

AREA SEARCH TEAM FIELD QUALIFICATION TEST

1. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

- This test has been promulgated by the NSDA to assess handler/canine teams as to operational suitability for typical area search incidents.
- This is not an area disaster test; therefore, the test criteria may or may not meet the proposed NIMS (disaster) area search criteria currently under review. When the NIMS criteria are finalized, the NSDA will make provisions to offer tests meeting or exceeding those criteria.
- The NSDA prerequisites represent those items that we believe will allow the candidate to have the opportunity to safely and successfully complete the area search test(s).

2. OBJECTIVE:

- The Daytime Area Search Team Field Qualification Test demonstrates the ability of an area search canine team (handler and K-9) to locate hidden subjects in a large area within a prescribed time period. This ability, combined with the demonstrated ability of the handler to correctly read the behavior of the K-9, the ability of the K-9 to show a trained, recognizable change in behavior when it detects a person, and the ability of the handler to formulate and execute a search plan constitutes the area search team field qualification certification for the NSDA.
- An optional Night Area Search Team Field Qualification Test is also available. Teams may elect to take the nighttime test at any time within one (1) year after they have passed the daytime area search field qualification test. The night test may be taken at the same test event as the daytime test.

3. GENERAL GUIDELINES:

- Testing will be of a handler and K-9 only.
- The Evaluator will follow the team during the test.
- A K-9 team will not be required to test in conditions other than those in which it would be reasonably expected to search.

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- No electronic collars are permitted while the K-9 team is being evaluated.
- Handlers will draw numbers for the order in which they are to be tested, unless there is a strong, overriding reason for convenience of handler or Evaluator.

4. EVALUATORS:

- The evaluation shall be conducted by a designated NSDA Principal Evaluator, with the option of a second Evaluator or Apprentice Evaluator.
- The Evaluator(s) shall terminate the test if, in their opinion, it becomes hazardous to any of the participants.
- The Evaluator(s) shall have discretion in the administration and evaluation of all portions of the test.
- Evaluators may be tested during the same testing period but not on the same day that they are conducting a test.

5. PRE-TESTING "INDICATION"

- Before the Area Search Team Field Qualification test is taken, the testing team must demonstrate the K-9's "indication" behavior (the K-9's trained means of signaling to the handler that it has found the subject).
- The demonstration will be set up so that the K-9 does not see the subject leave.
- The pre-test subject may be known to the K-9; however, family members, close friends or people that have been a subject for the testing team within the last forty-five (45) days may not be used as subjects. Pre-test subjects should not be used as Field Test subjects.
- The Evaluator will send the subject to a known point approximately one hundred (100) yards from where the team will start the exercise. The subject will remain hidden from the team and silent.
- Before the test starts, the handler must be able to articulate how the K-9 will indicate or communicate to the handler that the K-9 has found someone.
- The Evaluator will lead or direct the team to pass by the subject on the downwind side of the subject at a distance such that the K-9 should be able to scent the subject. It does not matter if the K-9 detects the subject's track and finds the subject by tracking or by

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air scent, only that the K-9 have ample opportunity to be able to detect and find the subject by using scent.

- Without undue influence from the handler, the K-9 should communicate the find to the handler.
- This test should be set up by the Evaluator to give the team the best advantage to find the subject, such as, in an area relatively free of distractions, etc.
- The team must demonstrate an adequate indication before it will be allowed to take the Area Search Qualification Field Test. In order to pass the pre-test, the indication performed by the K-9 must closely approximate the indication described by the handler.
- The Indication Pre-test shall only be given once and should be set up to be completed in less than five (5) minutes.

6. TEST SITE PREPARATION:

- The optimal size of the search area is one hundred sixty (160) acres. However, in no instance shall the search area be less than forty (40) acres in size.
- Since terrain and weather conditions greatly affect the effectiveness of area search teams, the Evaluator may adjust the size of the search area due to varying conditions.
- Adjustments to the search area size will be made using the NSDA Daytime Acreage Adjustment Chart and the experience and knowledge of the Evaluator. The area will be adjusted to attempt to achieve a desired search time of three (3) hours.
- The boundaries of the search area may be either obvious natural features (streams, ridgelines, etc.) or manmade boundaries like roads or trails, or marked or flagged boundary lines that are present on the ground, or a boundary line that is marked on the map provided to the handler.
- The use of GPS by the handler is recommended, however, the use of GPS is not required.
- If a boundary is not easily found or clearly marked, upon questioning by the handler, the Evaluator may assist the handler with finding the boundary.

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7. DISTRACTIONS:

- Clues and distractions shall not be intentionally placed in the search area. Although handlers should be clue aware, clue awareness is not a criterion for successful completion of the Field Test.

8. EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS:

- A pack check is not a pre-test requirement but the handler is expected to carry adequate first aid, supplies and water for the handler/K-9 team. NSDA will publish a recommended equipment list but, for this test, it is the responsibility of the handler to be adequately equipped and attired.

Although a pack check is not part of the evaluation, lack of adequate equipment may be a reason for the exam to be stopped and considered a failure. For example, if the handler runs out of water, the Evaluator may stop the test if there is a danger to the health and well being of the handler and K-9.

9. SAFETY:

- The search subjects must be properly dressed for the conditions, have adequate water and other necessary equipment to remain for the duration of the test.
- The subjects must be able to contact the Evaluator by radio.

10. PLACEMENT AND BRIEFING OF SUBJECTS:

- Two subjects shall be placed in the search area at least thirty (30) minutes prior to the start of the evaluation.
- The subject may be known to the K-9; however, family members, close friends or people that have been a subject for the testing team within the last forty-five (45) days may not be used as subjects.
- The subjects must be placed at such a distance that the search for the second subject optimizes full use of the 3 hour search period. The subjects should be placed at least one hundred (100) yards away from each other. The object of the test is not to place the subjects in unreasonable terrain in order to fool the K-9. The subjects must be concealed such that the handler shall not be able to see them from a distance of twenty (20) feet or more.
- The subjects must remain silent.

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11. BRIEFING OF HANDLER:

- At the test site, the Evaluator shall carefully explain the area's boundaries and shall provide the handler with a good quality aerial or topographic map of the area with the boundaries drawn on it.
- The handler will address the Evaluator as though the Evaluator was a search manager unfamiliar with search K-9 teams and shall introduce the team, explain its capabilities, and ask questions pertinent to the assignment.

12. TEST TIMING:

- The handler will have a maximum time of fifteen (15) minutes to develop a search plan based upon the information provided and the existing conditions. The handler shall then explain their plan to the Evaluator.
- Timing shall commence after the handler has advised the Evaluator of the search plan and has deployed the K-9 in the search area.
- Both subjects must be located within three (3) hours.

Failure to find both subjects within the prescribed time limit results in failure of the test.

- Successful finding of both subjects results in the conclusion of the test even if the target time limit of three (3) hours has not elapsed.

13. KNOWLEDGE AND PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES:

Search Plan

- During the test, the handler will simulate providing base camp with in-field progress checks at half-hour intervals. The handler may complete and report map details at the end of the search.
- The Evaluator may prompt the handler for the required updates but this should be done in a time and manner that does not interfere with the search. The handler shall inform the Evaluator of changes made to his/her initial search plan.
- If the Evaluator for the field test is not the same as for the pre-test then, prior to the start of the evaluation, the handler shall describe to the Evaluator how his/her K-9 indicates the presence of a hidden subject.

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- During or at the conclusion of the test, as applicable, the K-9/handler team must:
 1. Demonstrate the ability to plan an efficient search, best utilizing wind, terrain, topography, and existing environmental conditions to provide efficient and effective coverage of the terrain given the time constraints of the test.
 2. Report clearly on the map the following information (Note: Map documentation may be completed at the conclusion of the test):
 - a) Areas searched.
 - b) Routes covered.
 - c) Areas not searched.
 - d) Location of “alerts” (change in K-9’s behavior when it detects human scent) or indications unless they coincide with the location of a subject.
 - e) Wind direction and other observed environmental factors which may be pertinent to the search effort.
 - f) Once both subjects are found, locate the sites on the map with coordinates for each, within approximately 100 meters.
 3. Demonstrate the ability to work and control the K-9 to effectively search the area.
 4. Demonstrate that the handler and K-9 have adequate agility and stamina for a wilderness search of three (3) hours duration.
 5. Demonstrate that the handler recognizes when the K-9 is alerting to human scent.
 6. Demonstrate the ability to judge sweeps of areas as to their suitability to the prevailing conditions.
 7. Demonstrate that the handler recognizes when either member of the K-9 team is working ineffectively and take action to compensate for or remedy the situation.
 8. Demonstrate that the handler and SAR K-9 have the ability to work effectively and find a subject with an additional person or persons accompanying the K-9 team.
 9. Demonstrate that the handler behaves professionally during the test.

14. FAILURE TO PERFORM:

- *The team must locate both subjects within the allotted time in order to pass the evaluation.*
- *However, the team may still fail the evaluation even if both subjects are located. For example, if the handler cannot show the subject’s locations on the search map, the exam will be a failure even if both subjects are found.*

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15. RE-CERTIFICATION:

- Re-certification is required every two (2) years.

16. NIGHT AREA SEARCH FIELD QUALIFICATION TEST (OPTIONAL)

- Teams that have completed the Basic Daytime Area Search Team Field Test may, at their option and within one year of passing the daytime Field Test, complete the additional Night Area Search Field Test. It is not necessary to retake the Indication Pre-test once the daytime test has been successfully completed.
- The same conditions apply as in the Basic Daytime Area Search except that the test shall be taken at night, only one search subject will be used, the minimum acreage will be twenty (20) acres and the maximum acreage will be forty (40) acres. The exact acreage of the area will be determined by the scenting and terrain conditions and adjusted using the NSDA Nighttime Acreage Adjustment Chart to provide for a test of two (2) hours duration.
- Failure to find the subject within the prescribed time limit results in failure of the test. Successful finding of the subject results in the conclusion of the test even if the target time limit has not elapsed.
- The test must be completed in two (2) hours or less. Night will be defined as ½ hour after sunset to ½ hour before sunrise.