

USAR Canine Handler Protocols

Safe System of Work

All canine teams are trained, qualified and licensed to operate to the national standard set by the Chief Fire Officers Association prior to working in the inner cordon of an USAR incident. CFOA canine teams are aware of and will adhere to all safe working practices and procedures as required by CLG generic operational guidance for working in an USAR environment. Specifically:

- Canine teams will participate in all briefings and meetings as requested.
- Any PPE necessary will be worn by the handler and dog at all times when working in the risk area.
- The canine team will not conduct a search of a collapsed structure without the assistance of a competent person being present to act as a dedicated safety officer.
- The safety officer will be equipped with a radio communication system.
- The canine handler will receive a full search brief including the findings of the latest risk assessment before commencing a canine search.
- The handler will comply with all entry control procedures implemented at the incident.
- All equipment, e.g. a canine collar, will be removed from the canine prior to searching a collapsed structure to prevent possible entrapment. A canine harness and/or protective boots may be worn if a required as an outcome of the handler's risk assessment.
- Dogs cannot differentiate between rescue personnel and missing persons in a search area. To assist the canine in locating the correct person(s), the search area should be cleared of all non essential personnel before the search commences.
- Where possible, the handler will prevent the canine working out of sight, , whilst conducting a search in a collapsed structure environment.
- After a canine has given an indication on a location, the area should be re-searched by a second canine team to confirm the indication.
- Any indications and points of interest should be clearly marked using a USAR Site Risk Assessment Card¹. In addition, a nominated person should stay at the scene to liaise with subsequent search team(s) and identify the canine's point of indication. All search outcomes will be communicated to the Operations Commander via the Sector Commander by the handler.
- When working at night or in poor lighting the canine team may request sufficient artificial light to enable safe working. This will also include either a light stick being attached to the working harness / jacket to illuminate the canine.
- Any injuries to handler or canine will be reported to the Incident Commander.

¹ Form USAR204

Date	Status	Document Number	Version	Page
July 07	Completed	ND_USAR_SOP_DOG003	1.0	Page 1 of 3

Integration into the Incident Command System

On arrival at an incident, Canine Teams will report to the Fire & Rescue Service (FRS) Incident Commander (or nominated officer via Command Support) stating who they are, call sign and, if necessary, by which FRS they are employed.

In some cases, Incident/Operations/Sector Commanders may not be USAR specialists and consequently, a concise brief on the canine's capabilities and limitations may be beneficial in order to assist commanders in achieving the objectives of their operational plan.

At larger incidents, a functional Canine Sector may be put in place with an officer with canine experience nominated as Sector Commander for canine support.

The Sector Commander for canine support will be responsible for operational preparedness of canine teams and liaison between the canine teams and the Incident Commander. They will also task all canine teams to the relevant operational sector(s) at the request of the Incident Commander.

The Sector Commander will also be responsible for ensuring that canine teams are rotated, rested at a suitable location and that welfare is catered for.

Operational Sector Commanders will require a full debrief on the outcomes of the canine search in designated areas. They may also require situation reports from handlers whilst searches are in progress.

Media

All FRS have an agreed structure and process for dealing with the media. Direct requests from the media for information will be directed to the incident's designated media liaison officer. Handlers may only give information to the media following guidance from the FRS designated media officer.

Welfare

It is essential that the welfare of the dog is considered during all stages of an incident and a canine team will be welfare self-sufficient for at least the first 12 hours of the incident.

- On completion of each working period, the canine is to be thoroughly checked for injury.
- Handlers will ensure the canines have an opportunity to relieve themselves immediately prior to working.
- All canines will be under control at all times and predetermined areas will be selected for loose exercising.

Date	Status	Document Number	Version	Page
July 07	Completed	ND_USAR_SOP_DOG003	1.0	Page 2 of 3

- When working on a collapsed structure with a team of two / three canine teams, each canine team should not search for more than 20 minutes before rotating in the team.
- Clean drinking water must be available to the canine at all times.
- The handler is to ensure their physical readiness through proper nutrition, water intake, rest, and stress control techniques are carried out.
- When temperatures are excessive, the canine(s) must be kept in a shaded area and monitored constantly by a competent team member to prevent possible heat stroke or exhaustion.
- Handlers are responsible for ensuring adequate rest for canines and mitigating the effects of stress or fatigue and ensure a safe, secure place when not directly engaged in search operations.
- Handlers are responsible for their canines and will ensure they receive food & water both at the incident site and in designated rest areas. When working for more than eighteen hours the handler must ensure the canine receives at least six hours undisturbed rest in every twenty four hour period.

Author – C Pritchard

Date	Status	Document Number	Version	Page
July 07	Completed	ND_USAR_SOP_DOG003	1.0	Page 3 of 3