

MAINE ASSOCIATION FOR SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mounted SAR 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 certification of mounted search teams used in SAR incidents.
- B. This standard defines the minimum knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for a mounted team to be certified to participate in search and rescue operations managed by the Maine Warden Service.
- C. The certification issued under this standard is required for horse¹ and rider (mounted) teams that wish to participate in search and rescue operations in the State of Maine. The exception is an uncertified mounted team which may be allowed to take part in an actual search if the following requirements are met:
 - 1. The uncertified mounted team in training has met the requirements of Section III, Part A, subparts 2 and 3, below.
 - 2. Participation is approved by the unit training director or officer responsible for the trainee's instruction to date.
 - 3. The uncertified mounted team in training works under the direct supervision of a certified mounted search team rider. A certified mounted team may not supervise more than one uncertified mounted team at one time.
- D. Testing of a mounted team for certification shall be done within the unit of which the rider is a member, utilizing the objectives and procedures in the appendices to this standard. A mounted team that is not a member of a unit must apply to a MASAR-certified mounted SAR unit or the MASAR Standards Committee for testing.
- E. This standard applies to mounted wilderness search only. Other mounted search specialties shall be evaluated based on other standards and evaluation tests accepted by the MASAR Standards Committee.

II. Certification and Recertification

- A. Certification
 - 1. Mounted team certification is only issued by the MASAR Standards Committee.
 - 2. Certification shall be for mares and geldings only.
 - 3. The initial certification is valid for three years.

¹ Throughout this document, the term "horse" shall refer to any equine animal ridden for the purpose of performing search and rescue.

4. Certification must be requested in writing, sent to the chairman of the MASAR Standards Committee. The request must come from one of the following:
 - a) an officer of a MASAR-certified unit, or
 - b) a rider seeking certification for themselves and their mount.
- B. Recertification
 1. Mounted team certification must be renewed every three years.
 2. Recertification is issued only by the MASAR Standards Committee
 3. Recertification must be requested in writing, sent to the chairman of the MASAR Standards Committee. The request must come from one of the following:
 - a) an officer of a MASAR-certified unit, or
 - b) a rider seeking certification for themselves and their mount.

III. Documentation Required for Initial Certification

- A. For initial certification the applicant must provide the Standards Committee with the following:
 1. Proof of current MASAR certification as a Search Team Member.
 2. Documentation from a unit officer that the horse has demonstrated in the presence of other riders that it is quiet, well-mannered, non-aggressive, and does not bite or kick.
 3. Documentation from a unit officer that the team has passed all of the Certification Tests listed in Section V of this standard.

IV. Documentation Required for Re-certification

- A. For recertification, a mounted team must provide the MASAR Standards Committee with proof of continuing training, as shown by one of the following:
 1. Written records from an officer of a MASAR-certified mounted SAR unit attesting that the applicant has participated in a unit-approved continuing training program which includes at least 70 hours of actual mounted training time each year.
 - a) The minimum total training time since the last certification shall be no less than 210 hours.
 - b) More than 50% of the training must be in the field, as opposed to in the classroom.
 - c) A mounted team actively searching may count those hours as training time for recertification as a basic mounted team.
 - d) If a mounted team is not able to accrue 70 hours of training time in any one year, it may:
 - (1) Make up lost time the following year, with the written approval of a unit officer.
 - (2) Complete a training and re-testing plan assigned to them by

their Unit.

- e) The written records shall include a letter, signed by a unit officer, which states that the individual's training is sufficient to have maintained proficiency.
2. Successful continuance of an "in house" training program administered by a MASAR-certified mounted SAR unit. Written records from a unit Training Officer (or their equivalent) or the President of a unit attesting to the successful continuance of such a program shall be provided to the Standards Committee before recertification.
3. Successful completion of a course or courses in mounted SAR-related subjects which includes training exercises that encompass all the requirements of the Certification Tests in this standard.
 - a) This method of recertification requires prior approval by the MASAR Standards Committee.
 - b) Written proof of successful completion of such a course or courses must be furnished to the MASAR Standards Committee with the request for recertification.
4. Participation in activities which demonstrate that the mounted team continues to meet the requirements in the Certification Tests.
 - a) This method of re-certification requires prior approval by the MASAR Standards Committee.
 - b) A written description of the activities, and how they meet the requirements of the Certification Tests, must be furnished to the MASAR Standards Committee in advance of the activities.
 - c) A Unit officer or other member recognized by the Unit's leadership must provide the MASAR Standards Committee with a written statement that the member to be recertified has successfully performed these activities.
- B. A mounted team that cannot provide the MASAR Standards Committee with proof of continuing training must complete the entire certification process.
- C. Mounted team training hours shall not count toward recertification as a mounted air scent team.

V. Certification Testing

- A. Test Conditions
 1. All testing will be accomplished with the same horse and rider.
 2. A mounted team will not be required to test in conditions other than those in which it would be expected to search.
 3. Before beginning the test, the rider shall show that they are equipped with the minimum equipment for a basic ground searcher, as recommended by MASAR.
 4. Before beginning the test, the rider shall show that they are equipped with the minimum equipment for a mounted team, as recommended by

MASAR.

5. The Standards Committee reserves the option to independently test applicants with an evaluation team of its own choosing.
- B. Certification Tests
1. General Skills
 - a) Prior to taking part in any trail tests, the rider shall demonstrate their ability to manage the mount and equipment by doing the following:
 - (1) Safely unload the horse from a trailer.
 - (2) Tack the horse without assistance.
 - (3) Mount from the ground without the assistance of another person.
 - (4) Turn left, turn right, and stop while remaining in control of the horse.
 - (5) Ride safely at a walk, at a trot or 4-beat gait, and at a canter or pace.
 - (6) Demonstrate that horse remains reasonably quiet while held by another person.
 - (7) Demonstrate that horse can be led and handled by another person. Horse shall not push ahead.
 - (8) Demonstrate that horse accepts distractions and can be handled safely around such things as moving cars, motorcycles or ATVs, bicycles, backpackers, tents, gunfire, helicopters, chain saws, sirens, dogs, runners, and flagging tape.
 - (9) Horse must load into a trailer in no more than 10 minutes while being handled by someone who is relatively unfamiliar to the horse, with no more than 1 assistant, and with no input or assistance from the rider.
 - (10) Demonstrate that horse is reasonably quiet in a trailer for at least 15 minutes.
 2. Trail Skills
 - a) During a daylight or night trail ride, the rider shall demonstrate the following:
 - (1) Cross a stream, ideally wide enough that it cannot be jumped.
 - (2) Ride off trail in order to negotiate thick brush, fallen logs, or other obstacles.
 - (3) Stop and tie horse for at least 15 minutes. For the entire time it is tied, the horse shall not pull against the tie and shall remain reasonably quiet.
 - (4) Stop and locate a position on a map while remaining mounted.
 - (5) Locate exact position using a map and compass. This may be

- done while dismounted.
 - (6) Put on rain gear while mounted.
 - (7) Demonstrate that the horse can be separated from the herd.
 - (8) Demonstrate that the horse will walk single file and side by side with another horse.
 - (9) Demonstrate control while riding at all natural gaits of the horse.
 - (10) Demonstrate that horse will back up when asked.
 - (11) Take an object from one person and pass it to another rider while remaining mounted. Horse must remain calm.
 - (12) Demonstrate that horse can be ponied and can pony another horse.
 - (13) Demonstrate the ability to report clearly on a map the following information after searching an area:
 - (a) Areas and/or routes covered.
 - (b) Estimated probability of detection for the mounted team based on environmental and terrain conditions.
 - (c) Location of any clues encountered during the search.
 - (14) Demonstrate the ability to work and control the horse in a variety of areas, terrain, and conditions.
 - (15) Demonstrate adequate agility for mounted wilderness search.
 - (16) Show that the mounted 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.
3. Daylight Trail Ride
- a) The rider and mount shall navigate a trail covering a distance of 10-15 miles, with several steep climbs and descents.
 - b) The trail ride shall be completed in no less than 2-1/2, and no more than 4, hours.
 - c) At that speed, the mount shall show a recovery pulse of 52 or less in less than 30 minutes.
4. Night Trail Ride
- a) The entire test ride shall take place during the hours of darkness, beginning no earlier than one hour after sunset, as the purpose of this test is to determine the comfort level of horse and rider when working under nighttime conditions.
 - b) The rider shall unload and tack the horse, in the dark, without assistance. Headlamps and lights inside the trailer are permitted.
 - c) The team shall ride on a trail for approximately two hours, covering a distance of at least four miles.
 - d) The horse must demonstrate its acceptance of headlamps, flashlights, rotating lights, and strobe lights.
 - e) The rider shall untack and load the horse in the dark. Headlamps

and lights inside the trailer are permitted

VI. Evaluation Procedures

- A. Field Evaluation Team Requirements
 - 1. The certification testing shall be conducted by a Field Evaluation Team.
 - 2. The Field Evaluation Team shall, at minimum, consist of two people
 - a) At least one member shall be a MASAR-certified mounted team rider or an alternative approved by the MASAR Standards Committee.
 - b) One member may be an experienced rider proficient in SAR but who is not a certified mounted rider.
 - 3. The rider of a mounted team to be tested, or the unit of which that rider is a member, may request that the Field Evaluation Team consist of more than two people.
- B. Each member of the Field Evaluation Team shall use a separate evaluation form. Each form shall be signed by the evaluation team member after completion of each test.
- C. The Field Evaluation Team members shall document the mounted team independently 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 when certification of the mounted team is requested.
- E. Evaluator instructions
 - 1. The objectives of the certification tests are:
 - a) Evaluation of the rider's ability to control the horse.
 - b) Observation of the horse's behavior to determine if it is safe and well mannered.
 - c) Evaluation of the rider's ability to search effectively as a member of a mounted team.
 - 2. It is the responsibility of the evaluators to ensure that the test location provides adequate opportunity to observe all elements of the Certification Tests.
 - 3. The Field Evaluation Team shall terminate the test if, in their opinion, it becomes hazardous to any of the participants.
 - 4. The Field Evaluation Team shall have discretion in the administration and evaluation of all portions of the test.
 - 5. During these tests the rider, in conjunction with his or her mount, must:
 - a) Demonstrate the ability to report clearly on a map the following information after searching an area:
 - (1) Areas and/or routes covered.
 - (2) Estimated probability of detection for the mounted team based on environmental and terrain conditions.
 - (3) Location of any clues encountered during the search.

- b) Demonstrate the ability to work and control the horse in a variety of areas, terrain, and conditions.
- c) Demonstrate adequate agility for wilderness search.
- d) Show that the mounted 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.

VII. Retesting

- A. At the discretion of the Examiners, a team may retest with minimal delay if it fails either of the Certification Tests.
- B. If a team fails a retest the rider may appeal for another retest after a waiting period of not less than 60 days.
- C. Any mounted team may be retested only on successful appeal. Upon failure of a retest the mounted team shall have no right of appeal.
- D. A retest shall consist of only the failed parts of the previous test.

VIII. Suspension and Revocation of Certification

- A. Suspension
 - 1. Mounted teams which are temporarily unable to work in the field for an extended period (usually greater than six months) should request inactive status from the Standards Committee.
 - 2. The Standards Committee may suspend a team which does not request inactive status when some deficiency impedes that team's effectiveness.
 - a) When a report of a team's deficiency is brought to the attention of the Standards Committee, the committee will consult with the team's rider and the unit training officer before taking any action.
 - b) The rider in question will have the right to challenge any report of deficiency and has the right to know and confront the person who makes the report. He or she may provide written, oral, and recorded testimony in his or her support.
 - c) The committee may take one of the following courses of action upon the challenge of a mounted team's competence.
 - (1) The committee may confirm that team's continued certification.
 - (2) The committee may require that the team in question complete the re-certification process before the normal re-certification time.
 - d) In all instances, the rider in question shall have the right to request a Performance Expectation Trial, or the relevant parts thereof, in order to confirm certification.
 - 3. Revocation
 - (1) The committee shall have the option of permanently revoking a mounted team's certification in the following circumstances.

- b) Death or retirement of a mounted search team member.
- c) Serious misconduct on the part of a mounted team member, horse or rider, which endangers the operation or credibility of the SAR enterprise.

IX. Appeals

- A. A team that fails any test in this standard may appeal the decision to the MASAR Standards Committee.
- B. A team that fails any test in this standard when that test is administered by the MASAR Standards Committee may appeal the decision to the MASAR Board.
- C. Appeals must be made in the following fashion:
 - 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 to the members of the MASAR Board of Directors in the case of an appeal of a decision of the MASAR Standards Committee.
 - 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.
- D. 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.
- E. The decision by the MASAR Standards Committee or MASAR Board will be written and sent to the appellant by certified mail (return receipt).
- F. The decision of the MASAR Board will be final.

X. Acceptance and Amendment

- A. These standards will take effect immediately upon acceptance by majority vote of the MASAR membership present in conformance with the current MASAR by-laws.
- 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 in conformance with the current MASAR by-laws.
- C. Any MASAR Organizational Member may propose amendments by the same process outlined in Section X Part B.