



# DOG TALK

The official *unofficial* newsletter for FEMA dog handlers

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## Doggy Disneyland

Search & Rescue Assist, Inc. is a non-profit charity with 501(c)(3) status. Over the years we have raised money slowly and have undertaken small projects such as a helmet loaner program, expense reimbursements, test support and more. The Board of Directors is comprised of three MD-TF1 handlers and one PA-TF1 handler. It is NOT affiliated with any particular task force. NO POLITICS ALLOWED!

In the last two years we've been undertaking the completion of a Type I testing / training facility located in Baltimore, Maryland. At this time we are nearing completion of all three piles (our size is up to par, we just need a little tweaking to add more hides). We have a huge agility course which has been dubbed "Disneyland for dogs", a bark tube training prop, two large Transit busses (one of which will be buried in one of the piles, the other will be for basic search problems). We have two rubble piles made primarily of concrete hydro-conduit and long bars. One is coated with bricks, the other is not. Our third pile is a large pallet pile with two double-wide trailers incorporated within.

The site also has a 12 x 64 ft office trailer which is powered with a generator to provide air conditioning, heat, lights, etc. There are several kennels permanently inside to provide a safe staging area out of the elements. While we all like to make sure our dogs can handle the extremes it's nice to have a climate controlled environment to safeguard the pups!

The site is located 10 minutes from Thurgood Marshall Airport (formerly Baltimore Washington International). There are hotel accommodations next door with a negotiated rate as well as a few small eating establishments who have generously agreed to give K9 handlers 25% off.

The site is available for training, testing and learning. Being in such close proximity to MD-TF1 and VA-TF1 organizing training weekends is fairly easy.

For information please contact Sam Balsam at [Bandaid069@aol.com](mailto:Bandaid069@aol.com).

## K911: Emergency Life Support for the Search & Rescue Dog Conference

Saturday & Sunday, February 24-25, 2007

We completed our second conference, and again the response was overwhelming! We have implemented some of the changes that were suggested during the first conference, and continue to fine tune the structure of the conference so that all attendees are getting the best possible educational experience!

Next spring, we will return to the original format with a full day of lectures on Saturday, and a limited-space skills session with dogs on Sunday. We are considering offering 2 levels of skills labs next time, one for basic skills, and one for more advanced skills, and will keep you posted.

Please visit our website at [www.wmrl.net](http://www.wmrl.net) and click on the K911 link for information from past conferences. Check back often, because the website will be getting a makeover as more information is posted for the upcoming conferences!

Meghan  
K911 Registration Coordinator

# Savannah

### **In Passing:**

It is with great sadness that I advise you all of the passing of one of our own. On 6-21-06 K9 Savannah tragically passed away from heat stroke. Savannah was one of the first K9's in FL-TF 2 history to become FEMA Advanced certified. She worked side by side with the other members of FL-TF 2 in the house to house searches in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina as well as other deployments and training exercises.. Along with her handler Brian Smithey she was always there to assist one in need or put a smile on a child's face during a demonstration. She will be greatly missed, but never forgotten. The thoughts and prayers of FL-TF 2 go out to Brian and his family.

Captain C. Radelman  
Search Team Coordinator, Canine Coordinator  
FEMA Urban Search & Rescue Florida Task Force 2



***Sometimes we say "What a good dog" and sometimes we say "What a good handler".....and every now and then we say "What a great team".....This was Brian Smithey and Savannah.***  
**-Teresa MacPherson**

# GULF COAST US&R READINESS STATUS — SUMMER 2006

National US&R Response Program is at a full state of readiness — 3 ISTs and 28 TFs available.

US&R Incident Support Teams — White IST is up for June and available.

June	WHITE IST
July	RED IST
Aug	BLUE IST
Sep	WHITE IST

Detailed run orders developed for all Gulf states (as well as all 50 states) for the order of dispatch for all task forces. The three closest TFs are activated first (identified for each state below):

TX	LA	MS	AL	FL
<b>TN-TF1</b> 38127	<b>TX-TF1</b> 77842	<b>TN-TF1</b> 38127	<b>TN-TF1</b> 38127	<b>VA-TF2</b> 23451
<b>NE-TF1</b> 68502	<b>TN-TF1</b> 38127	<b>TX-TF1</b> 77842	<b>TX-TF1</b> 77842	<b>TN-TF1</b> 38127
<b>NM-TF1</b> 87102	<b>MO-TF1</b> 65202	<b>MO-TF1</b> 65202	<b>FL-TF2*</b> 33136	<b>VA-TF1</b> 22030

After the first three closest TFs are identified (by state), we then activate the subsequent TFs by the rotation model below by month:

		CA-TF4	CA-TF1	CA-TF8	CA-TF3	WA-TF1	CA-TF6	CA-TF2	CA-TF7	CA-TF5
<b>JUN</b>	<b>W</b>	CA-TF4	CA-TF1	CA-TF8	CA-TF3	WA-TF1	CA-TF6	CA-TF2	CA-TF7	CA-TF5
	<b>C</b>	NE-TF1	NV-TF1	IN-TF1	MO-TF1	TX-TF1	UT-TF1	AZ-TF1	TN-TF1	CO-TF1
	<b>E</b>	FL-TF1	PA-TF1	VA-TF2	MA-TF1	VA-TF1	MD-TF1	FL-TF2	OH-TF1	NY-TF1
<b>JUL</b>	<b>W</b>	CA-TF1	CA-TF8	CA-TF3	WA-TF1	CA-TF6	CA-TF2	CA-TF7	CA-TF5	CA-TF4
	<b>C</b>	NV-TF1	IN-TF1	MO-TF1	TX-TF1	UT-TF1	AZ-TF1	TN-TF1	CO-TF1	NM-TF1
	<b>E</b>	PA-TF1	VA-TF2	MA-TF1	VA-TF1	MD-TF1	FL-TF2	OH-TF1	NY-TF1	FL-TF1
<b>AUG</b>	<b>W</b>	CA-TF8	CA-TF3	WA-TF1	CA-TF6	CA-TF2	CA-TF7	CA-TF5	CA-TF4	CA-TF1
	<b>C</b>	IN-TF1	MO-TF1	TX-TF1	UT-TF1	AZ-TF1	TN-TF1	CO-TF1	NM-TF1	NE-TF1
	<b>E</b>	VA-TF2	MA-TF1	VA-TF1	MD-TF1	FL-TF2	OH-TF1	NY-TF1	FL-TF1	PA-TF1
<b>SEP</b>	<b>W</b>	CA-TF3	WA-TF1	CA-TF6	CA-TF2	CA-TF7	CA-TF5	CA-TF4	CA-TF1	CA-TF8
	<b>C</b>	MO-TF1	TX-TF1	UT-TF1	AZ-TF1	TN-TF1	CO-TF1	NM-TF1	NE-TF1	NV-TF1
	<b>E</b>	MA-TF1	VA-TF1	MD-TF1	FL-TF2	OH-TF1	NY-TF1	FL-TF1	PA-TF1	VA-TF2

- All IST caches are at full state of readiness.
- Region IV has requested the US&R Program Office to identify up to four (4) US&R personnel who could work on an RNA. Staff is reviewing availability.
- US&R Program Office is reviewing staff requirements for NRCC and Program Office staffing.

## From the Editor

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Jesus Rodriguez lives in Mexico and works for Motorola. I got an email from him a few months ago requesting information about search & rescue dogs. It seemed his friend's baby got lost, and searchers did not find him until it was too late. They did not have search dogs. It was at that moment, Jesus realized he needed to do something so situations like that don't happen again in his town. I gave him some contact information for handlers that live a little closer to Mexico than Indiana. Though Jesus speaks English well, there is a little translation difficulty with his writing:

*In the beginning of this year, a baby of only a month die during a rainstorm. This baby was living in my neighborhood, I met his parents since long time and that situation created a idea to have a search and rescue dog with me. The baby was alive only few meters away from the rescue team and a lot of people trying to find him. Nobody found him until the next day with the sunlight, but he was dead.*

*I have experience on dog training since 1990, but nothing about search and rescue. I had no dog at that time, so I had to start searching for a great dog to be adopted. After 1452 emails all over US, and just a few replies back, a breeder of hunting dogs called me, telling me that I can pick a Labrador female in Flagstaff, AZ area. Then I had a reply back from Anne introducing me with John Dean. I have been training with John since, an excellent human.*

*It has not been a easy task. Here in Mexico, a sponsor is almost an impossible mission and I have to drive every weekend 8 hours in order to train with Arizona Search Dogs.*

*Now I will be this weekend with Doree for a seminar, I promise me that I will assist the people under this circumstances not matter what I have to do.*

*I want to say thanks to :*

*My wife and babies, Cap John Dean, Anne McCurdy, and Doree Donovan.*

*God Bless you.*

*Jesus Rodriguez*

Quite a story, huh? He drives 8 hours to train with John. I asked John to tell me about Jesus:

Interesting challenge in working with Jesus. Jesus speaks English very well, but I know he does not understand everything we talk about and I have trouble understanding some of his words and thoughts, especially with his accent. To attend training he must drive up from Nogales, rent a hotel room, and drive all the way home. With the heat all his effort affords him and his dog about 3 hours of training with our group.

If his dedication holds out I know he will do well in reaching his goal. It is refreshing to see so much enthusiasm in a handler. I hope we are up to the challenge and do not let him down. Bottom line is that he is in this for all the right reasons. Working with Jesus reminds us all of why we work dogs and causes us to remember the way we felt when we started vs. the way we feel dealing with all the other issues associated with training and maintaining a disaster dog.

JD



So – here is to the handlers that do this for the right reason. Thanks to John and Doree for taking the time to help Jesus. I think we all can learn a pretty important lesson from him!

## Our Changing System

Lynne Engelbert, Canine Search Specialist

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### **WANTED:**

Dedicated individual, self-motivated, willing to sacrifice self and family, work in heat, cold, wind, rain and sleet, suffer through frustration, rally in success, travel the country at your own expense to train, live with an empty wallet most of the time, ignore dog hair on everything you own, willing to run into areas that even rats are running from, leaving work and family for 14-21 days in response to a phone call in the middle of the night. Will need to forsake glory in exchange for the satisfaction of a job well done and the hope of saving lives.

The above want ad reflects only a small part of the what the dedicated disaster search dog handler will be required to do to become one of a small, highly-trained group of emergency responders in this country. This job is not for the faint-of-heart, nor is it for those looking for glory.

After responding to a massive earthquake in Mexico City in 1985, a small group of California search dog handlers and the California Office of Emergency Services began to develop and implement a training program for disaster search dogs. They were prompted by the obvious need during that response for animals that were specifically trained to locate and alert upon the scent of live humans trapped far below the surface.

These people discussed critical elements and determined that the dogs must be willing to work in areas where there were many people, loud noises, heavy equipment and high emotions. They needed to be capable of moving confidently across uneven, sometimes dangerous, terrain. They had to be able to work independently but also able to take direction from a handler who may be a considerable distance away from them. They had to be obedient and well behaved. The most critical of all the elements was the need for the dog to tell the handler every time they found live human scent and to stay at the location, continuing to alert. This "alert" or "indication" needed to be audible in the event the handler could not see the dog. Hence, the Focused Bark Indicating Live Human Scent or FBILHS.

From these elements a training program was developed and after that a test. The test was very basic to begin with, created with the intention of being a method with which to evaluate the handlers and dogs training to become disaster search dog teams. As the training and testing of disaster search dog teams evolved, this dynamic document also evolved, continuing to improve the quality of the growing number of teams. Today it continues to evolve; unfortunately it isn't in an upward cycle.

Those involved in improving the testing process over the years strived to remove as much subjectivity as possible from the test. Unfortunately the human element of the process (the evaluators) makes the attempt for total objectivity very difficult, if at all possible. The evaluation process has gone from a *graded scale* to *pass/fail*, to *completed/did not complete* (pass/fail in more PC terms). In the past, teams had to pass the evaluation 100% to become a certified disaster search team. Over the years bits and pieces of the test have been watered down or removed completely in response to the protests of some who didn't care to be the best that they could be. As the Disaster Search Canine Readiness Evaluation Process (DSCREP) continues to evolve, decisions appear to be more congruent with **building the quantity** of teams and less with **improving the quality**.

During a recent evaluator's teleconference it was mentioned that the subjectivity in Commitment to Scent wasn't fair to everything from the handler, to the search team, to the task force, to the system. Not once was it mentioned that a lack of Commitment to Scent is ultimately not fair to our *customer*, that individual who is entombed in a collapsed structure.

Finding and rescuing our customer must always be our primary goal. We must continue training and certifying disaster search dogs that will immediately alert, telling us when they have found live human scent, and then staying with that scent source until someone, their handler or a spotter, can pinpoint the location . . . a process that may take up to a few minutes. Our evaluation process is the only way we have of ensuring that we have only those teams in the system that we truly know will tell us about every person they have found in an area. Can any handler honestly say that they would be content with anything less? Could they leave a building knowing their dog may not have alerted on someone they found? If so, they may well be in this business for the wrong reasons.

There are two solutions to this problem. Canine handlers, search team managers, evaluators and task force leaders must be educated on what it takes to become a competent disaster dog search team. And the training process we use to guide these dogs and handlers from green recruit to a highly trained, competent Type I disaster search team. There are many steps along the way and each must be taken, no step skipped.

Education of all involved should begin with the evaluators. For years those involved in the evaluation of these teams have asked for an evaluator's class. This would be a solid first step in pulling all the evaluators in the country together and get them working off the same page. The answer to this is not building the numbers of evaluators as witnessed in the recent rush to create evaluators but in taking a select group of experienced disaster search dog handlers and search team managers through a well-developed evaluator training program. Building the numbers of evaluators can come at a later point once a solid foundation has been built.

Search team managers and task force leaders, some of whom may never have seen competent canine teams at work, need to rely on those in the field who have the knowledge, skills and abilities to be the Subject Matter Experts tasked with improving the evaluation of this important tool. To build trust in the canine teams we must show the STMs and TFLs what a well-trained disaster search dog team should look like. They in turn, need to support the training of these teams. So many of our canine teams are on their own, without the support of training mentors, travel funds to attend training workshops and the classes they need to round out their training like Rescue Systems, CPR, WMD, etc. This will cost precious funds, but as with anything else in the US&R program, this is an investment.

Handlers, like the dogs we choose, must be carefully selected. Not everyone is cut out to be a disaster search dog handler. Look again at the Want Ad at the beginning of this article. This job entails a great deal of work, sacrifice and dedication to the task at hand. An individual who is looking for glory is going to be disappointed. There are more blood, sweat and tears involved than the glimpses of glory they will see. They will be required to train their dogs every single day. The handler has as much to learn as the dog . . . and the dog will often learn faster. There will be days where everything goes perfectly and there will be days when nothing they do works and sometimes they have to go backwards to continue forward. We need handlers who are willing to go that extra mile toward saving the life of one of our customers, not the ones who want to shortcut the process by whining.

There is an established training program as demonstrated in Shirley Hammond's new book *Training the Disaster Search Dog*. There is a select group of individuals who are very good at assisting in the training of the disaster search dog teams. It is important to remember that like evaluators not everyone is cut out to be a mentor/instructor in this field. There are many more handlers than there are trainers. A cadre of trainers has been identified and is ready to work with our developing teams. Again there is cost involved but that too is an investment in our current and future teams.

Lastly, we need to re-address Commitment to Scent in the evaluation process. It can be written to remove as much subjectivity as possible. Even given the dynamics of scent as it moves at the whim of wind direction, the criteria can be made as simple as possible to remove most of the potential for subjectivity. While more work is needed, here is one suggestion from a group of SMEs who have been working on this issue . . . unpaid and on their own time:

- Handler directs dog to search area
- Dog ignores or leaves other scents (evaluators, handler, distractions...)
- Dog detects scent source
- Dog remains in area of scent source
- Dog performs independent bark alert
- Handler confirms alert, marks victim location, relates information to evaluator

The solution to our problem is in education and the training process, not in eliminating the element. We must continue to have a dynamic document in the DSCREP, but it must be improved and not allowed to spiral to its death by removing critical elements.

## **Flying Visit from Kiwis...**

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*Janelle Mackie*

*President, New Zealand USAR Search Dog Association*

In May this year 3 New Zealander's visited the US to have a good look at the FEMA search dog programme. The NZ disaster search dog standards are based entirely on the FEMA Type I and old Type II and we have been privileged to host Shirley Hammond for the past 2 years to oversee the testing of our Type I dogs. Linda Pike and Brenda Woolley are the NZ civilian evaluators and also do a lot of the mentoring of search dogs throughout the country as well as both having Type I dogs of their own I came along as the driver (wrong side of the road), sacrificial dog victim, shopping mall sensor and chief margarita negotiator. In 2 weeks we managed to train with Shirley and the others in SanFrancisco, build hides and observe the Colorado test, train with Arizona search dogs and visit the Disaster Search Dog Foundation.

It was a fantastic trip – we picked up a lot of ideas for the continued development of USAR search dogs in NZ, but returned home sure that we are well and truly on the right track. Already some new bark tubes have been made and trialled at the National Training Weekend at the start of July (it is a lot easier to get everyone together when the longest flight from one end of the country to the other is about 2 hours- and that is the length of the country!), we have started to build pallet piles in areas where rubble is difficult to find, swapped to wearing cargo pants and T-Shirts rather than overalls, and have modified our current dog suitability testing forms- and that is just the start!

We cannot say thankyou enough to all the handlers, trainers and other people we met- everyone was really friendly and so willing to discuss ideas and experiences. We look forward to the continued links with many of the FEMA handlers we met.

## ☆☆☆☆ 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** Canine Search Specialists:

### ☆☆ Ipswich, MA Results – April, 2006

**Type I Certified:** Lisa Harford & Rocky (PA-TF1), Mark Hopkins and K.C. (MD-TF1), Roxanne Dunn & Chili (CO-TF1), Roger Picard & Cinder (FL-TF2), Mike McKenna & Maggie (TX-TF1), Kathy Farrell & Blade (TX-TF1), Kristian Catapano & Fancy (FL-TF1), James Spence & Louie (TN-TF1), Gary Hay & Freddy (IN-TF1), Christina Ridge & Doc (IN-TF1), Bob Sessions & Raider (PA-TF1), Laura Huggins & Frankie (MD-TF1), Tim Dingess & Lago (VA-TF1), Lori Tocke & Win (VA-TF2), Jennifer McKay & Rogue (VA-TF2) and Cathy Schiltz & Malachai (MO-TF1)

### ☆☆ Denver, CO Results – May, 2006

**Type I Certified:** Sonja Heritage & Czaro (VA-TF1), John Jenkins & Cyril (NV-TF1), Bill Monahan & Hunter (CA-TF2), Rick Nogues & Jack (NV-TF1), Chris Holleyman & Petzl (VA-TF1), James McHenry & Jas (PA-TF1) and Doree Donovan & Faith (NM-TF1)

### ☆☆ Sun Valley, CA Results – June, 2006

**Type I Certified:** Tom Moore & Cassi (NV-TF1), Robert Strickland & Buck (TN-TF1), Eric Haslam & Glacier (CA-TF3) and Scott Mullin & Flash (FL-TF1)

### ☆☆ Seattle, WA Results – July, 2006

**Type I Certified:** Sharon Gattas & Chili (CA-TF6), Hakan Kaynaroglu & Riva (CO-TF1), Kent Olson & Chase (WA-TF1), David Ramsey & Sandy (CA-TF3), Gerri Ann Schmutz & Sizzle (CA-TF4), LaFond Davis & Spring (WA-TF1), Doree Donovan & Gyp (NM-TF1) and Tina Shaw & Taeryn (MO-TF1)

Please forward any news, scheduled events, letters to the editor, or other info you want disseminated via **DOGTALK**, the underground canine newsletter to Anne McCurdy: [amccurdy@clarian.org](mailto:amccurdy@clarian.org)