

GUIDELINES TO TRAINING A URBAN SEARCH & RESCUE DOG

There are many different, tried and tested ways of training search and rescue dogs throughout the world. **The stages laid down in this document are some of the training guidelines adopted by the UKFSSART Dog Teams.**

INTRODUCTION

All dogs should be fully proficient at every stage of training before being moving onto the next stage of training. This should be checked by a competent instructor / handler. Each individual dog is like a human that has different levels of learning ability, some will learn faster than others. Never rush your dog through any stage of the dogs training, to do so will only cause complications further in the dogs training, that always inevitably means backtracking on the stages of training. The only person that can be held responsible if you get to this stage is yourself and not your dog, you have been warned !!!.



Relationship

A bond must be formed between dog and handler from day one, the relationship will start to develop through feeding, grooming, walking and spending as much time as possible with your new dog. At all times the puppy must understand the natural pecking order with its handler, to archive this the dog must be handled in a controlled, but fair disciplined manner to allow the dog to understand that its handler is its master. Through this type of relationship, trust, respect and understanding will be formed between dog and handler.

Agility training



This taught to the dog and handler to be able:

- To negotiate any natural or man-made object that it may encounter in the course of an operational search.
- To improve the dogs confidence and build on dog & handler relationship.

Considerations to be taken into account when carrying out an agility session: -

- Age of the dog.
- The dog's ability & stage of training.
- Fitness of the dog.
- Safe construction and stability of the obstacles and the general area for hazards.

To assist the dog in negotiating an obstacle the following words of command can be used:

Agility courses e.g. especially where the dog has to jump through an obstacle and land several feet below should not be used until the dog is at least 12 months old as the dog is still developing (growing) until then.

Natural agility training

- This is designed to be a change from normal agility training.
- The training should be pre-planned to include as much variation as possible.
- Natural obstacles and the environment should be used that the dog will encounter on a typical search in the course of the dogs training.
- The most important rule is always cater for the least agile / youngest canine member in the team to assist in building up there confidence.

Obedience

Is the most important factor to a well-trained and obedient dog. It is through short and frequent lessons that the dog becomes conditioned to its handlers voice and responds to the basic words of command that are taught Through repetition, patience and time. The dog will conform to all commands that are taught to them, remembering to always praise the dog when they carry out a task correctly. This allows the dog to learn right from wrong.

Obedience training

- Training periods should vary to suit the temperament and maturity of dog.
- Carried out 3 – 4 times a day for approximately 5 – 10 minutes each session.
- Each dog will have its own rate of progress.
- All training to be given in short sessions.
- Made to be interesting and fun if not, the dog will become stale, disinterested & unwilling.

Methods of reward

- Verbal praise
- Physical Praise patting / stroking
- Playing with the dog
- Retrieving with a toy

Correcting a dog

The voice can be used in different ways to get the dog to respond

- Loud or quiet
- High or low pitched
- Sharp or drawn out
- Find what tone of voice produces the best results

When the handler gives reward or correction, this must be given without delay so that the dog associates right from wrong.

The timing of the commands must be given before the action is carried out. This will allow the dog time to think and react to the command that has been given, before the handler carries out the movement.

There are also other alternative methods that can be adopted like clicker training that get the same desired facts.

Basic words of command and positions



Sit

Heel Moving Position

Heel: Dog to sit next or be close to the left hand side of the handler's body.



Present / Sit

Heel

Sit



Down

Stay

Come

Stay: Used to command the dog to stay in a position e.g. sit, down or used immediately to get the dog to stand his ground.

Come: To inform the dog to return to its handler immediately.

Leave: To the dog to stop immediately the action that it is carrying out.
E.G. drop from its mouth any foreign object that it may of picked up off the ground.

Working word of command

Find: This word of command is taught to the dog to associate with work, (play) this command is introduced once the dog starts to retrieve.

Additional words of command

Speak: This word of command is initially taught to the dog to teach him to bark. It is used to enhance the dogs indicate to assist in the developing of the dogs indication to show that the dog has found a person.



No: This word of command is used to prevent the dog from carrying out any undesirable act that the handler does not want the dog to do.

To assist the dog in negotiating an obstacle the following words of command can be used:

Over: To jump over an object.



Up: Used to command the dog to jump onto an object.



Through: To command the dog through small openings / obstacles.



Stock testing



Livestock / wildlife testing must be carried out at an early stage of the dogs life. The dog must be at all times trustworthy around any forms of livestock. This also includes training the dog to ignore and work around any form of wildlife that the dog may encounter at any time:

- Rabbits
- Waterfowl
- Foxes
- Pheasants
- Etc

This form of training must be regularly carried out throughout the dogs working life.

STAGE ONE OF SEARCH WORK



Environmental Training must be introduced from an early age. This Stage is extremely important in the development of the dog and should be carried out on a regular basis day and night. The dogs must be conditioned to the noise and disruption associated with rescue operations such as heavy plant, generators and disturbance that would be generated from a collapsed structure environment with all associated articles that would be found in a dwelling/building. They are taught to ignore attractive scents such as food and other animals to assure a negative response whilst searching for live bodies. The dogs are taught through environmental training to be able to negotiate any reasonable obstacle that they may encounter whilst carrying out a search.

Once the dog becomes accustomed and proficient it will be able to work in or around any situation that it may encounter, without being distracted or stressed in any way.

Retrieving is the key to search & rescue work, this is the reward and fun that drives the dog to search an area. Retrieving is the foundations in developing an excellent search & rescue dog and must be used regularly throughout the stages of training and carried out daily throughout the dogs career.

The toy (example squeaky ball) is thrown out and the working word of command “find” is given to the dog. The dog is encouraged to retrieve the toy and return to its handler, where praise is given. This stage is continued in all types of terrain and environments until the dog is proficient at finding the toy. The dog is also encouraged from its handler to bark (speak) for the toy every time it is squeaked or played with. This process is the first stage in teaching the dog to indicate.

To enhance the dog’s drive and enthusiasm on this stage of training the handler or an assistant can hold back the dog by either the lead or working harness, before the toy is thrown out into the search area out of sight.



Example behind a pile of rubble, dense undergrowth.

The dog is held back for approx. 5 to 10 seconds before released, the working word of command find is also given. The time delay can be increased gradually until the dog is locating the toy after approximately 45 seconds. This is the first stage in teaching the dog to search using his nose to locate the toy instead of their eyes.

Indication training

This is taught to the dog at every opportunity to train the dog to indicate to its handler that it has found a casualty by the dog barking (speaking). Once the dog has become proficient at indication training it should be regularly revisited.

There are many tried and tested ways of carrying out this type of training some of these can be via play and food reward initially.



Example of indication training getting the dog to bark for the toy whilst retrieving.

The dog should be fully proficient at this stage with real drive and enthusiasm regarding searching, retrieving and barking for the toy before moving onto a run away (stage two).

STAGE TWO

Run away

The dog wearing its working harness is handled by its handler and an assistant (casualty) is used to tease & excite the dog with a toy, before running out into the area. The assistant continues to tease and

call to the dog whilst finding a place to hide. Once the assistant is in a place of hiding (E.G.: lying down in a conceal position on the ground) the dog is released and the working command is given find. The handler gives verbal encouragement until the dog locates the assistant. When the dog has found the assistant the handler keeps quite at this stage so the dog's attention is focused on the assistant with the toy.

The assistant encourages the dog to bark (indicate) by using the toy as a reward. This exercise can also be carried out by an assistant moving in a zig - zag pattern across the search area, this is used to assist in preventing the dog from tracking the assistant into the hiding place by means of the ground disturbance that has been caused by the assistants movements.



STAGE THREE

Run away with hides Following the same procedure as above, but this time the area has several box hides within the search area for the assistant to be completely concealed away from the dogs sight. When the dog has found the assistant the handler keeps quite so the dog can focus all their attention on the assistant with the toy. The assistant encourages the dog to bark (indicate) if required by using the toy as a reward. Once the dog has indicated the presents of the assistant, they then reveal themselves from the hide to play and fuss with the dog. The handler can then join in with this encouragement.



The distance/area that the dog has to search is increased gradually and the amount of time that the assistant is in hiding is also increased before the dog is released to search. As the dog becomes more proficient the complexity of these hides are gradually increased in difficulty, as illustrated below.



STAGE FOUR

Delayed run away The dog is teased up by the assistant with the toy before running off into the search area, at the same time the assistant is continually calling out to the dog before going into hiding. The dog is then taken away from the search area for a period of time, before being brought back to commence the search. The handler at this stage is continually giving the dog verbal / physical encouragement to keep the dog focused on finding the assistant.

As the dog becomes proficient the time is gradually increased before the dog is brought back into the search area. In time the delayed run away can be dispensed with, allowing the handler to bring the dog to the search area without any input from the assistant. The handler will use verbal encouragement to get the dog to carry out the search of the area.

STAGE FIVE

Consolidation training the assistant hides at different locations, left, right, centre of the search area and uses varying heights to a max of 1 metre and depths of 12 inches. These heights and depths are increased as the dog becomes more proficient at finding and indicating the assistant/s. Maximum use of box hides or other natural hides or objects should be used to conceal the assistant's. E.G.: under floorboards, inside cavity walls, cupboards, under shallow rubble.



This stage is continued until the dog is proficient in finding the assistant after 15 minutes of searching with a good indication.

Once the dog has become proficient at this stage the assistant periodically stops taking the toy into hiding with them. This is used to reinforce that the dog is finding the assistant by using the human scent picture and not by the scent of the toy. Once the dog has indicated the presents of the assistant, the **handler** will remove the toy from their person, making sure that the dog doesn't see it and then pretend to remove it from the hide where the assistant is hiding.



There are two other forms of toy delivery that can be used:

- The toy reward can be delivered by the handler, by throwing the toy into the immediate area where the assistant is in hiding. The handler must make sure that the dog does not see the toy being thrown by them self. This type of reward must be precision ally timed to get maximum reward in believing that the toy has come from the assistant.
- The handler moves in close to the assistants hiding place and removes the toy from their person and gives it to the assistant who then delivers it to the dog. An alternative to this is that the handler pretends to remove it from the hide location and delivers it himself directly to the dog.

STAGE SIX

Free / systematic search control

To search an area effectively the area must be broken down by the handler into manageable search areas and the following search procedure must be followed: -

This procedure is broken down into two search sequences.

- 1) Free search.
- 2) Systematic search
- 3) Perimeter search

Free search: The handler allows the dog to search the area using its own initiative, with guidance from the handler if required.

Systematic search: is then carried out by the handler who takes control of the search and directs the dog systematically throughout the area.

Perimeter / boundary Search: must always be carried out on a building search, remembering to search any cellars, attics, garages and outbuildings that have been incorporated into the search area. Open areas must also have their boundaries searched making sure that the handler has searched at least 5m over the edge of the search area.

Handler then moves onto the next search area and the procedure is repeated.

A full systematic search may not be required every time, if the handler feels that the dog has sufficiently covered the area on their free search, then the handler may only need to direct the dog to certain specific points within the search area.

Tight Control/ Fingertip Search is used to concentration the dog's search pattern into a specific area. Example: after the dog has shown interest in an area, but has not given a clear indication. The handler will re-search the area with the dog in a tighten systematic controlled search, guiding the dog by the use of the handler's hands and showing the dog the exact location to search (Finger tip search).

Open area / Quartering Control

Where applicable and safe the dog should be encouraged to range out on all open area searches. The distance will depend on the terrain and environment that is needed to be searched, ideally the dog should be "ranging out" between 100 - 500 metres or low level urban / rural searches.

Quartering control training can be incorporated in with stage five of the dogs training. It is taught to a Dog to search an area both quickly and efficiently under the direct control of the handler. The handler uses this method to direct the dog to the left and right of the handler's axis to distances of approximately 30 – 50 metres (open area).

This method of search is very effective for the handler to use in breaking down large areas into sectors/grids for the team to search systematically, once the dog has covered the area on its free search.



Carrying out a search in a collapsed structural environment is classified as a high risk task and this will drastically reduce the dogs working distance. The distance the handler works their dog away from them with depend on the risk assessment. This will indicate to the handler any potential hazards were the dog could become injured or venture out of sight.



STAGE EIGHT

Continued Consolidation training the hides are increased to heights of approximately 4 metres and depths of 3 metres depending on terrain. These heights, depths and times are gradually increased until the dog is proficient at finding and indicating the presents of the assistant after been hidden for 1hour. Maximum use of man made and natural hides should be used to conceal the assistant/s. e.g. under floorboards, inside cavity walls, cupboards, furniture, voids and under large quantities of rubble.



STAGE NINE

Specialist Equipment Training



These two pieces of equipment are used on collapsed structure searches where there may be times when the dog will need the added protection of the safety harness and line when working at height. This gives the handler the added control over the dog when searching close to an exposed edge and will prevent a dog from taking an uncontrolled fall from height. (Pictured above)

When searching in areas of high risk such as voids and where further structural collapse is suspected. Training in rope work is required to protect both dog and handler. Abseil training must also be taught and practiced to gain safe access and egress to and from buildings with damaged or dangerous entry and exit points. This type of training is good confidence building for the dog and handler as there is a lot of manual handling of the dog in this type of operation, which builds up trust and confidence between handler and dog in these areas.



Cadaver Training

The aim of this training is to understand the dog's reactions when coming across a deceased body on an operational task. This type of training will assist the handler in having a greater understanding of the dog's reactions if any and interpret these correctly when working in these difficult situations.

Scent sources can be soil samples from a grave, aged human blood, or other suitable sources. Example aged Pork. These scents must be introduced into a search area with live casualties. The training aids should be placed out approximately 12 hours before the search commences; and should be no more than 6 feet above ground or buried no more than 24 inches.

(All distances are approximate)

All sources should be disguised and other empty hides constructed to insure that the dog does not indicate on ground disturbance. If possible, live animals and animal remains should be within the search area.

The dog should search the area locating only the live scent sources. Where a dog indicates or shows interest in the cadaver scent or the disturbance the dog must be discouraged and worked onto a live scent source for a positive reward.

CONCLUSION

These stages of training covered by this document are only basic guidelines to training a Disaster Search & Rescue Dog. Depending on the individual dog and its ability to learn, these stages may vary and the time spent on them.

It is a common belief with new or inexperienced handlers, that to take your dog back in the stages of training is a failure, "this is not true".

It is important that you as a handler revisit these stages of training regularly through good constructive continuation training to consolidate and build on these foundations. This will assist you to recognise areas for improvement by yourself and more importantly the needs of your dog.

A run away, retrieving and indication training are the basic building blocks of any Disaster Search and Rescue Dog and must be revisited regularly to keep the dog's enthusiasm. Remember search work must always be a big game of hide and seek with a reward at the end of it for your dog. Once this stops becoming a game, it will become a major issue maintaining your dog's standard of efficiency in search and rescue work.

This document gives the reader an overview of the stages used in training a dog for disaster search & rescue work. Further documents produced by UKFSSART are used to explain in detail each of the stages of training for the dog team.