is more likely to be stationary, and the heat of the day is not taxing the dog and causing air currents adversely affecting the dog's ability to detect the missing party's air-borne scent. It is thus essential that the search dog team is as comfortable and effective working during the hours of darkness as in daylight.

6.2.4 **Management of Dog**

The handler must demonstrate appropriate management of the canine member of the team, including rest schedule, access to water, encouragement, appropriate praise and guidance through directional control.

6.2.5 **Ability to Read the Dog**

The handler must have the ability to read and interpret the dog's actions and behaviours. This would include, but is not limited to: correctly reading the 'strike' and reading when the dog is losing concentration and requires rest.

6.2.6 **Elimination Search**

Most search areas the team will search during operations will not contain the missing person. Therefore it is vital that an operational team can search an area, not find anything in that area, and continue working effectively when tasked again. The handler must demonstrate enough confidence in the team's abilities to leave the area and debrief appropriately to the SAR managers when nothing is found in the area. Additionally, the handler must demonstrate a means of finishing the search for the dog, other than by means of the reward given for successfully locating a subject. Whatever method the handler employs, the dog must retain its desire to search during subsequent taskings.

NOTE. When this competency is being assessed, the participant will not be made aware of that prior to the exercise. The participant will be informed that a full debrief of the search will be required upon completion. Other competencies may still be assessed during this exercise and the participant may be made aware of them.

6.2.7 **Traverse all types of terrain**

Dog teams must display an ability to travel efficiently over various terrain (e.g. dense bush, steep ground, scree, rocks, snow) and traverse barriers encountered (e.g. Fences, water etc.) in a range of conditions and must have the stamina to sustain this for extended periods (a number of hours) whilst continuing to search effectively.

6.2.8 **Behaviour in the presence of domestic stock**

The dog must show no interest in domestic stock, such as sheep, goats, cattle, pigs etc.. Search dog teams will frequently be required to search farmland, and the dog may not in any way cause any distress to domestic stock.

6.2.9 **Behaviour in presence of distractions**

The dog must be under the control of the handler at all times, including in the presence of distractions such as other dogs, wildlife etc.. The dog should continue searching in the presence of such distractions

6.2.10 **Directional Control**

In order to successfully implement a search plan, the handler will need to be able to direct the dog to search in particular directions and places.

Handlers should be able to demonstrate during the course of general searching, sufficient directional control to ensure that the search plan is thoroughly implemented.

6.2.11 **Helicopter/Light Aircraft Transport**

Whilst this competency may not necessarily be assessed, the handler is responsible to ensure that both themselves and the dog have attended appropriate safety sessions, and that the dog is exposed to helicopters/light aircraft at all available opportunities. If at all possible, the handler should get the dog comfortable with entering helicopters/light aircraft with the engine(s) running, and also with being winched into and out of helicopters. (Winching practice can be achieved without the use of a helicopter)

6.2.12 **Transport**

Handlers and dogs should be comfortable travelling in all forms of transport. Many different modes of transport may be used to locate search teams to the start of their search area, including, 4WD's, ATV's, air transport, snowmobiles, 'Unimogs', inflatable boats (IRB's), jet boats, skidoos, chairlifts.

6.2.13 **Obedience**

Whilst this competency may not necessarily be assessed, the handler must have sufficient control over the dog to cater for all eventualities whilst the team are representing NZLSAR as a Search Dog Team.

This includes PR exercises, such as demonstrations, displays etc., transport on commercial transport, such as aircraft, and at all times during a search, from arrival at the incident through deployment and location and possible extraction of the subject.

As such the dog must:

- Walk to heel on and off lead.
- Return to handler immediately when commanded
- Be able to be left in a 'downstay' for a minimum of 10 minutes. (This is to allow the handler to deal with a subject once located without distraction, for instance)
- Be sociable in the presence of humans and other dogs
 - Be handleable by persons other than the regular handler in controlled situations.

6.2.14 **Aggression**

The team must show no sign of aggression in the presence of other dogs, handlers, search team members or members of the public. The dog should be capable of being handled for all situations except searching by persons other than the handler (e.g. transportation)