



SEARCH DOG STANDARDS

REV 3.3 2017

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A. Revision History

1. Standards reviewed and updated in 2013 (v3.1).
Thanks to the following Assessor/Trainers and Members for their input:
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2. The Standards were reviewed/updated in 2014 (v3.2) prompted in part by the LandSAR Competencies review and also to include updates for specific sections. This revision included establishment of the common prerequisites section for all handlers, addition of Mountain Safety Council Backcountry Avalanche Course (or equivalent) for avalanche handlers, updated avalanche advanced operational assessment.
3. The Standards were reviewed/updated in 2017 (v3.3) after both avalanche and wilderness competencies had been amended respectively. This revision includes the combined updates along with the discipline specific updates.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This document specifies the standards of performance required by search and rescue dog teams used in Land SAR and details the process of assessment used to determine the operational readiness of the teams.

1.1 Objectives

- Provide a fair and open process to determine operational readiness of search dog teams.
- Ensure consistency in the MINIMUM skills and abilities of operational SAR Dog teams nationally.
- Provide a clear direction to non-operational teams of the standard they must achieve in order to become operational, and to enable them to train accordingly to become a valuable resource to LandSAR.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

Search Dog - A dog that is certified operational for Search and Rescue (SAR) work.

Search Dog Team - A SAR Dog and Handler combination that is certified operational for SAR.

Area Search Dog - A search dog specifically trained to locate scent (human, ground or windborne) but more specifically windborne scent, and follow that scent to its source, whether it be human or article. (also called an Air Scent or Wilderness dog)

Avalanche Dog

A dog specifically trained to find people and articles buried under snow. A search dog specifically trained to locate scent (human, ground or windborne) and follow the scent to its source, whether it be human or article.

Tracking Dog

A dog that is specifically trained to follow a line of human scent (ground or windborne). The ground scent is caused by a combination of individual human scent, the crushing of vegetation and life forms in the ground and the disturbance of soil, which may be affected by varying factors, including all climatic conditions. Then following that line of human scent to its source.

Alert

A natural change of behaviour exhibited by the dog when it locates human scent. This behaviour may be subtle, but should be recognisable by the handler and considered a clue.

Indication

A trained response from the dog upon finding a source of scent (e.g. a person or article).

Indications include:

1. Stay and bark
2. Re find
3. Physical Indication

Stay and bark - dog remains at location of missing subject and barks. Handler locates subject and barking dog together.

Re find - Upon finding, dog returns to handler and indicates by barking, grabbing or some other trained response, and then returns with handler to missing subject

Physical Indication - In cases of buried, concealed or elevated subjects, dog indicates strongest source of scent by physically digging, scratching, barking and/or biting at ground or other materials.

Strike - The moment when an air-scent dog locates air-borne human scent and changes from searching for the scent to following that scent to its source.

Article/Evidence Recovery:

(Although not a mandatory component of the Assessment Process at this time), it is expected that a dog will readily alert on an article (ie. Backpack, wallet, glasses, items of clothing etc) or anything that may be foreign to the natural environment. The alert would be a distinct change in behaviour to the dog, whether it be to pick the article/property up, bark or some other trained response.

3.0 PRE REQUISITES

3.1 Handler

Common prerequisites for Wilderness and Avalanche Handlers

- Be a Member of NZ LandSAR Search Dogs. This includes completion of necessary endorsement forms to become a member and trainee/novice handler
- Have good communication skills and demonstrate an understanding of basic radio use and protocols.
- Have a good level of fitness
- A potential handler needs to uphold standards in conduct, dress, appearance, and demeanor when representing LandSAR Search Dogs.
- Be appropriately equipped to handle themselves in the required operational environment (e.g. wilderness or alpine)
- Affinity with dogs
- Willingness to persevere
- Ability to clearly communicate and demonstrate integrity
- Determination to succeed
- Adherence to the LandSAR Search Dogs Inc. Code of Conduct

Wilderness handler specific prerequisites

- Completion of necessary endorsement forms to become a member and trainee/novice handler (e.g. Local group endorsement and then operational handler (e.g. Police endorsement that you will be used if you become operational).
- Be an active field team member of their local SAR group i.e. the handler must be fully involved in their local SAR group
- Meet the requirements for Team Member in LandSAR Field Guide and be working towards Team Leader

Avalanche handler specific prerequisites¹

- Response time is critical - therefore during the winter season, teams must be located no more than 30 mins from high risk avalanche areas or live in close proximity of a helicopter base likely to be involved in a rescue operation
- Preference is for teams to be located at ski areas
- Working in the ski industry, or an associated industry such as guiding, or a strong connection to skiing, touring and snow as a sport
- Have completed an approved Avalanche Course with supporting documentation and evidence of further application of skills.
- Applicant must display a suitable level of proficiency in back country travel
- The ability to learn the dynamics of an avalanche rescue and the roles and reasons for whatever is undertaken

¹ These competencies are to be assessed by a NZ LandSAR Avalanche Assessor or nominated representative prior to the prospective handler being accepted as an entry level applicant of LandSAR Dogs (Avalanche).

3.2 Dog Team

Must be seen by an Assessor or Operational Handler (nominated by the Assessor Team Leader or Current Assessor) for suitability prior to the team being invited to a training camp.

This initial suitability check is at the prospective Handlers cost and at a location which suits the Assessor or Operational Handler.

3.3 Dog Attributes

- fit, healthy, of a suitable age, size and necessary attributes of a working dog
- obedient and trustworthy off lead in all situations
- non-aggressive to other dogs
- high play drive and retrieve
- likes people and willingly approaches strangers with a good attitude
- doesn't chase other animals, eg cats, possums, livestock etc. Search dogs are ONLY allowed to follow human scent.
- doesn't perve... that is, become distracted by the scent of other dogs and continually cock its leg to mark its territory (some dominant bitches also do this).
- registered with the local authority in which the handler is resident and fully vaccinated

We may conduct a drive test on prospective search dogs – a dog that does not score well may not be suitable to continue in the training program. This will be at assessor discretion.

4.0 ASSESSMENT PROCESS

- The Assessment process is by joint agreement between LandSAR Dog assessors and New Zealand Police Dog section appointed Assessor

LandSAR Dog Assessors will appoint from within their ranks an Assessor Team Leader. The tenure for the Team Leader will be for 3 years with annual reviews.

Assessors once appointed are reviewed annually.

- New Zealand Police Dog Section Assessors will be appointed on Recommendation of National Coordinator - Police Dogs, NZ Police

4.2 Operational Status

Operational status shall be granted to teams deemed to have demonstrated that they have the competencies required by this standard.

Operational status will be effective for 12 months or from the date of assessment to the subsequent annual assessment (in that Island), unless other extraordinary circumstances apply. (Assessor Team Leader/Senior Assessors to have final decision)

- A team that is out of service for 90 days or more (e.g. due to injury) may be asked to attend a weekend training in order to allow assessors to satisfy themselves that the team's skills have been maintained and that a level of fitness in alignment with assessment criteria is demonstrated.
- Should an Operational team present at an endorsed NZ LandSAR Dogs training event at a standard well below that of the Assessment criteria, and is seen by more than one LandSAR Dogs Assessor, their Operational status may be suspended until such time as the team can present working at the Assessment standard
- A team that fails an assessment for operational status will immediately become non-operational, irrespective of any time remaining in the 12 months since operational status was granted.
- A team that has been operational, but fails a subsequent assessment, **may, at the discretion of the LSAR Dog Assessors and Police Assessor**, be offered the chance to re-present at an “extraordinary evaluation” as defined in section 5.3 or be seen at a subsequent training camp by 2 Assessors.

4.3 Eligibility for Assessment

Assessment is by invitation only

Operational Search Dog teams are expected to attend the annual assessment course in order

to recertify. (Failure to do so may result in removal of operational status).

Operational Search Dog teams must attend at least one NZ LandSAR Dog training event a year, or be seen by an Assessor working at or close to Operational standard on at least one occasion throughout the previous six (6) months.

Non-operational Search Dog teams that have been observed by an assessor in the six (6) months prior to the assessment camp working at or close to the required standard will be invited to attend for assessment.

These teams must have been observed working by an Assessor, either in their regional training or at one of the LandSAR training weekends.

This observation can be made at any weekend training where an Assessor is present.

An Assessor may be requested to attend a training event where there is no local Assessor attending, in order to make recommendations to the LandSAR Search Dog committee.

NOTE: *Assessors should err on the side of including borderline teams rather than excluding them; teams may potentially make significant progress between being observed and the camp.*

Assessors will make recommendations to the LandSAR Assessor Team Leader or Senior Assessor coordinating the camp, who will invite suitable teams to participate.

5.0 ASSESSMENT PROCEDURE

Evaluations to determine suitability for operational status will be carried out annually at two camps, one on each island.

5.1 Format of Assessment Camp

5.1.1 The camp shall be run over four consecutive days.

5.1.2 There shall be a number of sessions during the camp - morning, afternoon and possibly one or more evening (dark) sessions. Sessions to be run at discretion of Senior Assessor at the camp.

5.1.3 Each session will be designed to train and assess specific competencies. Many competencies may be trained and assessed in a single session.

5.1.4 LandSAR Assessors will be present to observe all dogs during all sessions.

5.1.5 Police Assessors will observe each dog at least one, preferably two sessions.

5.1.6 Assessors will debrief each team observed.

5.1.7 During the camp Assessors will have a meeting to agree upon the suitability of each team for operational status. (Any disputes will be directed to the LandSAR Assessor Team Leader and his/her decision will be final).

5.2 Re-assessment

5.2.1 Operational handlers are required to recertify annually in order to retain their operational status

They are therefore expected to attend the annual course for their island in order to be

re-assessed

5.2.2 In the case of exceptional circumstances preventing the team attending the annual course, the team may be eligible for assessment at an extraordinary assessment as defined in section 5.3

5.3 Extraordinary Assessments

In some cases, assessments may be arranged outside the annual camp.

There is significant cost, both monetary and in Assessors and Police time.

Therefore, it is **entirely at the Assessors Team Leaders or Senior Assessors discretion** whether such an assessment will be offered to teams.

5.3.1 Extraordinary assessment **may** be offered to:

a) Teams who were operational but fail to subsequently recertify. It is expected that this option will only be exercised for teams who were very close to the required standard at the annual assessment.

b) Operational teams who due to exceptional circumstances were unable to attend the annual assessment.

5.3.2 Extraordinary assessments will, wherever possible, be arranged to take place at a weekend training camp, either national or regional, in order to reduce costs and workload.

5.3.3 Whenever possible, more than one LandSAR Assessor will be present to observe teams.

5.3.4 Teams being recertified at such an extraordinary assessment will be required to be observed by the LandSAR Assessor and by the Police Assessor.

5.4 The assessment process is a closed evaluation with 'observers' present only at the discretion of the assessor running the assessment in consultation with the handler.

5.5 The assessment and prior process is to evaluate the Dog Team as a whole. Should a Handler wish for the dog to be qualified with a second Handler then the second Handler becomes a second Dog Team and must fulfil the prior requirements for Assessment.

6.0 WILDERNESS COMPETENCIES

In order to be deemed operational, the Search Dog team must demonstrate during the course certain handler and dog competencies.

6.1 TRACKING STANDARD

Purpose

The assessment is to test that a dog team can locate a line of human scent (see Dog Tracking Standard below)

A dog that is specifically trained to follow a line of human scent (ground or windborne). The ground scent is caused by a combination of individual human scent, the crushing of vegetation and life forms in the ground and the disturbance of soil, which may be affected by varying factors, including all climatic conditions. Then following that line of human scent to its source.

The dog team will be given an approximate starting point and will be required to follow that line of scent to a successful conclusion, under assessment conditions. The assessment is to determine that a handler can plan and systematically cast for a line of scent (human, ground or windborne) and follow it, showing the necessary handler skills required to work that dog and locate the source of that scent (human or article), to a competent level.

A non-operational team attempting assessment will be required to show consistency over a minimum of three (3) tracks to be deemed operational. This includes all aspects of the handler and dog to be deemed competent (operational). Current Operational Dog Teams will be required to successfully complete a minimum of one (1) assessment. For all Dog Teams to be deemed 'Operational': This will be at the discretion of the LandSAR Dog Assessor and Police Assessor overseeing the Assessment.

Any disputes by either Handler or Assessor will be overseen/adjudicated by the LandSAR Dog Assessor Team Leader, and his/her decision will be final.

Assessment conditions

6.1.1 In a simulated situation, one person lays a track; the age is timed from when it is commenced. All tracks are to be single laid, and should be laid, if possible in a down-wind direction to prevent air-scent contamination from the subject or article.

6.1.2 New Zealand bush /rural terrain should be varied and may include the following - grass paddocks, bush, gullies, ridges, steep areas and / or open tussock areas. Length up to 1.5 km with 5 - 6 directional changes and 3hrs old.

6.1.3 Casting is a systematic process used to enable the dog to locate a track.

6.1.4 At the start of the track the handler will be given an area approx 20m x 20m as PLS. (Point last seen)

6.1.5 Finding the track is a recognisable reaction by the dog on finding human scent on the ground.

6.1.6 On finding the track the dog is to follow the line of human scent to its conclusion.

6.1.7 Upon reaching the end of the track the dog is to provide to the handler a recognisable indication of the presence of the human subject or article.

Performance Criteria:

6.1.8 Dog is trained to find and follow on command a track unknown to the handler and to complete this within 30 minutes.

6.1.9 The dog is cast by the handler in a manner which allows the dog to find then follow the track.

6.1.10 The handler maintains even contact and control of the tracking line throughout

tracking.

6.1.11 Commands given to the dog provide direction and encouragement.

6.1.12 Tracking speed and general direction of travel is maintained. In the event the dog loses the scent, the handler must be able to recognise this. Handlers are permitted to rework a part of the track to re-find the scent/track.

AIMLESS WANDERING HOWEVER IS NOT PERMITTED.

6.1.13 Dog is trained to respond immediately to handler's commands in the presence of distractions. Distractions may include but are not limited to - other dogs, people, food, wildlife and farm animals.

6.1.14 Handlers on completion of their search task are capable of being debriefed. At such a debriefing, the handler should be able to describe and show on a map their route and any indications made by the dog

6.1.15 Aggression The team must show no sign of aggression in the presence of other dogs, handlers, search team members or members of the public. The dog should be capable of being handled for all situations except searching by persons other than the handler (e.g. transportation)

6.1.16 GPS Dog Tracking Collar - The use of GPS Dog Tracking Collars is permitted during assessment

6.1.17 Obedience - Whilst this competency may not necessarily be assessed, the handler must have sufficient control over the dog to cater for all eventualities whilst the team is representing LandSAR as a Search Dog Team. This includes PR exercises, such as demonstrations, displays etc., transport on commercial transport, such as aircraft, and at all times during a search, from arrival at the incident through deployment and location and possible extraction of the subject.

As such the dog must:

- Walk to heel on and off lead.
- Return to handler immediately when commanded
- Be able to be left in a 'down stay' for a minimum of 5 minutes. (This is to allow the handler to deal with a subject once located without distraction, for instance)
- Be sociable in the presence of humans and other dogs
- Be able to be handled by persons other than the regular handler in controlled situations

6.2 AREA SEARCH STANDARDS

A non-operational Air Scent Team attempting assessment will be required to show consistency over a minimum of Four (4) Scenario based assessments to be deemed operational. This includes all aspects of the handler and dog to be deemed competent (operational).

Current operational dog teams will be required to successfully complete a minimum of Two (2) scenario based assessments.

For all Dog Teams to be deemed 'Operational': This will be at the discretion of the LandSAR Dog Assessor and Police Assessor overseeing the Assessment.

Any disputes by either Handler or Assessor will be overseen/adjudicated by the LandSAR Dog Assessor Team Leader, and his/her decision will be final.

In order to be deemed operational, the Search Dog team must demonstrate during the camp certain handler and dog competencies. These competencies are related to Area Search dogs and the handling thereof.

Area Search Dog:

A dog that is specifically trained to indicate windborne human scent (note: it does not have to specifically windborne scent). The scent is caused by a combination of individual human scent, the crushing of vegetation and life forms in the ground and the disturbance of soil, which may be affected by varying factors, including all climatic conditions. Then following that scent to its source.

Possible Areas Search Scenarios for Assessment:

The Area SAR Dog is expected to have been trained and be competent in tackling each of these scenarios:

Corridor Search:

A path, trail, logging road or the like approximately 1 km in length. The subject will be hidden within 10-30m of the trail. The dog should alert and locate the subject from the trail or road and bark readily. The handler should be able recognize the initial indication of the dog. If trained to re-find, on location of the subject, the dog should return to the handler, and once the trained response is given to the handler from the dog, they will together go back and locate the lost party/subject. The handler should assess the subject for injury, accurately place the subject on the map, call the co-ordinates into base and recommend any medical assistance as required.

Night Search:

Dependant on available terrain, and conditions, the type of night search, will be at the Assessors discretion. This could be a corridor or a large open area search. Handler should evaluate information provided regarding missing subject, determine search strategy, and search the area for the subject. The search should begin as soon as practicable after dark and the subject placed at least 30 minutes prior to the start of the search. There will be up two subjects hidden for the scenario depending on terrain available in the area. Handler should direct search activity according to wind, terrain and cover. Handler should identify the dog's indication and should follow the dog in to the subject. In the case of a re-find trained dog, the dog should return to the handler, and once the trained response is given to the handler from the dog, they will together go back and locate the lost party/subject. Handler should assess subject, identify location, contact base with location and medical assessment.

Open area, Multi-Subject Scenario:

An area of 1–25 hectares depending on density of ground cover (25 hectares for open areas with some cover. e.g. tussock grasslands with rocks and flax; 10 hectares of denser bush). One to Two persons hidden out of handler and dog's sight must be found within a set time limit, generally approximately one hour should be sufficient, however this is discretionary upon the Assessors. Subjects should be placed 30 minutes prior to commencement of search. The handler should assess the sector on the map, determine the most effective way to search it, work the dog effectively, assess any subjects, determine their exact location, and notify base of their needs. The handler should continue to the next subject. The dog should eagerly find each subject with an identifiable alert and re-find or bark on find.

Elimination Search:

The dog team may be required to search any area, where there may be no subject. The Team will not know that the area is subject free. The team will work the area as any other given scenario.

6.2 Skill Maintenance Competencies

The following competencies are designated “skills maintenance” and as such must be demonstrated by all teams including currently operational teams. (NOTE: Assessors are at liberty to request any team, whether currently operational or not, to attend a particular session to demonstrate a specific competency.)

6.2.1 Spontaneous indication -The trained indication (see definitions) must be spontaneous and in no way induced by the handler, either consciously or subconsciously.

6.2.2 Consistent Indication-The dog must demonstrate a consistent trained response upon locating subjects. The indication should not alter or degrade significantly on subsequent 'finds'

6.2.3 Ranging -the dog must be comfortable working at a distance from the handler. The distance will vary with terrain and individual dogs, but should be upwards of 30-50m in open country. Most dogs will work closer to the handler in particularly thick vegetation or as the search lengthens.

6.2.4 Ability to successfully locate multiple subjects - Reliably finding multiple subjects during a single search. There should be no significant change in performance between finds.

6.2.5 Endurance - The search dog team must be sufficiently fit, both mentally and physically to search for extended periods, without detrimentally affecting the performance. Operationally, the team will be expected to work for many hours (e.g. a six or eight-hour shift) and as such the team must demonstrate the stamina to search for several hours in a single day.

6.2.6 Efficient Searching - Searches must be carried out efficiently; thoroughly enough such that an acceptable POD is achieved but in a timely manner, without over searching or over working the dog.

Other Mandatory Competencies

The following competencies must be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the assessors by all teams presenting for assessment for the first time. Current operational teams may also be required to demonstrate these competencies at the discretion of the assessor panel.

6.2.7 Plan and implement a search strategy - The ability to plan logical and efficient coverage of search areas which give their team the best possible P.O.D, and to implement the plan effectively. Successful implementation of the plan includes changing the plan appropriately if required (e.g. due to environmental changes), coverage of ground missed due to dog striking on scent. The search must be planned and implemented such no significant portion of the area designated is omitted, subject to assessors' instructions.

6.2.8 Debrief a search - The ability to realistically and accurately debrief to SAR IMT (Incident Management Team) the area searched, including an estimate of achieved POD, notification of any sections not covered, and any sections that would be worthy of another resource (either due to interest shown by the dog, or because the POD achieved was low, but the POA maybe high).

6.2.9 Search during darkness - The Search Dog Team will be required to work in the hours of darkness. It is thus essential that the search dog team is as competent and effective working during the hours of darkness as in daylight.

6.2.10 Management of dog - The handler must demonstrate appropriate management of the canine member of the team, including rest schedule, access to water, encouragement, appropriate praise and guidance through directional control.

6.2.11 Ability to read the dog - The handler must have the inherent skill level and ability to read and interpret the dog's actions and behaviours. This would include, but is not

limited to: correctly reading the 'strike' and reading when the dog is losing concentration and requires rest.

6.2.12 Elimination Search - Most search areas the team will search during operations will not contain the missing person. Therefore, it is vital that an operational team can search an area, not find anything in that area, and continue working effectively when tasked again. The handler must demonstrate enough confidence in the team's abilities to leave the area and debrief appropriately to the SAR I.M.T. when nothing is found in the area.

NOTE: When this competency is being assessed, the participant will not be made aware of that prior to the exercise. The participant will be informed that a full debrief of the search will be required upon completion. Other competencies may still be assessed during this exercise and the participant may be made aware of them.

6.2.13 Traverse all types of terrain - Dog teams must display an ability to travel efficiently over various terrain (e.g. dense bush, steep ground, scree, rocks, snow) and traverse barriers encountered (e.g. Fences, water etc.) in a range of conditions and must have the stamina to sustain this for extended periods (a number of hours) whilst continuing to search effectively.

6.2.14 Behaviour in the presence of domestic stock - The dog must show little to no interest in domestic stock, such as sheep, goats, cattle, pigs etc. Search dog teams will frequently be required to search farmland, and the dog may not in any way cause any distress to domestic stock. If the dog does show any interest, the handler must have a suitable recall of the dog

6.2.15 Behaviour in presence of distractions - The dog must be under the control of the handler at all times, including in the presence of distractions such as other dogs, wildlife etc. The dog should continue searching in the presence of such distractions

6.2.16 Directional Control - In order to successfully implement a search plan, the handler will need to be able to direct the dog to search in particular directions and places. Handlers should be able to demonstrate during the course of general searching, sufficient directional control to ensure that the search plan is thoroughly implemented.

6.2.17 Helicopter/Light Aircraft Transport - Whilst this competency may not necessarily be assessed, the handler is responsible to ensure that both they and the dog have attended appropriate safety sessions, and that the dog is exposed to helicopters/light aircraft at all available opportunities. If at all possible, the handler should get the dog comfortable with entering helicopters/light aircraft with the engine(s) running, and also

with being winched into and out of helicopters. (Winching practice can be achieved without the use of a helicopter)

6.2.18 Transport - Handlers and dogs should be comfortable travelling in all forms of transport. Many different modes of transport may be used to locate search teams to the start of their search area, including, 4WD's, ATV's, air transport, snowmobiles, 'Unimogs', inflatable boats (IRB's), jet boats, skidoos, chairlifts.

6.2.19 Obedience - Whilst this competency may not necessarily be assessed, the handler must have sufficient control over the dog to cater for all eventualities whilst the team is representing LandSAR as a Search Dog Team. This includes PR exercises, such as demonstrations, displays etc., transport on commercial transport, such as aircraft, and at all times during a search, from arrival at the incident through deployment and location and possible extraction of the subject.

As such the dog must:

- Walk to heel on and off lead.
- Return to handler immediately when commanded
- Be able to be left in a 'down stay' for a minimum of 10 minutes. (This is to allow the handler to deal with a subject once located without distraction, for instance)
- Be sociable in the presence of humans and other dogs
- Be handle able by persons other than the regular handler in controlled situations.

6.2.20 Aggression - The team must show no sign of aggression in the presence of other dogs, handlers, search team members or members of the public. The dog should be capable of being handled for all situations except searching by persons other than the handler (e.g. transportation)

6.2.21 GPS Dog Tracking Collar – The use of GPS Dog Tracking Collars is permitted during assessment

7.0 WILDERNESS OPERATIONAL

7.1 Operational Deployment Policy

7.1.1 Only Search dog teams which have met the Tracking or Area Search assessment standard will be used for SAR Operations.

7.1.2 Operational Search dog teams must always be deployed with at least one other LandSAR or Police team member and ideally two. Team members can be responsible for navigation and communications.

7.2 Operational expertise

7.2.1 The operational Tracking handler is able to demonstrate a careful and systematic "casting" procedure to locate ground scent at PLS (place last seen)

7.2.2 The operational handler understands the basic theory of scent, and the possible impact of climatic conditions on scent distribution to formulate an understanding of the likelihood of the dog being able to find scent.

7.2.3 The operational handler is able to recognise when the dog has NOT located scent human, ground or windborne or has lost the track or airborne scent

7.2.4 The operational handler marks on map and radios Search Base the location of any articles, items or clues found during a search. Base will instruct the handler regarding this.

7.2.5 If the dog is worked on line, the handler is physically capable of handling a 25 - 30-foot line in rough and varied terrain and handling the dog on tracks of 3 to 4 hours duration.

7.2.6 The handler is able to recognise scent pools and dead ends and be able to assist their dog as necessary

7.2.7 The handler is capable of assisting their dog over, under or across, fences, streams, swing bridges, bluffs and breaks in terrain.

7.2.8 The handler recognises when their dog needs a break during the search. The dog demonstrates a willingness to resume tracking / searching after being rested.

7.2.9 On completion of their task the handler will be debriefed by the SAR IMT (Incident Management team). The handler is able to reasonably describe and show on a map; the route and assessment of their confidence regarding the tracks location and person's direction of travel.

7.2.10 The Operational handler carries enough equipment to be self-supporting for 48 hours.

7.2.11 The Operational Tracking dog team is capable of finding the track of a subject leaving from a contaminated area. This may mean casting the dog in a large (100m or more) circle in order to cut the track.

7.2.12 Search Dogs should be comfortable in all types of transport with their handlers. this may involve being winched into and out of helicopters.

NB Search dog handlers often liaise directly with Search management to establish a search plan. Therefore, knowledge and competence in the following areas are highly recommended: tracking, sign cutting search methods, lost person behaviour, team leading and managing search operations.

8.0 AVALANCHE COMPETENCIES

8.1 OBEDIENCE STANDARDS

Dog teams must pass the following obedience exercises to a competent level; an inability to attain this level will prevent any further assessment.

All assessments must be completed without the aid of toy or food reward

Search Dog Teams must carry out the following group exercises:

1. On lead, handlers are to line up with the dog on their left-hand side and sitting, 2 metres separating them from the next team.
2. On lead, (1 at a time) each dog team to walk, dog on left hand side in control across an open area 20 metres, turn 180 degrees with dog and then sit the dog down again with a separation of 2 metres from the next dog team. Dogs will be required to maintain a sit position until instructed otherwise.
3. On lead, (1 at a time) each dog team to walk (weaving) through the other teams until they reach the end, then establish a 2-metre gap and sit the dog down on their left-hand side. This will be repeated in the opposite direction back to the original position.
4. Together, all handlers are to remove their dog from the lead. The dog must
5. maintain a controlled stationery position until instructed by the assessor.

6. Together, all handlers will walk 20 metres away from their dogs, (the dog must maintain a controlled stationery position) until each handler is instructed by the assessor to call their dog to a sit position on their left-hand side.
7. Together, all handlers will walk 20 metres away from their dog, (the dog must maintain a controlled position), then the handler (1 at a time) when instructed by the assessor:
 1. Will call their dog to them
 2. Halt the dog (*safety stop*) when asked, dog must maintain a controlled stationery position
 3. Call the dog to a sit position on their left-hand side.

GUIDELINES

1. Handlers may give reassurance to their dog during any exercise. They may not use a toy or food reward.
2. The purpose of this exercise is to ensure all dog teams can work together and demonstrate a level of control that is required for all aspects of training and operational deployments.
3. Teams to be assessed will be randomly assigned to groups. No dog will be required to remain in a controlled position for a duration of longer than 10 minutes during the assessment. If the time limit is reached, remaining handlers will be given the opportunity to release their dogs and reset the controlled position.
4. Each dog team should be able to demonstrate control on and off of lead – the intent of the *safety stop* is to ensure a dog can go into a halt position in any emergency situation. The effectiveness of the halt will be at the assessors' discretion.
5. Dogs that may be required to search on a site together will be socialised together. Any dogs not familiar with others must be allowed to socialise first.
6. The dog should also be capable of returning to its handler without deviation to other distractions.
7. The dog should be able to walk past/through other dog teams without issue.
8. Uncontrollable aggression between dogs cannot be tolerated as there is a high probability multiple dog teams will be deployed together.

Assessor discretion applies:

- * where an incident outside the parameters of the assessment has affected the performance of a team
- * where a level of competency is shown, the assessor may provide targeted training to allow

further assessment

* in the event of a fail in the first attempt, there will be one further opportunity offered on the same day under the same conditions (as much as is practicable)

8.2 NOVICE STANDARDS

NOTE: Assessments must be completed without the aid of toy or food reward

TIME LIMIT: 15 minutes

ASSESSMENT SITE: Snowfield approx 3000 sq metres. One victim buried to a depth of one metre. Visual and physical contact is allowed.

REGULATIONS:

The handler may complete this assessment either with, or without touring skis or snowshoes unless the assessor states otherwise.

The victim must be buried at least 20 minutes before assessment begin. The victim is not permitted to help in the preparation of the snow cave.

When burying people, adhere to all safety regulations. The handler with dog must remain out of sight until called by the assessor.

* See training/assessment site and management and safety SOPs.

SITE PREPARATION:

Snowfield boundaries must be marked by yellow flags to ensure that visual control of the entire search area.

Directly before search begins a minimum of three persons must walk or ski in a criss-cross fashion over the search area. This may be done a number of times.

The assessment site must have 1 hole per team assessed and each hole may only be used twice.

During an assessment, all other unused holes are to remain open. The assessor must ensure holes are prepared to a safe standard (refer to standards note) ensuring there is adequate door way to cover with a minimum thickness of 500mm of snow (compact).

NOVICE ASSESSMENT SCENARIO:

The assessor must ensure the handler has their transceiver switched off during the assessment exercise.

The assessor will deliver the search scenario and confirm that the handler understands the site boundaries.

The handler must then describe a basic plan. The plan must demonstrate an understanding of:

- wind direction
- likely areas of interest
- start point before deploying the dog.

The dog must be released to search from a point determined by the handler. The handler may not leave this position until:

- the dog has either disappeared from the handlers view, or
- has travelled more than 30 metres from the handler, or
- when directed by the assessor.

The dog must indicate on finding the victim with clear visible or audible indication. The dog must remain at the site of indication until the handler arrives.

If the dog disappears from sight before a 30-metre distance is reached, the handler may move from the start position to regain sight of the dog. Upon regaining visible contact, the handler must stop and wait until the 30-metre distance is achieved.

Any indication by the dog must be recognised by the dog handler and reported to the assessor.

The point of indication by the dog must be marked by the handler and the indicated person dug out by the handler. Assistance with digging may be given at the discretion of the assessor. The dog handler must make visual and auditory contact with the victim.

No indication on the victim or multiple false indications will lead to the handler being assessed as not yet competent.

FURTHER ASSESSMENT:

The handler must demonstrate that they can:

- use an avalanche transceiver in an unknown area of 20 x 20 metres to find a buried backpack
- recover the backpack and
- report the find to the assessor within a period of five minutes.

8.3 OPERATIONAL STANDARDS

NOTE: All forms of assessment must be completed without the aid of toy or food reward.

TIME LIMIT: 20 minutes

ASSESSMENT SITE: Snowfield approx 6000 sq metres. Two victims buried to a depth of one metre and a backpack buried to a minimum depth of 20cm (snow conditions allowing)

REGULATIONS:

The victims and the backpack must be buried at least 20 minutes before assessment begins. The victims are not permitted to help in the preparation of the snow caves.

The dog team must remain out of sight until called by the assessor.

SITE PREPARATION:

Snowfield boundaries must be marked by yellow flags to ensure that visual control of the entire search area.

Assessment sites must have enough holes prepared so that any one hole can only be used 3 times over the period of an assessment day.

The assessor must ensure holes are prepared to a safe standard (refer to standards note) ensuring there is adequate door way to cover with a minimum thickness of 500mm of snow.

The pack used for the article must be changed, re-scented and relocated prior to each assessment. The pack must be buried to a minimum depth of 20cm (snow conditions allowing) This measurement should be from the top of the buried pack to the surface and snow lightly compact.

All other unused holes are to remain open during an assessment.

Directly before the search begins a minimum number of three persons must walk or ski in a criss-cross fashion over the search area. This may be done a number of times.

OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT SCENARIO:

The assessor must ensure the handler has their transceiver switched off during the assessment exercise.

The assessor must ensure the handler has their transceiver switched off during the assessment exercise.

The assessor will deliver the search scenario and confirm that the handler understands the site boundaries.

The handler must then describe a basic plan. The plan must demonstrate an understanding of:

- wind direction
- likely areas of interest
- start point before deploying the dog.

The dog must be released to search from a point decided by the handler. The ability to range from the handler must be demonstrated.

The dog must indicate on finding the victim with clear visible or audible indication. The dog must remain at the site of indication until the handler arrives.

Any indication by the dog must be recognised by the dog handler and reported to the assessor. The dog handler is expected to maintain visual contact with the dog at all times (where possible).

The handler will be expected to make a call according to their dog's indication. The handler may not investigate the hole prior to making this call.

Areas of interest or indications by the dog must be marked with Land SAR orange flags.

The handler must then flag the point of indication. The indicated person or article can then be extricated by the handler. Assistance with digging may be given at the discretion of the assessor.

The handler is not obliged to wait until the total recovery of the victim, but may continue the search for the remaining subject or article after checking the condition and safety of the victim.

The assessor will appoint helpers to remove all victims and articles from the search site in the order they are found.

The assessment will end when the handler advises that the search action is finished, or when directed by the assessor. The assessor may debrief of the search at this time.

The dog team will be assessed as not competent if:

- there is no indication on victims or
- false indications.

FURTHER ASSESSMENT:

The handler must demonstrate that they can:

- use an avalanche transceiver in an unknown area of 20 x 20 metres to find a buried backpack
- recover the backpack and
- report the find to the assessor within a period of five minutes.

RE-TESTING CRITERIA:

Where a team has shown a level of competency but was deemed not competent, the assessment team may, elect to reassess or assess the team as competent.

The assessor team for all reassessments must consist of one of the original assessors plus one other assessor.

8.4 ADVANCED STANDARDS

NOTE: All forms of assessment must be completed without the aid of toy or food reward

*To be assessed at an advanced level; teams must first have fully completed the operational pathway and be assessed competent at an operational level.

TIME LIMIT: 30 minutes per dog team (note: multiple dog teams may be called to the same site, each with a different start and finish time, each with a different assessor)

ASSESSMENT SITE: Snowfield approximately 10,000sq metres with an unknown number of live subjects and/or articles.

NOTE: All victims located (if any) will be deceased as to not allow for additional information to influence the complete coverage of a search plan. Ensure that any surface clues or buried articles can be attributed to the same number of buried subjects, if any.

ADVANCED ASESMENT SCENARIO:

The Advanced Scenario will be set at the discretion of the assessor team (i.e. number of victims, articles, surface clues, etc.)

Operational handlers will demonstrate:

- their management/liaison skills
- applied understanding of the greater dynamics of an overall search profile:
 - correct site assessment and search planning
 - interview skills
 - making logistical decisions
 - working with and around probe teams, multiple dog teams
 - reassessment of search areas

- liaising and working with external resources
- having the confidence to say that the dog has not indicated on anything, etc.

The 1st dog handler will arrive on site as a member of the initial (hasty) response team. This team will consist of at least one other person (snow safety person/facilitator).

A witness (assessor) will inform the team of the presence of an avalanche involving an unknown number of victims. The time will start at the point of contact with the witness.

The Hasty team MUST assess site safety before any other action takes place.

This team will need to formulate an initial search plan that sets up a search using the dog as the primary search tool.

There will be no transceiver available for location in the field (other than those used for safety purposes on the live subjects). The handler will be expected to state that a transceiver search is needed, but they must have their transceivers switched off for the exercise.

Additional resources will arrive and be on stand-by for the Hasty team and, or subsequent handlers to direct into use. (Probe teams, diggers, etc.)

The handler should be able to restructure and modify their search plan, taking into account search progressions to facilitate the continuity of the search across multiple teams/agencies.

This is **NOT** a test of a Handler’s ability to assume the Avalanche Site Controller’s Job.

- As additional dog teams arrive, extra assessors will observe the new teams.
- Good communication, search plan modification and a professional “hand-off” will be assessed.
- Search will continue until the last advanced team has been assessed on the site with the site being declared clear of any further dog indications.

8.5 SAFETY PROCEDURES

TRAINING / ASSESSMENT SITE MANAGEMENT AND SAFETY SOPs

Table of Contents:

1. Site Selection and Safety
2. Site Size and Marking
3. Snow-cave Guidelines
 - a) Location

- b) Dimensions
- c) Number of caves per site

4. Personnel.

- a) Site Safety Coordinator (SSC)
- b) Site Safety Officer (SSO)
- c) Live Subject

5. Equipment.

- a) Live Subject Equipment
- b) Handler Assistant Equipment

6. Site Management

- a) Site Safety
- b) Briefing
- c) Communications
- d) Timeframes

7. Communications

1. Site Selection and Safety

The site must be assessed for avalanche safety prior to use by the most senior appropriately qualified person. This assessment must be agreed to by at least one other participant in the exercise.

All identified hazards will be communicated to participants in the exercise. Appropriate mitigating procedures will be employed.

Avoid areas below avalanche start zones during periods of avalanche hazard.
Avoid snow-covered creeks, glide cracks, cliffs, roads or bluffs, hang-fire, etc.

The site must have:

- ease of access
- high degree of visibility from what would typically be the downwind vantage / staging point given the predominant airflow
- a number of terrain features to offer various search plans, to provide wind-drifted areas for snow-caves and to encourage searching 'likely burial areas'.

Be aware of the effects of that terrain; for example, air is likely to pool in significant depressions or bowls. The site should be set up to reflect the level of assessment / training.

2. Site Size and Marking for Assessment

- The search area should be no smaller than stated in the assessment guidelines.
- Use red flags to mark the boundaries of the search area.
- Draw a map of the site; include boundaries, landmarks and snow-caves.
- Photograph the site if possible.
- If possible, use GPS coordinates to pinpoint the hole locations at training and assessment camps.

3. Snow Cave Guidelines

a) Location:

- Snow-caves need to have a small and vertical entrance to ensure that the dog does not collapse it. For this reason, the ideal locations are into the side of a wind-drift, a steep bank or man-made mound.
- Avoid lower angle slopes where possible. If this is not possible, dig a channel leading into the entrance to ensure a vertical entrance.

b) Dimensions:

- 1.5 meters of snow is the minimum depth required to ensure there is at least 50cm of ceiling. **Note:** if the snow is not strong enough to support the weight of a person, a greater ceiling thickness will be required. If this is not achievable, the SSO must ensure that people do not walk on top of the snow-cave.
- Dig a horizontal *channel* to the start of the entrance.
- The entrance should be no larger than 50cm x 50cm and have a vertical face and a horizontal floor. It is important that the entrance goes in about 50cm before excavation of the cave itself begins. (An angled entrance is difficult to close and there is a risk of the dog collapsing it, causing a negative experience.)
- The main cavity should be no smaller than 180cm long x 100cm high and 100cm wide.

c) Number of Caves per Site:

This is relative to the number of teams to be assessed. Generally, a cave should only be used three times in one day, when possible.

4. Personnel

a) Site Safety Coordinator (SSC)

The role of the SSC is to oversee the safety of all search areas. S/he needs to be suitably qualified to oversee and manage the following:

- Avalanche hazards
- Environmental hazards i.e. hypothermia, sunburn, drowning etc.
- External hazards, i.e. roads, recreational activities etc.

The SSC must also :

- Ensure live subjects are equipped with all necessary safety equipment (see 5a)
- Test and issue radio
- Enlist suitably qualified SSO's and brief them on their roles
- Check quality and safety of every snow cave before use.

b) Site Safety Officer (SSO)

The role of the SSO is to oversee the safety of an individual search area. S/he needs to be suitably qualified to oversee and manage the following:

- Manage all identified hazards as required, including personnel standing on a snow-cave.
- Undertake transceiver checks
- Manage equipment
- Maintain communications with live subjects
- Manage live subjects and ensure they are not getting hypothermic
- Communicate any issues with the SSC

c) Live Subject (dog-bait).

This person needs to:

- be comfortable in confined spaces
- have appropriate clothing
- know how to use safety equipment.

5. Equipment

a) Live Subject Equipment:

- Transceiver
- Closed-cell foam mat
- Warm clothing
- Radio (safety channel)
- Avalung (optional)

b) SSO Equipment:

- Transceiver
- Shovel
- Probe

- Snowshoes
- Radio & Spare batteries (safety channel)
- First Aid Kit & Sunscreen

c) Handler Assistant Equipment:

- Transceiver
- Shovel
- Probe
- Snowshoes
- Radio (safety channel)

6. Site Safety

a) The SSC will ensure that:

- any hazards are eliminated or identified prior to personnel entering the search area
- all SSOs are equipped as above

b) The SSC will brief the SSO and include the following:

- Site boundaries
- Cave locations (draw map, photograph, GPS if possible)
- Identify hazards.
- Identify safe zones as required.
- Communications (protocols and radio familiarisation)

c) SSO will:

- Instruct live subjects in the operation of radios and brief them on radio protocols.
- Communicate with the live subject at intervals of no greater than 10 minutes apart.
- If there is no response at any time the SSO will extract the live subject immediately.

No subject shall stay in a covered cave for a continuous period of more than 40 minutes.

7. Communication

- 2 radio channels will be used on site. One channel is dedicated to the search (search channel). The other channel will be dedicated to the safety of personnel and live subjects (safety channel).
- All batteries will be checked for suitable charge.
- All radios will be checked for operational functionality and locked to appropriate channel.
- Radio checks are performed immediately before and after burial.
- If communication is lost with subject, extricate them immediately.