

## In-Cabin Airline Travel with the Search Dog

Strictly speaking, search dogs are NOT service animals, as the handler is not disabled. Some commercial airlines have guidelines for search dogs, but most do not. Many airlines loosely designate the search dog as a service animal, for lack of a more specific category. These airlines afford search dogs the same privileges as service animals regarding in-cabin transport.

The following are some general requirements for the search dog flying in-cabin:

### Required Documentation

- Task Force identification (handler)
- Task Force identification (canine)
- Health Certificate
- Current Rabies Certificate
- Travel Letter from the sponsoring Task Force referencing flight information and stating the reason for flying

### Required Attire

- Task Force uniform (handler)
- FEMA vest or other identifying vest (canine)
- Collar and leash

Below are some general guidelines to make air travel with the search dog a little easier:

- Before the canine's first flight, take him to the airport for a practice run. Make sure the canine is acclimated to the slick floors, shuttles, elevators, baggage dropping down on the belt, people running to catch their flights, kids running up to them, small dogs on flexi-leads, etc...
- Once it is established that the airline does accept search dogs/service animals in the cabin, make the reservation with the canine in mind. Direct flights are preferred but if a layover is necessary, allow ample time between flights.
- Once the flight is booked, the handler should advise the airline that he will be traveling with a service animal, specifically a search dog. Be prepared to explain it to the ticket agent as well.
- If an airline has specific language for search dogs, ask for the code and section after the agent has looked up the verbiage. Remember this information for the next time, when a new ticket agent is checking the entire manual to figure out if the dog can fly in-cabin or not.
- Service animals generally fly at no cost, but cannot occupy an additional seat. More and more airlines are starting to charge a fee. American Airlines has recently implemented an \$80 charge for flying dogs in cabin.
- The only limitation to seating is that the canines are NOT permitted in exit rows. Usually, search dogs and handlers are seated in bulkhead. Children traveling alone are always seated in the bulkhead. If paired with a child traveling alone the handler should ask to be moved.

- Make sure to air the dog prior to going through security.
- Depending on the flight time, the handler may want to consider not feeding the dog beforehand.
- Get to the airport EXTRA early. The canines are a major attraction and will command much attention. Remember that there will be extra baggage to be handled up to the check-in counter (dog food weighs a lot—consider purchasing it at your destination, if possible). If airport parking is used, some buses leave it up to the drivers to decide if they will transport the dogs to the airport.
- The dog must be under control at all times, everywhere in the airport.
- Beware of escalators—the grooves are the width of toe-nails and can easily rip them off.
- The handler and canine will go through security separately. Typically, the handler will go through first, then the canine. As the dog is released and goes through, he will be collar-less and leash-less. Remember the obedience portion of the FSA? A solid stay and recall is required here.
- The airlines will generally allow the handler and canine to pre-board, but remember, pre-boarding means more time sitting on the plane.
- The handler should always ask the person he is seated next to if they mind dogs, if they are scared of dogs or if they are allergic to dogs. Ask the flight attendant to move you if the person seems the least bit hesitant--there are always lots of people who WANT to sit by the dog. Don't take any chances--if the dog is nervous around kids, don't have him seated next to one.
- Once on board, check around your seat for anything “edible” for the canine and clean it up before he does.
- Handlers are permitted to fly their dogs in-cabin at the discretion of the airlines. Any pilot at any time can deny the dogs the right to board. There are no federal regulations that address search canines flying in-cabin—it's a privilege that can easily be lost because of one incident. To date, the professionalism exhibited by canine handlers has contributed to many airlines accommodating our dogs in-cabin. But we must never forget that it's a privilege and not a right.
- Relax and enjoy the flight!