

DOG TALK

The official *unofficial* newsletter for FEMA dog handlers

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Colorado Training Weekend

The canine handlers of Colorado Task Force 1 are again hosting a canine disaster practice weekend, Oct 1-3. If there is interest, we will also provide a Type II Basic pre-test opportunity on Sept 30. The schedule and protocol will be similar to past practice sessions. This practice opportunity is not FEMA sponsored or sanctioned - it is merely an opportunity to share ideas and help each other train disaster canines, and work on various rubble piles and other disaster scenarios that may be available that weekend.

All participants will be required to wear full PPE on any rubble, will be required to sign a waiver of liability, will be responsible for their own safety and the safety of others, and will help make the weekend a successful learning experience for all. Participants must provide their own equipment, transportation, lodging arrangements, items to care for their canines, and anything else that might be needed. Meals are either group contribution or on your own. Expect to cycle through as a handler, helper, safety officer, or organizer on an "as needed" basis. Bring clothing and equipment to handle all weather conditions.

If there is interest, we will have the pre-test at Boulder on Thursday, Sept 30, beginning at 0830. Please e-mail Ann Wichmann (address below) if you are interested in taking the pre-test.

On Friday, Oct 1st, we will open practice at the Boulder County Jail site at noon, to end about 5 pm. This site has a small rubble pile (Type II size plus) and agility equipment.

On Saturday, Oct 2nd, we will practice at the DIA rubble pile from 0830 until about noon. This is a giant, complex, difficult, multi-surface rubble pile capable of accommodating multiple simultaneous problems. In the afternoon, we hope to provide a building search or somewhat different practice opportunity. We will have a group dinner/discussion to let the dogs rest in the late afternoon. That evening, we will practice night search under floodlights at DIA.

On Sunday morning, Oct 3rd, we will practice again at DIA until early afternoon, at which point all the Colorado handlers will go home and collapse.

Seriously, this has been very fun and a very good training opportunity the past 4 times we have done this.... mostly because everyone helps do everything! Please send Ann Wichmann an e-mail at: awlogan@mindspring.com so we will have some idea how many teams to expect.

The Red Roof Inn on Tower Rd (303-371-5300 or 1-800-733-7663) has given good rates in the past and is convenient to the DIA rubble pile. Directions to the Boulder and DIA pile are attached. Please keep in mind that our agreements to use these facilities require the presence of a certified canine handler or other deployable member of the Colorado Task Force. Thanks, and hope to see you at the practice!



KUDOS TO.....



DOGTALK is pleased to announce that the following Canine Search Teams have recently gained certification (or **re-certification**) as FEMA US&R Type I or II Canine Search Specialists:

Memphis, TN Results – July 2004

Type I Certified: Lee Dunn & Sky (CO-TF1)

Beverly, MA Results – August 2004

Type II Certified: Cyndi Smith & DD (IN-TF1), Scott Smith & Atlas (IN-TF1), Mary Flood & Jake (UT-TF1) and Janet Merrill & Chai (MA-TF1)

The National Certification List of FEMA Certified Disaster Canine Search Teams is provided by Lynne Engelbert. (Lynne's e-mail: lengelbert@mail.arc.nasa.gov) It's attached below as an EXCEL spreadsheet. **PLEASE notify Lynne of any changes in address, status, etc!!!**

THUNDER

(September 20, 1989 - August 9, 2004)

Thunder was certified in wilderness searching by the age of 11 months. She served with Mid-Atlantic D.O.G.S., Inc. In her wilderness/crime scene/water searching, she had a significant number of finds. Several yielded recoveries or evidence, which contributed to homicide convictions. In one article search for a handgun discarded by a bank robber along a section of heavily wooded roadside, the first gun she found was not the one being sought. When the U.S.A.R. program was initiated by F.E.M.A., she raised her paw for this new type of service. She was one of the first dogs certified at Level II, in the East. She passed on her first evaluation. She went on to get her Level I certification. Thunder loved the complex agility creations built by her friends with IN-TF 1. Major activations included Oklahoma City, the Pentagon on 9/11, Hurricane Fran, Hurricane Floyd, and the standby during the Atlanta Olympics, etc. She was featured on the television show, AMERICA'S MOST WANTED, in their coverage of the first anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombing, and the memorial service commemorating that event. Although retired, she was called back into service at the Pentagon, on day 4 of that incident. They were requesting recoveries in the heavy debris within the building. She turned into a young dog again for this incident. As she matured, her joy in finding the victim was stronger than the drive to get her toy. It could be compared to the elation a golfer gets from hitting a "hole in one". She would spring to her feet from a sound sleep in response to the faint whisper of the magic word, Frisbee. She was always a lady. Thunder passed on just a few weeks short of her 16th birthday. She can now run like the wind again.

Bob Sessions, Sky and Raider
PA-TF 1

Our thoughts are with Bob. Thunder was an exceptional dog. It is wonderful that she and Bob had the opportunity to enjoy so many wonderful years together. Kisses to Sky and Raider - Anne

Partners Past

As we are losing more and more of our precious search partners, and one of our handlers too, the suggestion was made that we should have a special section of our disasterdog.org website dedicated to the memory of our *Partners Past*.

The rules are simple:

- the canine or handler must have been certified at some time as a FEMA Type II or Type I team
- canines or handlers who were disaster search "certified" prior to the official FEMA certification program will be grand-fathered in and accepted for *Partners Past*.

To submit a memorial page for your canine, or a handler, to *Partners Past*, send your favorite picture of the subject (canine or human) along with the following information:

Canine's (or handler's) Name:

Handler's (or canine's) Name:

Date of first certification:

A brief paragraph (100 words or less) about the life of the canine (or handler) you are honoring.

Submit your request and picture to Lynne Engelbert at lengelbert@comcast.net. Lynne will verify and format it and present your submission to the Chair of the National Subcommittee for authorization.

Once we get several submissions, the page will be created and posted on the website. An announcement will be sent when this happens.

If you have any questions or suggestions, contact Lynne.

SHOPPING THE PILE

Eliodora Chamberlain/MO-TF1

I am sure many of you have heard, “that dog is shopping the pile”, or even had the problem yourself with your own dog. I know I have. Although it’s natural for a dog to exhibit this behavior as a foraging/hunting strategy (I will not go into theory here), it is not acceptable in urban search and rescue. Why is this considered a problem? First of all, timing is crucial for potential victims. We do not have the time to have our dogs cover the entire pile, find the victims, leave them, and then go back to alert on them. Second, when and how will the dog determine it is time to go back to the victims they already found? Third, can we rely on our dog to remember all the victims’ locations, especially on a pile they are not familiar with? And fourth, the behavior may lead to the dog leaving the victims altogether, and never returning to alert.

What is the definition of “shopping the pile?” (i.e. What does it look like?) Typically the dog will cover the pile easily, finds one victim, leaves the victim to search for more victims, finds the next victim, etc. After covering the entire pile and finding all the victims, the dog will go back and alert on all the victims, which may or may not be in the order they found them originally. Let me clarify that there is no “dinking” around between victims; the dog is searching and working hard, but will not alert until she/he finds some or all the victims in the pile.

There are several assumptions to be made first before trying to fix your dog’s problem of “shopping the pile.” These assumptions must be met first. If they are not, then maybe your dog does not have a “shopping the pile” problem, but may have confidence or agility issues.

Assumptions:

1. You have a dog with strong drive
2. You have a dog who wants to do USAR work
3. Dog has no agility problems
4. Dog has total confidence on the pile
5. Dog knows how to search for multiple victims (i.e. dog has already been taught to find multiple victims).

Objective: Dog alerts after finding each victim on the pile.

Materials/Equipment:

1. Multiple barrels or something similar. As you will see in the figures provided, I used an ammo box, a fiberglass bulkhead, plastic kiddie pool, and a water tank. I used other types of “barrels” so that the dog does not expect the victim(s) to always be in a barrel.
2. Multiple victims (make sure they are good victims with good timing!)
3. Multiple radios at least 3 (one for you and one for each of your victims)
4. And of course, multiple rewards

The reason I went back to barrels was to make sure I was going to extinguish the unacceptable behavior using a simple model. This should all take place at the home training site first.

Methodology:

Step 1: Have 2 barrels out with a victim in each barrel. Each victim should have a reward and radio with them. Put the barrels side by side about 25-50 ft apart (not so close that your dog can scent the other victim while working on the one). Your starting point should be parallel to not in front of the barrels, so that when your dog runs perpendicular and downwind of the barrels, she/he will come across each barrel one at a time (**Figure 1**). Each victim should reward on the first bark, and play with your dog right next to the barrel. Repeat Step 1 for 3 days straight. Move to Step 2, when your dog alerts on each victim without leaving.


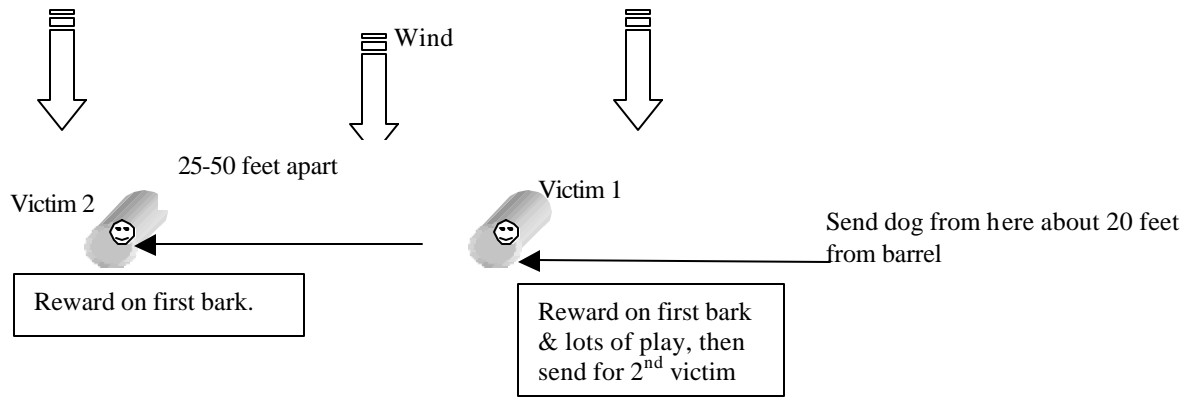
Figures are not drawn to scale, and make special note of wind direction and victim placement in the figures provided. Happy faces (☺) represent victims and  represents wind direction.

Figure 1:

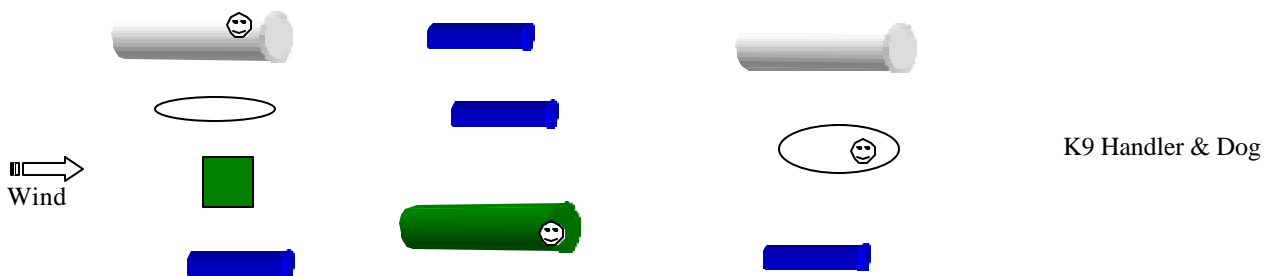


- ◆ If he does leave Victim 1 after smelling the hole, then radio to Victim 1 to call him back. The victim should immediately call out to him and even open the door if they have to, then reward on the first bark. At that point, end the search (forget about the 2nd person) and let him have lots of play with the first victim. Then put him in his crate before he gets tired. Make him want more.
- ◆ If he does not leave the Victim 1, and barks appropriately, then you can send him for Victim 2 after he has played with the first victim. Again, Victim 2 should reward on the first bark and lots of play.
- ◆ If he does leave Victim 2 after smelling the hole, the victim should immediately call out to him and even open the door if they have to, then reward on the first bark. Then put him in his crate before he gets tired. Make him want more.

Step 2: Setup multiple barrels (or something similar) and send the dog downwind of the “barrels” (Figure 2). Use 1, 2, or 3 victims along with empty “barrels” in your setup. Apply variations of the Figures 1 and 2 for 2-3 weeks before going back to the pile. Use the same reward system as in Step 1, or if your dog is barking reliably at the first barrel with a victim, have your victims reward on multiple barks.

- ◆ If you do not have more than one victim to train with, setup easy, single victim pile searches. Victim should reward on the first bark and provide lots of fun and play!

Figure 2: This setup includes 3 regular (white and green) barrels, 1 white bulkhead, 1 ammo box, 1 tarp-covered spools, and 4 blue barrels (short, nonfunctional). I put the barrel lids in front of all the blue barrels and the empty barrels.



Step 3: How do you know when you are ready to get back on the pile with multiple victim searches? View **Figure 3**. If your dog gives a strong alert on the first victim without leaving AND gives a strong alert on the second victim without leaving, you are ready to move to the pile. A strong alert is defined as multiple strong barks at the barrel. Searches on the pile, should be easy and fun. If you want, move the barrels onto the pile for a more smooth transition. Setup very easy searches and have the victims reward on the first bark with lots and lots of play! Begin with single victim searches and short number of barks before a reward. Gradually increase the number of victims and the number of barks.

- ◆ You will also want to make sure that the victims are not too close together (not just yet). Make sure your dog is barking reliably at each victim before challenging her/him.

Figure 3: This is actually a good test setup to see if your dog is ready for the next step. Set the “barrels” to be about 15-20 ft apart from one another. If you want, put them a little closer and test your dog’s limitations.



Step 4: Another factor that may play a role in “shopping the pile” is your dog may be patterned trained to a specific number of victims. Randomly choose the number of victims you are going to hide in the pile. This will prevent your dog from “counting” or predicting the number of victims in the pile. If you want to keep yourself honest, draw numbers (#1-3) out of a hat.

Use this information, modify it, and use your imagination to set up different things. Each dog is a different individual and may learn differently, so adjust the information provided for your dog. Also keep in mind that there is no single method or magic bullet for this or any other problem. There are lots of routes from point A to B, and the most important part is that you get there.

One last thing - be *patient* with yourself and your canine partner. This will take time, and will not correct itself overnight (maybe not even after a month!)

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Thanks to Deborah Burnett of TN-TF1 who sent me this photo from the July test. You can get a good idea of the depth of the holes used for the victims. These were very straightforward victim locations.

Canine Subcommittee Update

We have a new Type I Evaluator, Mark Dawson MATF1. We know how hard it is for the Type II's to pro-actively market themselves into the evaluations—nice job, all of you!

The last (probably) CSST course, as we know it, will be this October in Fairfax, VA. FEMA is sponsoring the course for 2 members per Task Force. We wanted to take advantage of the full complement of 56 slots, since they are FEMA funded. But we couldn't accommodate 56 dogs and assure quality training with only 6 Instructors (the maximum funded). It's also difficult to find sites that can logistically accommodate 56 dogs. So we opened the slots for 1 dog and handler per Task Force *and* a Search Team Manager or handler with no dog (presumably a certified team who needs the box checked off). After our upcoming September Subcommittee meeting, we will have completed the new Training Program, which will be a Basic level and an Advanced level. The Basic Program will be for uncertified teams preparing for the pre-test and/or Type II. The Advanced Program will be geared towards those teams preparing for the Type I evaluation. It will include search strategy and tactics, mapping, advanced scent work, deep burials, distractions, multiple victims and zero victim piles. Obviously it will consist of predominantly fieldwork. Sounds fun, huh?! We are planning on this split-level program for the April 2005 course.

Disasterhelp.gov is up and running! It's not quite as user-friendly as disasterdog.org, but it's our official site for our official documents, so give it a try. Sign in and create a password, then hit the "collaborate" tab on top of the page to which you are directed once you sign in. Click on "DHelpcommunities", then "Partners" and continue to click on the word that appears underneath—the rest of the words will be "FEMA", "USAR", "Advisory", "Operations", then "Canine". Then you are there! (Good luck)

The Subcommittee has had to make some difficult decisions subsequent to recent tests. The nature of the beast being what it is, I am sure that word has already traveled, or will soon travel, throughout the K9 world. Please remember that the Subcommittee is a group of diverse individuals, all somewhat opinionated and slightly hardheaded, but all truly trying to do the right thing. The decisions are not always the result of unanimous votes, and sometimes are the result of very close votes. We respect each other's opinions as representative of those of our peers.

By majority vote, we have decided to interpret the Standard concerning the ladder in the agility element to allow for going "up the ladder" only. But—this does not mean that we don't think that going "down the ladder" isn't necessary for disaster dog training. We unanimously agree that it should be a part of the training program. It's valid training and the subcommittee will be re-visiting the issue of including the option of climbing up the ladder on tests.

More growing pains—

The Chief Evaluator position has been revisited. We have been using as the sole criteria for this position that the person be a current Lead Evaluator. But we have come to realize that this position takes some special qualifications. The Subcommittee is creating an application for the Chief Evaluator position. This person is a manager, a communicator, a mediator and is responsible for all paperwork (tons of it!) getting out on time and properly routed. A thankless job, for sure, but we thank all of you who have stepped up to the plate and performed to the best of your abilities with less than adequate guidelines. We have spelled out the duties and responsibilities in the test SOPs and the updated DSCREP, both now on the website. (Better late than never?) In this vein, we are also creating a standard format for the After Action Report.

Aggression—what is it? You know it when you see it, right? But what you see as a handler may differ from what the outside world sees. And we are in the public eye—especially on deployment. Keep that in mind....

Teresa MacPherson,
Chair, Canine Subcommittee
8-24-04

Please forward any news, scheduled events, letters to the editor, or other info you want disseminated via **DOG TALK**, the underground canine newsletter to Anne McCurdy: amccurdy@clarian.org