

**MAINE SEARCH AND RESCUE DOGS (MESARD)  
Standards and Evaluation Procedures  
(Revised and Accepted 2021-07-10)**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. These standards are designed to ensure that MESARD operational SAR dog and handler teams and flankers will be professional and competent in their work. These standards meet or exceed the MASAR (Maine Association for Search and Rescue) standards, required for call out by the Maine Warden Service.
- 1.2. Teams wishing to test to the following standards will have demonstrated proficiency in the areas to be tested to the Training Director and/or operational handlers that have achieved evaluator status. When the team has fulfilled requirements for operational status, the Training Director will recommend a team for operational status and apply for MASAR certification of the team.
- 1.3. The SAR dog should be one of the working, herding, sporting or hound breeds of sound physical structure and temperament, and of adequate size and strength to negotiate the terrain encountered in wilderness areas.
- 1.4. The SAR dog handlers and flankers must be reasonably available to respond to search calls.
- 1.5. All SAR dog handlers are required to train to the industry standard of an average of 16 hours of training a month. In addition to individual training, each operational SAR dog team will be required to spend a minimum of eight hours each month training in SAR work at a formal MESARD training session, or with another operational team, or with an experienced dog handler or trainer. Teams not participating in the formal MESARD training sessions will submit a written description of the training to the Training Director during that month to satisfy this requirement. The document must be signed by the attending handler or trainer. An operational team that misses more than three consecutive months of formal MESARD training sessions may be subject to a review of its operational status by the officers.
- 1.6. SAR dog handlers must maintain a current training log that is of a form acceptable to the Training Director. Handlers that fail to maintain a training log will be subject to a review of their operational status by the officers.

**2. MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL OPERATIONAL TEAMS (AIR OR GROUND SCENT)**

- 2.1. The handler has current certification with the Maine Association for Search and Rescue (MASAR) as a Search Team Member. The handler and dog will meet the requirements of the MASAR Search Dog Team Certification Standard with the following additions:
  - 2.1.1. Before undertaking any search certification tests, the handler will present their training records for inspection by the Training Director, or a designated member, to show that:
    - 2.1.1.1. If testing for air scent work, the team has completed a minimum of 50 air scent exercises, including basic runaways.
    - 2.1.1.2. If testing for ground scent work, the team has completed a minimum of 30 tracking/trailing exercises.
    - 2.1.1.3. The team must produce proof of having completed the Basic Temperament Test and the outside temperament test (if required).
- 2.2. Before they start field certification testing, or when they take their field re-certification tests, teams that work off lead will also be required to pass a basic obedience certification test consisting of:
  - 2.2.1. Walking on a loose lead for 200 feet with a minimum of a right, left and about turn and 1 halt.
  - 2.2.2. A five minute down stay (off lead).
  - 2.2.3. A sit and down on command.
  - 2.2.4. A "come" on command from 30 feet away.
- 2.3. The handler must complete the requirements and skills required for Flankers (9.1).
- 2.4. All new handlers must deploy at two searches as a trainee or search team member before they may deploy on their own. At least one of these deployments must be as a flanker for an operational handler.

**3. CERTIFICATION TESTING FOR OPERATIONAL STATUS**

- 3.1. Conditions for testing will meet the MASAR Basic Search Dog Standard with the following additions:
  - 3.1.1. Before beginning any field test, the dog handler shall describe to the evaluator the search plan to be used based on the scenario provided him by the evaluation team.

3.1.2. Before beginning the test, the dog handler shall describe the dog's indication behavior to the evaluator.

### **3.2. Certification Tests for Operational Status for Air Scent Wilderness Search**

3.2.1. Teams shall meet the requirements of the MASAR Search Dog Team Certification Standard, Appendix B, "Certification Tests: Air Scent for Wilderness Search," plus:

3.2.2. Teams shall pass the Large Article Detection Proficiency Certification as described below:

3.2.2.1. The dog team will be allowed only one search through the area, in other words, once an area has been searched by the team, the team cannot go back without articulating a justification for returning to ground already searched.

3.2.2.2. The dog must locate the article within 30 minutes and demonstrate a trained indication. A refund or bark indication is preferred but not required.

3.2.2.3. The handler must properly mark the area and provide coordinates of the article's location.

3.2.2.4. The test area shall be 5 acres of moderate terrain and varied ground cover.

3.2.2.5. The test area shall have clear geographic boundaries, or the handler will be provided a GPS track of the boundaries.

3.2.2.6. The test area shall be contaminated by at least one person (in addition to the tester) after the article is placed.

3.2.2.7. One large article (pack, jacket, shirt, pants) shall be placed in the search area, 1 hour or more before the test.

3.2.2.8. The large article shall be placed on the ground and hidden from sight.

3.2.3. Air Scent teams shall also take the Part II, Section B, "Preliminary Certification Test" of Appendix G, "Certification Tests: Wilderness Land Human Remains Detection" of the MASAR Search Dog Team Certification Standard.

3.2.4. Teams which successfully pass this test will be allowed to work at searches where it is suspected that the subject is recently deceased, on the surface, and not significantly decomposed.

3.2.5. Teams which do not pass this test will be restricted to searches for "probable live" subjects only.

3.2.6. Teams which successfully pass only the Preliminary Test will not be deployed on searches for human remains. Team must pass the test or tests outlined in 7. Specialty Training to be deployed for water or human remains searches.

3.2.7. At searches where the subject has been missing for more than three days, and possibly deceased, MESARD officers will determine whether a search will require "live" find air scent dog teams, air scent dog teams that have passed the Preliminary Certification Test, and/or dog teams that have passed the Human Remains Detection Standard. Searches involving criminal investigations and human remains detection will require dog teams that have passed the Human Remains Detection Standard.

### **3.3. Certification Tests for Operational Status for Basic Tracking/Trailing**

3.3.1. Teams shall meet the requirements of the MASAR Search Dog Team Certification Standard, Appendix C, "Certification Tests: Basic Tracking/Trailing for Wilderness Search," with the following changes or additions:

3.3.1.1. All tracks described in Appendix C shall have a minimum age of 1 hour.

#### **3.3.2. Hasty or "Trail" Search for Tracking/Trailing Dog Teams**

3.3.2.1. The handler will be given a scent article for the victim.

3.3.2.2. The dog team will search a roadway, roadside or trail approximately ¼ of a mile long for the trail or scent of the victim.

3.3.2.3. The victim will be positioned 30 feet to the right or left of the roadway, roadside or trail and will have crossed the path of travel to create a scent trail.

3.3.2.4. The team will be allowed one pass up and back on the roadway, roadside or trail to locate the victim.

3.3.2.5. The roadway or roadside must not be a heavily travelled road that would pose a hazard to the team.

#### **3.3.3. Optional Off-Lead Hasty Search for Tracking/Trailing Dog Teams**

3.3.3.2. A certified Tracking/Trailing Dog Team will be qualified to do off-lead hasty searches if it passes part IIC of Appendix B, "Certification Tests: Air Scent for Wilderness Search" and meet the requirements of IV (D) of the MASAR Search Dog Team Certification Standard, i.e., a temperament/obedience test.

3.3.3.3. The dog must perform a final indication on the test subject without any help from the handler. The evaluator may require the handler to continue walking along the travel route to check the indication after the dog has found the subject, if no obvious indication is shown by the dog when it first finds the subject.

#### **4. EVALUATOR QUALIFICATIONS & RESPONSIBILITIES**

- 4.1. Evaluators must meet the qualifications outlined in the MASAR Search Dog Team Certification Standard and have the approval of the Training Director or President.
- 4.2. Evaluators are responsible for following the requirements of the MASAR Search Dog Team Certification Standard plus any additional MESARD requirements.
- 4.3. During the initial certification of a team, no one evaluator shall perform more than 2 of the required certification tests for any one team.

#### **5. RE-CERTIFICATION**

- 5.1. To remain operational for searches, a MESARD member must maintain their MASAR Search Team Member certification unless they are in a support role (see 9.2). Once a handler's or flanker's MASAR certification expires, that member will have a maximum of 30 days to re-certify, or he or she will be subject to a review of their operational status by the officers.
- 5.2. MESARD Teams that have reached Operational Status in air scent and/or tracking/trailing and/or passed the "Preliminary Certification Test" of Appendix G, "Certification Tests: Wilderness Land Human Remains Detection" must re-test every year. The date the team's first re-certification is due will be one year from the teams' initial certification date by MASAR. After the first year, the re-certification due date will be one year from the last re-certification test that was passed by the team. Teams are encouraged to re-test early to avoid having to re-test during bad weather conditions.
- 5.3. The Basic Testing Conditions which apply to certification tests apply to re-certification tests except that subject unknown to dog, search areas unfamiliar to the team and the supplying of a map may be waived at the discretion of the Training Director or President.
- 5.4. Before they start field certification testing, or when they take their field re-certification tests, teams that work off lead will also be required to pass a basic obedience certification test consisting of:
  - 5.4.1. Walking on a loose lead for 200 feet with a minimum of a right, left and about turn and 1 halt.
  - 5.4.2. A five minute down stay (off lead).
  - 5.4.3. A sit and down on command.
  - 5.4.4. A "come" on command from 30 feet away.
- 5.5. Annual re-certification tests for air scent teams will consist of a 40-acre area test with one or two victims, with the number of victims unknown to the handler, and an evaluator following the team; taking the "Preliminary Certification Test" of Appendix G, "Certification Tests: Wilderness Land Human Remains Detection;" and the Large Article Detection Proficiency Certification Test. Air Scent teams that are or were certified as of 3/1/21 are not required to take the Large Article Detection test but are encouraged to do so. Teams which do not pass the Appendix G Preliminary Certification Test or another Human Remains Test may be limited to search for presumed live victims only.
- 5.6. Re-certification tests for tracking/trailing teams will consist of one of the MASAR certification tracking tests, or the Search and Rescue Tracking/Trailing Test or an equivalent or harder test approved by the MESARD officers.
- 5.7. Teams that have been on leave more than 3 months may be required by the training committee to re-certify according to the guidelines above.
- 5.8. Teams that fail to re-certify by passing the required certification tests within 30 days of their re-certification date will be subject to a review of their operational status by the officers.

#### **6. LIMITED CERTIFICATION**

- 6.1. Due to increasing age, sickness or injury, personnel or canines may not be capable of the full range of activities in areas they previously certified in. In this case, the Training Director, with the consent and advice of the officers, may issue a Limited Certification that will delineate what MESARD will allow the team to do at search operations, and if needed, what tests should be passed to restore the team to operational status. All such Limited Certifications must also be approved by MASAR.
- 6.2. In true emergency situations, the team may be fielded until more qualified teams arrive and take over the functions.

#### **7. SPECIALTY TRAINING**

##### **7.1 Certification Test for Advanced Tracking Dog Team**

- 7.1.1 Teams shall meet the requirements of the MASAR Search Dog Team Certification Standards, Appendix D, "Certification Tests: Advanced Tracking/Trailing for Wilderness Search" or
- 7.1.2 Pass the International Police Work Dog Association SAR Trailing Test or
- 7.1.3 A comparable nationally recognized test approved by the officers and MASAR.

## **7.2 Certification Test for Article Search/Clue Detection**

- 7.2.1 Teams testing must have obtained MESARD operational status as an air scent or tracking dog team. Experienced members may request an exemption from this requirement. All requests must be in writing and exemptions will require approval from a majority of the officers. Criteria for approval will include, but are not limited to, years of service as a certified MESARD dog handler, search call-out response and operational needs of the team.
- 7.2.2 Teams shall meet the requirements of the MASAR Search Dog Team Certification Standards, Appendix F, "Certification Tests: Wilderness Article Search/Clue Detection" or
- 7.2.3 A comparable nationally recognized test approved by the officers and MASAR.
- 7.2.4 Article Search/Clue Detection Teams must re-certify every two years.

## **7.3 Water Search Dog Team - Certification Requirements**

- 7.3.1 Teams testing must have obtained MESARD operational status as an air scent or tracking dog team. Experienced members may request an exemption from this requirement. All requests must be in writing and exemptions will require approval from a majority of the officers. Criteria for approval will include, but are not limited to, years of service as a certified MESARD dog handler, search call-out response and operational needs of the team.
- 7.3.2 For a team to be utilized for water search from shore, only the Shoreline Test must be passed. To be utilized for water search from a boat, both the Shoreline and Boat Test must be passed.
- 7.3.3 Any team with a verifiable find of a drowning victim in a search which takes place under circumstances equal to or exceeding those of these tests will be certified or re-certified for that application. The find must be verifiable by another MESARD handler or member of a user agency able to describe the complete situation. When multiple dogs are used to confirm an initial alert, only the team that initially called the possible find will be automatically certified. However, the situation may be used as a test if a suitable evaluator is present while the succeeding teams work. If the body of water is a small pond with less than 500 feet of shoreline, teams may search other small ponds nearby to fulfill the shoreline requirement.
- 7.3.4 General Evaluation Criteria:
  - 7.3.4.1 Teams shall meet the requirements of the MASAR Search Dog Team Certification Standards, Appendix E, "Certification Tests: Air Scent Water Search" or
  - 7.3.4.2 A comparable nationally recognized test approved by the officers and MASAR.
  - 7.3.4.3 The following criteria should be followed during the testing process:
    - 7.3.4.3.1 The handler will indicate to the evaluator once they are sure the dog is alerting or reacting to the scent of the diver or human remains detection material. Once the handler does this, the handler must remain silent and not give any commands or encouragement to the dog as long as the dog is working on its own. If the dog stops working and looks to the handler for guidance or gives an indication that requires acknowledgment by the handler, the handler may then give limited commands and praise. However, the alert or indication by the dog must come from the dog alone and not as a result of the handler's commands or praise. The handler may also reward the dog if that is required by the circumstances. It will be up to the evaluator to decide if praise or commands are excessive and the dog cannot work or alert without them. If the evaluator is in doubt, the team will not pass the test.
    - 7.3.4.3.2 The handler may give commands to the dog while it is working, but these commands may not be excessive. Any dog that shows a lack of understanding of the work or an inability to focus on the work for sufficient amounts of time will not pass the test.
    - 7.3.4.3.3 The dog's jumping out of the boat is an obvious alert behavior, but it is not a safe practice and should be discouraged. Handlers should take action to discourage the dog from jumping out of the boat. However, no team will be failed for the dog jumping out of the boat unless the dog proves unmanageable and a danger to others in the boat.
    - 7.3.4.3.4 Evaluators may be utilized as boat handlers. The evaluator will accompany the dog handler.

7.3.4.3.5 Teams will not be allowed to make an unlimited number of passes through the search area. If, in the opinion of the evaluator, the search area is covered more than twice without an indication from the dog, the evaluator may end the test. If the search pattern outlined by the handler degenerates significantly so that the search is no longer effective and drags on, the evaluator may also end the test. It is recommended that the evaluator utilize a GPS to keep track of search patterns.

7.3.4.4 Water Search Dog teams must re-certify every two years.

### **7.3.5 Human Remains Detection (HRD) Search Dog Team - Certification Requirements**

7.3.5.1 Teams testing must have obtained MESARD operational status as an air scent or tracking dog team. Experienced members may request an exemption from this requirement. All requests must be in writing and exemptions will require approval from a majority of the officers. Criteria for approval will include, but are not limited to, years of service as a certified MESARD dog handler, search call-out response and operational needs of the team.

7.3.5.2 Teams shall meet the requirements of the MASAR Search Dog Team Certification Standards, Appendix G, "Certification Tests: Wilderness Land Human Remains Detection Team" or

7.3.5.3 A comparable nationally recognized test approved by the officers and MASAR.

7.3.5.4 HRD Detection teams must re-certify every two years as required by the MASAR Standards in Appendix G.

### **7.4 Disaster Search Dog Team - Certification Requirements**

7.4.1 The team will have met some nationally accepted standard for Disaster Search.

### **7.5 Avalanche Search Dog Team - Certification Requirements**

7.5.1 The team will have met some nationally accepted standard for Avalanche Search.

## **8 OPERATIONAL LEADER**

8.1 MESARD Operational Leaders shall be responsible for the deployment of MESARD teams at search scenes and serve as the MESARD representative to the search command.

8.2 MESARD Operational Leaders shall be the leader of MESARD members at search scenes.

### **8.3 Qualification Requirements:**

8.3.1 A minimum of three years experience as a certified handler.

8.3.2 Participation in a minimum of 10 searches.

8.3.3 Demonstrated ability at MESARD training sessions to define search areas and assign teams to those areas.

8.3.4 Operational Leader status requires approval by a majority vote of the membership at a business meeting.

8.3.5 In the absence of an Operational Leader, MESARD members present at a search incident will designate an acting Operational Leader for that search.

## **9 SUPPORT PERSONNEL**

9.1 **Flankers** - The position of flanker is intended to provide trained, direct support and assistance to MESARD dog teams during searches and trainings. Flankers shall be Affiliate Members of MESARD and shall not train a dog with MESARD.

### **9.1.1 Operational Status Requirements for Flankers:**

9.1.1.1 Maintain MASAR Search Team Member Certification.

9.1.1.2 Demonstrate navigation proficiency sufficient to navigate for a K9 team at a search incident (GPS, map & compass) by navigating for a trailing dog team and for an air scent SAR team approved by the MESARD training committee in an area of 20 acres or greater. The exact requirements for evaluation will be listed on the Handler/Flanker certification test form.

9.1.1.3 Complete crime scene and courtroom testimony training that has been approved by the officers of MESARD.

9.1.1.4 Complete dog safety training that has been approved by the officers of MESARD.

9.1.1.5 Show that she/he is equipped with the minimum equipment recommended by MASAR or MASAR-accepted standards for a basic ground searcher.

9.1.1.6 Demonstrate proper radio communication skills.

9.1.1.7 Deploy at two searches under the guidance of a MESARD operational member.

**9.1.2 Re-Certification Requirements for Flankers:**

9.1.2.1 Maintain MASAR Search Team Member Certification.

9.1.2.2 Attend a minimum of 9 MESARD monthly training sessions every 12 months. Training with another MASAR certified Unit may replace 3 of the MESARD training sessions. Flankers may also submit related training from other organizations for consideration as training to fulfill this requirement. Written documentation of outside training must be provided to and approved by the Training Director.

9.1.2.3 Flankers that fail to maintain the required training attendance may be subject to a review of their operational status by the officers.

9.2 **Support** – Members or affiliate members who wish to support MESARD other than being a Flanker or Handler may apply for Support status. Support members who work at searches or training should be Search Team Member Certified or MASAR Support Team Member Certified to take advantage of the State's insurance, but this is not required. Requests for Support designation, certification and recertification will be considered on a case by case basis by the Officers.

**10 APPENDIX 1 - Evaluation Forms and Check Off Sheet** – See the appropriate MASAR forms.

**11 APPENDIX 2 – Handler/Flanker Certification Skills Form**

**12 APPENDIX 3 – Large Article Detection Evaluation Form**

**Revised: 2021-07-10**

**Maine Search and Rescue Dogs  
Handler/Flanker Certification Skills Form**

Handler's/Flanker's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Obtain and maintain MASAR Search Team Member certification.

Date of Initial MASAR Certification \_\_\_\_\_

2. Demonstrate navigation proficiency sufficient to navigate for an area search K9 team\*:

- Using GPS
  - Correctly enter waypoints for search area
  - Properly use the GPS track function
  - When in search area identify area boundaries
  - Navigate to a point designated by the dog handler
  - Navigate while performing a grid search
  - Provide a GPS recorded track
  - Date \_\_\_\_\_
  - Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Using compass
  - Navigate for a search team performing a grid search using natural boundaries or a GPS to identify search area boundaries
  - Navigate best path out of area when complete
  - Date \_\_\_\_\_
  - Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_

3. Demonstrate navigation proficiency for a trailing dog team by accompanying the team and providing a GPS recorded track and waypoints for the team as requested by the dog handler.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_

4. Complete crime scene and courtroom testimony training that has been approved by the officers of MESARD.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_

5. Complete dog safety training that has been approved by the officers of MESARD.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_

6. Demonstrate possession of minimum equipment recommended by MASAR or MASAR-accepted standards for a basic ground searcher.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_

7. Demonstrate proper radio communication skills.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_

8. Attend 2 searches under the guidance of a MESARD operational member.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Member \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Member \_\_\_\_\_

\*Dog handlers doing evaluations must be approved by the MESARD training committee.  
Search areas will be a minimum of 20 acres.

# Large Article Detection Evaluation Form

Handler's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Dog's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Finish Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Location and Terrain Description: \_\_\_\_\_

Temperature: \_\_\_\_\_ Estimated Wind Direction and Strength: \_\_\_\_\_

Weather: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Article: \_\_\_\_\_

A "Yes" answer must be received for all skills to pass this test.

<u>Skill</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
The dog team shall locate the scent material in 30 minutes or less.	_____	_____
Handler demonstrates ability to judge sweeps of areas as to their suitability to the prevailing conditions.	_____	_____
Dog performs trained indication or final response as described by the handler.	_____	_____
Handler demonstrates the ability to properly mark the area and provide coordinates of the article location.	_____	_____

Pass? \_\_\_\_\_

Fail? \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name of Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_