

POST Law Enforcement K-9 Guidelines



California Commission On Peace Officer Standards and Training

Produced By POST Management Counseling and Projects Bureau

POST Law Enforcement K-9 Guidelines

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FOREWORD

In 1991, a group of K-9 Officers, Law Enforcement Managers, and K-9 Trainers from throughout the state met to discuss the need for K-9 Team Standards in California. The group believed that local liability would be reduced if statewide K-9 Team Standards were available. They further believed that these standards, to be acceptable and have an impact, should be supported by the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

In February 1992, POST brought this committee and other interested experts together, and they agreed to develop guidelines in the areas of Obedience, Search, Apprehension, Handler Protection, Handler Selection, and Evaluation. After initial development work and following several reviews which resulted in consensus, the proposed guidelines were submitted to and approved by the POST Commission in July 1992.

Following Commission action, POST brought the subject matter experts together again and developed suggested scenarios to test the recommended minimum K-9 Team Standards contained within the approved guidelines. POST developed a one-day Evaluator's Course and accompanying evaluation forms to train officers evaluating K-9 Teams.

Updates to this document aim to refine and streamline the guidelines. POST recognizes that agencies utilize K-9 teams in various capacities and with differing expectations.

Additionally, many more specialized K-9 team functions have developed in the decades since POST first created the guidelines. These guidelines recommend minimum training and evaluation benchmarks for K-9 Patrol and Detection functions. They are intended to assist agencies with recommendations to develop policies for the use and training of K-9 teams.

Questions regarding the POST Law Enforcement K-9 Guidelines should be directed to the Management Counseling and Projects Bureau at (916) 227-4852. Questions regarding certification of K-9 training courses should be directed to the Training Delivery and Compliance Bureau at (916) 227-4863.

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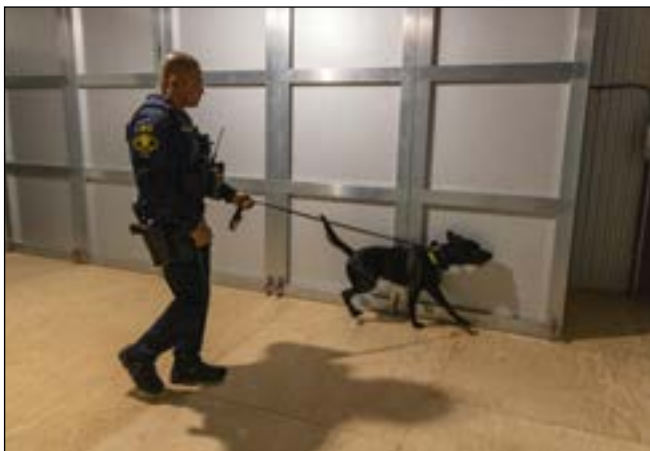
INTRODUCTION

These guidelines are designed to assist agencies with minimum training and performance standards for patrol and detection K-9 teams. Patrol K-9 teams should meet minimum standards regarding obedience, search, apprehension, control, de-escalation, and tracking/trailing.

Detection K-9 teams should meet minimum standards for detection of the odor(s) that the K-9 is trained to detect.

This categorization (patrol and detection) is intentionally basic. POST recognizes that there are many specializations among law enforcement K-9s. Specializations include explosives detection, cadaver detection, search and rescue, SWAT, and airport operations, among others.

These guidelines recognize that the use of K-9s by law enforcement personnel is of important concern to the community, including law enforcement, and that safeguarding the life, dignity, and liberty of all persons, without prejudice to anyone, should be priority.



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GENERAL TRAINING GUIDELINES

Minimum Standards for Basic K-9 Handler/Team Training

1. The K-9 handler should demonstrate an understanding of current laws and competence in exercising sound judgment and critical decision-making when using force to include during the training and development of a law enforcement K-9.
2. The K-9 handler/team should successfully pass an evaluation prior to law enforcement deployment. For purposes of these guidelines, an “alert” is behavior recognized by the handler that indicates the presence of a target odor.
3. In-service K-9 teams should complete 20 hours of documented training monthly to maintain basic patrol and/or detection proficiency.
4. A K-9 team with multiple/added specializations (e.g., SWAT K-9, bomb detection, search and rescue) may require additional training to maintain proficiency.
5. POST recommends annual recertification for the K-9 team.
6. If a K-9 team member has an extended absence from training, POST recommends that the team member be re-evaluated by a trainer prior to service being reinstated.



K-9 TEAM EVALUATORS

In order to meet POST law enforcement K-9 guidelines, K-9 teams shall be assessed by an evaluator prior to general law enforcement deployment and at least once annually.

The evaluator and handler should not have a monetary interest in the breeding/selling/training of the K-9 being evaluated. This is to preserve the highest standards of professionalism and to avoid any perceived conflict of interest between the evaluator and the K-9 team.



PATROL GUIDELINES

The release of a K-9 to search for or apprehend a suspect should be based upon the handler's reasonable belief that the suspect has committed, is committing, or is threatening to commit a serious offense under any of the following conditions:

1. There is a reasonable belief that the suspect poses an imminent or immediate threat of violence or serious harm to the public or an officer.
2. The suspect is physically resisting or threatening to resist arrest and the use of a K-9 reasonably appears necessary to overcome such resistance.
3. Officers reasonably believe the suspect is concealed in an area where entry by a person would pose a threat to the safety of officers or the public.
4. Unless the handler reasonably believes that it would pose an imminent threat of danger to the officer or other persons or substantially increase the risk of a suspect's escape, a warning, clearly audible, within the deployment area announcing the potential release of a police K-9 if the suspect does not surrender should be given prior to the release of the K-9.
5. Once given, the handler should allow a reasonable opportunity for the suspect to comply with any warning, if feasible as defined in Government Code section 7286.

In general, the K-9 should not be used for crowd control at an assembly, protest, or demonstration.



K-9 TEAM COMPETENCIES

The following four K-9 team competencies outline minimum “patrol” performance standards that a K-9 team should be able to demonstrate. Testing for the following four competencies should be conducted in an environment closely simulating realistic job conditions and distractions.

1. Obedience

The handler will demonstrate the ability to control the K-9 during an obedience performance test.

- a. The K-9 will perform a basic routine of left, right, and about turns, at normal, and quick pace, while on a leash.
- b. The K-9 team will perform basic tactical movements and control.

2. Search

Under the direction and control of the handler, the K-9 will independently locate a hidden agitator/decoy in a structure or building and in an outdoor area within a reasonable amount of time.

- a. The K-9 will “alert” the handler after finding the agitator/decoy. Prior to the release of the K-9 , an announcement of intended use will be given. At least one search will be a civil find using no equipment on the agitator/decoy.
- b. The K-9 will locate a hidden agitator/decoy in a structure or building with multiple rooms and hiding locations places and “alert” the handler.
- c. The K-9 will locate a hidden agitator/decoy in a large outdoor area with multiple hiding locations and “alert” the handler.

3. Apprehension

Under the direction of the handler and while off-leash, the K-9 will pursue and apprehend an agitator/decoy.

- a. The K-9 team will demonstrate a “pursuit and call off” prior to apprehension.
- b. On command from the handler, the K-9 will pursue and apprehend the agitator/decoy.
- c. From a reasonable distance and within a reasonable amount of time, on verbal command only, the K-9 will cease the apprehension.
- d. Handlers must demonstrate a tactical release from a prone agitator/decoy.
- e. Handlers will identify supplemental equipment they will have available to aid with the release and demonstrate its use. Supplemental equipment may include but are not limited to breaker bar, e-collar, pinch collar or other devices.

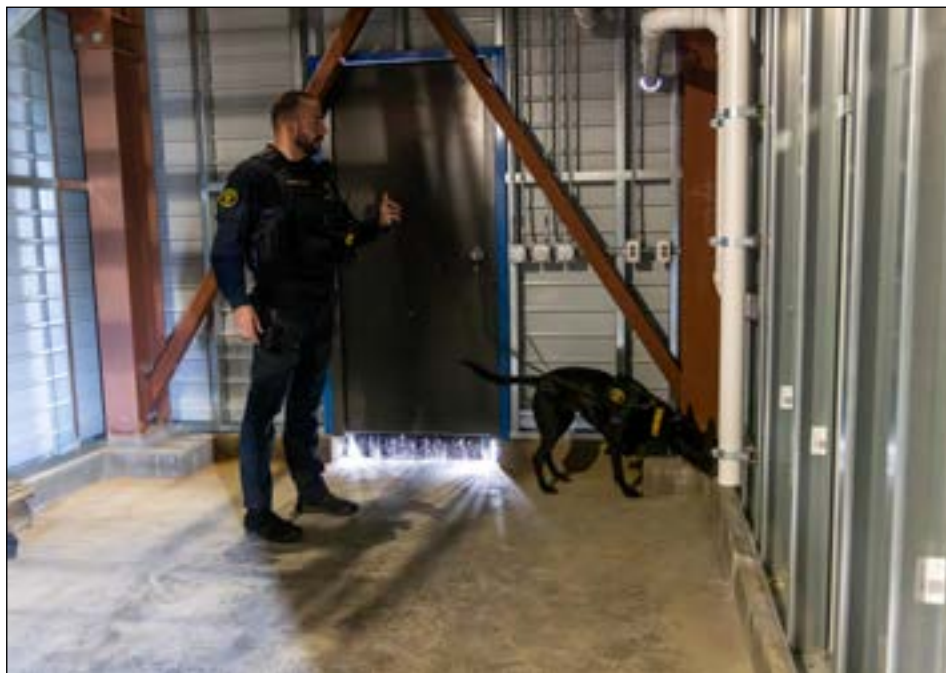
4. Control and De-escalation

The K-9 will remain under control while the handler attempts to gain compliance from the agitator/decoy.

PATROL SCENARIOS FOR K-9 TEAM EVALUATIONS

The following are scenarios for a K-9 team evaluation in each of the competency areas. These scenarios contain minimum elements for an evaluation.

1. These exercises should be demonstrated in an environment closely simulating realistic job conditions and distractions without the use of a muzzle.
2. The evaluating instructor will be fully apprised of the pertinent agency policies and regulations prior to the commencement of all exercises conducted. The “correct” response or reaction of the handler, the K-9, or the two acting together, may differ from agency to agency, based on prevailing agency policy.



Obedience

Handlers will report to the evaluator with the K-9 on a leash. At the direction of the evaluator, the team will complete the following exercises as called for by the evaluator. During the exercise, the K-9 will be under the handler’s control at the “heel” position.

At the “forward” direction of the evaluator, handlers will proceed ahead with their K-9s at the “heel” position and at a normal, and/or quick pace at the direction of the evaluator. The evaluator will direct the handler K-9 team through a series of turns and movements including the following:

1. On a leash:
 - a. Two right turns
 - b. Two left turns
 - c. Two about-turns
 - d. Two stop/sits
 - e. Two stop/downs
2. Off-leash tactical obedience:

This exercise will be performed using four stations or points of cover. The K-9 team starts from a position of cover near station number one. The K-9 is placed in a stationary position as the handler moves to the second station, leaving the K-9 behind. Once the handler is at the second station in a position of cover, the K-9 is called to a heel. From the second station, the handler has the K-9 heel to the third station. At the third station, the handler again assumes a position of cover, keeping the K-9 beside the handler in a controlled position. The handler leaves the K-9 and moves to the fourth station and assumes a position of cover. The handler recalls the K-9 to a heeling position, concluding the exercise. The K-9 must not break from stationary positions until called upon by the handler.

Search/Apprehension

During all the below exercises, a minimum of two people, which may include the evaluator, shall be present to simulate the presence of a search team. The K-9 should maintain neutrality to all persons present other than the agitator/decoy.

Based on the following criteria listed in this section, the evaluator will develop the certification scenarios which encompass the skills listed below.

The K-9 will demonstrate the following:

1. **Building Search**

A structure or building with multiple rooms and hiding locations in which the K-9 will locate a hiding agitator/decoy. This scenario shall be demonstrated off-leash.

2. **Area Search**

A large outdoor area with multiple hiding locations in which the K-9 will locate a hiding agitator/decoy. This scenario shall be demonstrated off-leash.

3. **Verbal Out**

The K-9 will apprehend the agitator/decoy from a distance no less than ten yards from the handler. The handler, using verbal commands only, will have the K-9 release and recall back to the handler. This scenario shall be demonstrated off-leash and without the use of an e-collar correction.

4. **Tactical Release**

The handler will demonstrate the ability to physically remove the K-9 from the apprehension of an agitator/decoy, in a reasonable amount of time, in two separate scenarios. For the first, the handler will demonstrate the ability to physically remove the K-9 from an agitator/decoy in a prone position. For the second, handlers will identify a supplemental method they will use in aiding with the release and demonstrate its use in removing the K-9 from an agitator/decoy. Supplemental methods may include but are not limited to a breaker bar, e-collar, pinch collar or other devices or techniques.

5. **Inaccessible Find**

The alert to the presence of an inaccessible agitator/decoy with no equipment present. After the handler identifies the alert to the evaluator, the K-9 will then be recalled back to the handler's position. This scenario shall be demonstrated off-leash as part of the building search or area search, as determined by the evaluator.

Call-off

This function is critical and separates the K-9 from all other less-than-lethal force options in that the handler has the ability to call off the K-9 prior to making contact with the agitator/decoy, within reason, to avoid a use of force.

1. This exercise will simulate a directed apprehension and will be conducted off-leash and without the use of an e-collar correction.
2. The K-9 will be sent on a directed apprehension, from approximately 30 yards, on a visible and accessible agitator/decoy.
3. Once the K-9 is in the pursuit and committed to the agitator/decoy (approximately halfway), the handler will call off the apprehension using only voice commands.
4. The K-9 is not allowed to make contact with the agitator/decoy.
5. The K-9 may or may not be recalled to the handler at the discretion of the evaluator.

The scenario will conclude when the K-9 is under physical control of the handler.



Control and De-escalation

The K9 handler will approach the agitator/decoy. The K-9 will remain under control while the handler attempts to gain compliance from the agitator/decoy for a minimum of 20 seconds. The circumstances of the scenario are at the discretion of the evaluator.



DETECTION GUIDELINES

The following K-9 team competency outlines minimum “detection” performance standards that a K-9 team should be able to demonstrate when adopting these guidelines.

Search

While demonstrating reasonable control and coordination between the handler and the K-9 used in the detection, the K-9 must find (within a reasonable period of time as determined by the evaluator) the odor(s) they have been trained to find in the environment(s) they have been trained to search.

1. The K-9 should not “alert” to anything that it is not trained to find
2. A false “alert” (as determined by the evaluator) is a failure
3. The agency will designate what odors may be used



Detection

The evaluator will be fully apprised of the pertinent agency policies and regulations prior to the commencement of the exercise. The “correct” response or reaction of the handler, the K-9, or the two acting together, may differ from agency to agency, based on prevailing agency policy.

1. While demonstrating reasonable control and coordination between the handler and the K-9 used in detection, the K-9 must find—within a reasonable period of time—the odor(s) identified.
2. There should be a recognized signal “alert” from the K-9 to the handler which indicates that the K-9 has located each odor.
3. The handler must be able to interpret the K-9’s “alert” clearly enough to be able to inform the evaluator of the substance’s location.
4. Once a handler has signaled their K-9’s “alert” to the evaluator, the exercise is complete.
5. The handler must demonstrate the ability to control the K-9 fully throughout all phases of the search. The evaluation should contain at least one trained odor in each environment evaluated.

6. To ensure adequate scent dispersion, setup time for each sample of trained odor should be a minimum of 30 minutes prior to the actual search.
7. The actual target trained odor should be present for the evaluation of trained odor detection.

Detection Scenarios for K-9 Team Evaluations

The evaluator shall set up hides in test environments suitable to the K9 team being tested. Environments may include but are not limited to:

1. **Building Search**

A minimum of three rooms, only one trained odor should be placed in any given room; one room must be blank with no trained odors present

2. **Open Area Search**

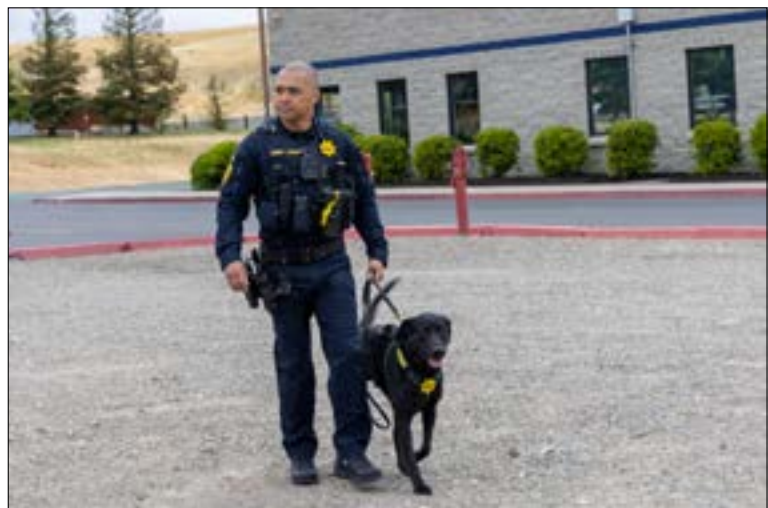
Large, exterior area with one trained odor

3. **Vehicle Search**

Minimum of three vehicles; only one trained odor should be placed on any vehicle; one vehicle must be blank with no trained odors present

4. **Other Search Area**

As determined by the evaluator based on the needs of the agency



Tracking/Trailing Guidelines

Minimum Standards for Tracking/Trailing Performance Standards

The purpose of this guideline is to determine the K-9's ability to follow the track/trail.

While demonstrating reasonable control and coordination between the handler and the K-9, the K-9 must find the article or odor to be tracked/trailed within a reasonable amount of time.



Tracking/Trailing Scenarios for K-9 Team Evaluations

1. The evaluator will have the track/trail laid in an environment suitable for the working conditions of the team being evaluated.
2. The evaluation must consist of two turns, a minimum of 100 yards, and one article or odor (if articles are trained).
3. The K-9 team will not be given the exact location of the start of the track/trail, but only the general area and the direction of travel by the evaluator.
4. The K-9 must provide an indication recognized by the handler when the article or odor is located.



