

MAINE ASSOCIATION FOR SEARCH AND RESCUE

Search Dog Team Certification Standard

I. Introduction

- A. The Maine Association for Search and Rescue (MASAR) is dedicated to providing a centralized clearinghouse of search and rescue (SAR) services for the State of Maine. To this end, MASAR has developed the following standard for canine teams used in SAR incidents.
- B. This standard is intended to define the minimum requirements necessary for any SAR canine team.
- C. The certification issued under this standard is the minimum requirement for those dog teams that wish to participate in search and rescue programs in the State of Maine under the direction of the Maine Warden Service or other government agencies. No uncertified dog teams from MASAR-certified units shall respond to these search and rescue missions unless specifically requested by the agency in charge.
- D. This standard meets or exceeds the requirements of ASTM F1847-98 “Standard Guide for Demonstrating Minimum Skills of Search and Rescue Dogs and Handlers”

II. Application

- A. Per ASTM F1848-98, “Standard Classification for Search and Rescue Dog Crew/Teams”, dog teams are certified as Types and Kinds of resources. This standard applies to the following types and kinds of search dog teams:
 1. Air Scent for Wilderness Search - Type II, Kind A (*Area Search Dog*, per ASTM)
 2. Wilderness and Non- Wilderness Land Human Remains Detection - Type II, Kind C (*Cadaver Search Dog*, per ASTM)
 3. Wilderness Article Search and Clue Detection - Type II, Kind E (*Evidence Search Dog*, per ASTM)
 4. Tracking and Trailing - Types I and II, Kind F/G (*Trailing or Tracking Search Dog*, per ASTM)
 5. Air Scent Water Search - Type II, Kind H (*Water Search*, per ASTM)
- B. Application of this standard to other Types and Kinds of search dog teams shall be considered on a case by case basis by the MASAR Standards Committee.

III. Certification and Recertification

- A. Initial Certification
 1. The certification shall be issued by the MASAR Standards Committee
 2. To receive certification a dog team must:
 - a) Request certification by the MASAR Standards Committee, in writing.
 - b) Provide documentation that it has met the applicable requirements of Section IV below.

- c) Receive a passing score from the Field Evaluation Team in the Basic Certification Tests (Section V, Part A, below).
 - d) Receive a passing score from the Field Evaluation Team in the Specific Certification Test (Section V, Part B, below) for the specialty in which the dog team is to be certified.
3. All initial dog team certifications, with the exception of those for Land Human Remains Detection teams) is valid for three years. The initial certification for Wilderness Land Human Remains Detection dog teams is valid for two years only.
- B. Recertification
- 1. Recertification shall be issued by the MASAR Standards Committee.
 - 2. With the exception of Land Human Remains Detection teams, each certified canine team must be recertified by the Standards Committee every three years. Land Human Remains Detection teams must be recertified every two years.
 - 3. Recertification requires fulfillment of one of the following:
 - a) Continual successful involvement in an "in house" training program administered by a MASAR-certified search dog unit.
 - (1) Written records attesting to the team's participation in this training program, signed by a unit officer, must be included with the request for recertification.
 - b) Documented regular training, as well as successful completion of a course or courses in canine search-related subjects.
 - (1) The course, or courses, shall include field competency tests that encompass all the requirements of the certification procedures contained in this standard for this type of search dog team.
 - (2) Written proof of successful completion of the course must be included with the request for recertification. This method of recertification is predicated on the development and approval of training programs that meet the MASAR search dog standard.
 - 4. Regardless of the recertification method used, the dog team must have trained for at least 96 hours each year since it was last certified.
 - a) If a dog team is not able to train for that length of time in one year, it may make up lost time the following year, with the written approval of a unit officer. Alternatively, the team may complete a training and re-testing plan assigned to them by their MASAR Unit.
 - b) Written records attesting to this minimum training time, signed by a unit officer, shall be included with the request for recertification.
 - c) A letter, signed by a unit officer, which states that the team's training is sufficient for it to have maintained its proficiency, shall be provided with the request for recertification.
 - d) Copies of training logs (a minimum of 6 pages) shall be included with the request for recertification.
 - 5. With the exception of Land Human Remains Detection teams, each dog team recertification is valid for three years. Land Human Remains

Detection team recertifications are valid for two years.

6. A dog team which does not recertify through one of the above procedures must complete the entire certification procedure defined in this standard.
- C. Suspension and Revocation of Certification
1. Suspension
 - a) Dog teams that are temporarily unable to work should request inactive status from the standards committee.
 - b) The standards committee may suspend dog teams that do not request inactive status when some deficiency impedes their effectiveness.
 - (1) When a report of a dog team's deficiency is brought to the attention of the Standards Committee, the committee will consult with the handler and the unit training officer before taking any action.
 - (2) The handler will have the right to challenge any report of dog team deficiency, and has the right to know and confront the person who makes the report. The handler may provide written, oral, and recorded testimony in his support.
 - (3) The committee may take one of the following courses of action upon the challenge of a dog team's competence.
 - (a) The committee may confirm the dog team's continued certification.
 - (b) The committee may require that the dog team complete the recertification process before the normal certification time.
 - (4) In all instances, the dog team shall have the right to request a field test, or the relevant parts of the field or temperament tests, in order to confirm certification.
 2. Revocation
 - a) The committee shall have the option of permanently revoking a dog team's certification if serious misconduct on the part of a dog team member endangers the operation or credibility of the SAR enterprise.
 - b) In the event of the death or retirement of a dog team member, certification of the team will be terminated.

IV. Preliminary Requirements

Before scheduling certification testing, the dog team handler must provide proof of the following to the MASAR Standards Committee:

- A. The handler has current certification in the State of Maine as a basic ground searcher.
- B. The handler has training in basic canine first aid.
- C. The handler keeps clear and accurate training records.
- D. The dog has passed the current version of one of the following temperament/obedience tests. Tracking dogs which work on lead at all times will be exempt from this requirement.

1. AKC Canine Good Citizen Test.
 2. Schutzhund B
 3. UKC or AKC or AMBOR obedience title of CD or above
 4. Therapy dog certification
- E. The dog has demonstrated in the presence of unit members or others the ability to ride quietly in a powered watercraft larger than a motorized canoe and, if possible, aircraft.

V. Certification Testing

A. Basic Certification Tests

1. The handler shall show that she or he is equipped with the minimum equipment recommended by MASAR, or MASAR-accepted standards, for a search team member.
2. The handler shall demonstrate that the dog does not bite or snap at either humans or dogs, or growl at humans, in the following situations; excepting that a dog who is attacked by another dog will not be penalized for self-defense:
 - a) When transported in an unfamiliar vehicle for at least 10 minutes with the handler and at least two other dog teams.
 - b) While in a heeling position with the handler and a person approaches and engages in conversation with the handler.
 - c) While told to stay in an unfamiliar vehicle, three strangers come up to the dog and pat it while conversing in a pleasant tone of voice. The handler shall be out of sight.
 - d) When finding or approaching a stranger in the field.
3. The SAR dog must, in the presence of the Field Evaluation Team, allow handlers other than the dog's handler to transport and exercise the dog.

B. Specific Certification Tests

1. Tests for specific certification types can be found in the appropriate appendix.
2. Test Conditions
 - a) All testing will be of the handler and dog only.
 - b) Search subjects must be unknown to the dog.
 - c) Search subjects will be hidden and silent.
 - d) Search areas must be unfamiliar to the dog team undergoing testing.
 - e) Dog handlers will be provided with an adequate map.
 - f) A dog team will not be required to test in conditions other than those in which it would be expected to search.
 - g) Before beginning the test, the dog handler shall describe to the Field Evaluation Team the search plan to be used based on the scenario provided by the evaluation team.
 - h) Before beginning the test, the dog handler shall describe the dog's alert to the Field Evaluation Team.
 - i) The Standards Committee reserves the option to independently test applicants with an evaluation team of its own choosing.
3. Requirements

- a) During these tests, as applicable, the handler, in conjunction with his or her SAR dog, must:
- (1) Report clearly on a map the following information after searching an area, demonstrating a knowledge of how to evaluate the clues inherent in the dog's alert(s) and behavior:
 - (a) Areas and/or routes covered.
 - (b) Estimated probability of detection for the dog team based on environmental and terrain conditions.
 - (c) Location of alerts.
 - (d) Wind direction and other observed environmental factors which may be pertinent to the search effort.
 - (e) Location of any clues encountered during the search.
 - (2) Demonstrate the ability to plan an efficient search, best utilizing the wind and existing environmental conditions to provide maximum coverage of the terrain.
 - (3) Demonstrate the ability to work and control the dog in a variety of areas, terrain, and conditions.
 - (4) Demonstrate adequate agility for wilderness search.
 - (5) Demonstrate that the handler recognizes when the dog 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 dog team is working ineffectively, and take action to compensate for or remedy the situation.
 - (8) Demonstrate that the handler and SAR dog have the ability to work effectively and find the search subject with an additional person or persons accompanying the dog team.
 - (9) Demonstrate the ability to find the search subject and, in the case of an air scent dog, return to the handler on its own and indicate the find to the handler or alternatively, indicate in some other definitive manner like a steady "bark" indication, return to the handler when recalled, and return to the search subject.
 - (10) Show that the dog team can be part of the overall SAR mission by demonstrating an understanding of the purposes of other SAR resources and the Incident Command System.
 - (11) The handler shall demonstrate proficiency navigating with map and compass alone on at least one area search test if testing for Appendix B or at least one Basic Tracking or Trailing test if testing for Appendix C.
 - (12) The handler shall demonstrate proficiency with a GPS unit by showing that he or she can:
 - (a) Turn it on;
 - (b) Check battery status;
 - (c) Check and set the map datum;
 - (d) Clear the track log;

- (e) Set the track log ON;
 - (f) While in the field, demonstrate that the unit is operating and has sufficiently good satellite coverage to record a usable track.
 - (g) Demonstrate that he or she can collect a track log of the area or trail searched.
- C. Tests for Other Search Specialties
1. In order to be certified for a type and kind not listed in Section III, Part A above, a dog team handler shall present to the MASAR Standards Committee documentation of proficiency in that specialization.

VI. General Evaluation Procedures

- A. Field Evaluation Team
1. The Field Evaluation Team shall conduct the applicable Certification Testing.
 2. The Field Evaluation Team shall at minimum be a handler from a MASAR-certified dog team or a MASAR-approved alternative, but it may also include a second handler from a MASAR-certified dog team or a SAR-proficient person who is not a dog handler. At least one member of the Field Evaluation Team must meet the following criteria, unless waived by the MASAR Standards Committee:
 - a) Current MASAR certification under this standard for the specific skill(s) to be tested. Certification must have been held for at least the previous 2 years.¹
 - b) Five (5) documented deployments at actual searches.
 - c) Assisted a qualified evaluator for a minimum of two previous certification tests.
 - d) The approval of the Training Director or President of the unit in which the evaluator is a member.
 3. The handler of a dog team to be tested, or the unit of which that handler is a member, may request that the Field Evaluation Team consist of two people.
 4. Field Evaluation Team members not currently certified by MASAR shall be approved in advance by the MASAR Standards Committee.
 5. No member of a Field Evaluation Team shall perform more than 2 of the required certification tests of any one dog team.
- B. Separate evaluation forms shall be used by each member of the evaluation team and each form shall be signed by the evaluator after completion of each test.
- C. The evaluators shall document the dog team separately, and may compare their ratings only after the test has been completed.
- D. Copies of all evaluation forms for successful tests shall be sent to the MASAR Standards Committee.

¹ This specific requirement may be waived if the evaluator meets the following criteria:

- a) Was previously certified as a handler for at least three (3) years in the skill(s) to be tested;
- b) Is currently active in SAR dog training activities.

- E. Evaluator instructions
1. The objectives of the certification tests are:
 - a) Evaluation of the handler's planning ability and search technique.
 - b) Observation of the dog's ability to detect scent, communicate the search subject's location to the handler, and locate the search subject.
 2. It is the responsibility of the evaluators to ensure the following:
 - a) The search subjects are properly dressed for the conditions.
 - b) The search subjects have adequate food, water, and other necessary equipment to remain for the duration of the test, and are able to contact the evaluators by radio in an emergency.
 - c) The search subject shall be placed in the search area prior to the arrival of the dog team and shall be located such that the dog team should search a substantial portion of the area before the subject is located.
 - d) The Field Evaluation Team shall terminate the test if in their opinion it becomes hazardous to any of the participants.
 - e) The Field Evaluation Team shall have discretion in the administration and evaluation of all portions of the test.

VII. Retesting

- A. At the discretion of the Field Evaluation Team, a team may retest with minimal delay (not to exceed 60 days) if it fails any of the tests in Section V, Part A, 1 or 3, or if it fails any of the Specific Certification Tests in the testing appendices.
- B. A dog team failing any of the tests in Section V, Part A, Number 2, may be retested only on successful appeal. A dog team that fails a retest shall have no right of appeal and will be ineligible for certification.
- C. Any dog team failing any of the tests in a testing appendix must reapply for certification after further training. However, before reapplying, the dog team must have demonstrated before the handler's unit leader or training director, or the leader or training director of another MASAR-certified SAR dog unit, that the team can pass these tests, and must present documentation of these observations to the Standards Committee.
- D. Any team that fails a retest must reapply to the MASAR Standards Committee for certification testing, and may do so only after a waiting period of not less than 60 days. A dog team that fails a second retest may become ineligible for further testing, based on the recommendations of the evaluation team.

VIII. Appeals

- A. A dog team that fails any test or requirement in this standard may appeal the decision of the Field Evaluation Team to the Standards Committee, and may appeal a decision of the Standards Committee to the MASAR Board.
 1. The appeal must be submitted in writing.
 2. The appeal must be postmarked no later than 15 days after the failed test(s) or receipt of the contested decision(s).
 3. A copy of the appeal must be sent to all members of the MASAR

- Standards Committee, or, in the case of an appeal of the Standards Committee's decision, to the MASAR Board of Directors.
4. The appeal shall provide sufficient information for the Standards Committee or MASAR Board to make a decision. Such information may include but is not limited to:
 - a) Affidavits
 - b) Written statements of relevant parties, witnesses, and experts.
 - c) Complete description of the reason for the appeal.
 - d) The suggested remedy.
 - B. The Standards Committee or the MASAR Board will have a total of 60 calendar days in which to investigate, obtain testimony (if necessary), question the parties involved, obtain outside professional assistance, or take other actions which the committee deems necessary and appropriate in the circumstances.
 - C. The decision by the MASAR Standards Committee or MASAR Board will be written and sent to the appellant by certified mail (return receipt).
 - D. The decision of the MASAR Board will be final.

IX. Acceptance and Amendment

- A. These standards will take effect immediately upon acceptance by majority vote of the MASAR membership.
 1. The Standards Committee will immediately appoint Field Evaluation Teams.
 2. Dog Teams may immediately apply for certification and begin to schedule testing.
- B. The MASAR Standards Committee may recommend amendments to the MASAR membership as these standards are improved and expanded.
 1. The committee will present suggestions for amendment in writing to the MASAR membership.
 - a) MASAR members will have 30 days during which to comment on proposed amendments.
 - b) Amendments will be discussed and voted on at the next scheduled MASAR meeting after the comment period has ended.
 2. Amendments will be accepted by a two thirds majority vote of the MASAR membership present.
- C. Any MASAR Organizational Member may propose amendments by the same process outlined in Section IX Part B.