



# Virginia Task Force 2

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March 2019

## Urban Search and Rescue

Administrative Manual

# Policies and Procedures for Virginia Task Force-2 Canine Search Team Specialists

## **Purpose**

To develop and set the standards for all Canine search teams operating within the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) team based in Virginia Beach, VA. These policies will also govern those teams in training towards membership to the USAR task force.

## **Organization**

The search sub-group is one of five sub-groups of the USAR team. When deployed as a Type 1 team, it includes: 2 Search Team Managers (STM), 2 Technical Search Specialists (TSS), and 4 Canine Search Specialists (CSS) trained in live human scent or human remains detection. When deployed as a Type 3 team, it includes 1 Search Team Manager (STM), 1 Technical Search Specialists (TSS), and 2 Canine Search Specialists (CSS) trained in live human scent or human remains detection. If the team sends a Mission Ready Package (MRP), it will be filled as required for the mission.

FEMA allows each Task Force (TF) to maintain a membership roster filled three deep for each deployable position. This allows for twelve Canine teams (one handler and their dog) to be rostered at any one time. The required minimum number of certified Canine teams is 6.

Informally, the Canine unit of the TF will contain three (3) status levels. They are: Applicant, Conditional Membership, and Taskforce Deployable. There is no limit to the number of teams in the Applicant and Conditional Membership levels.



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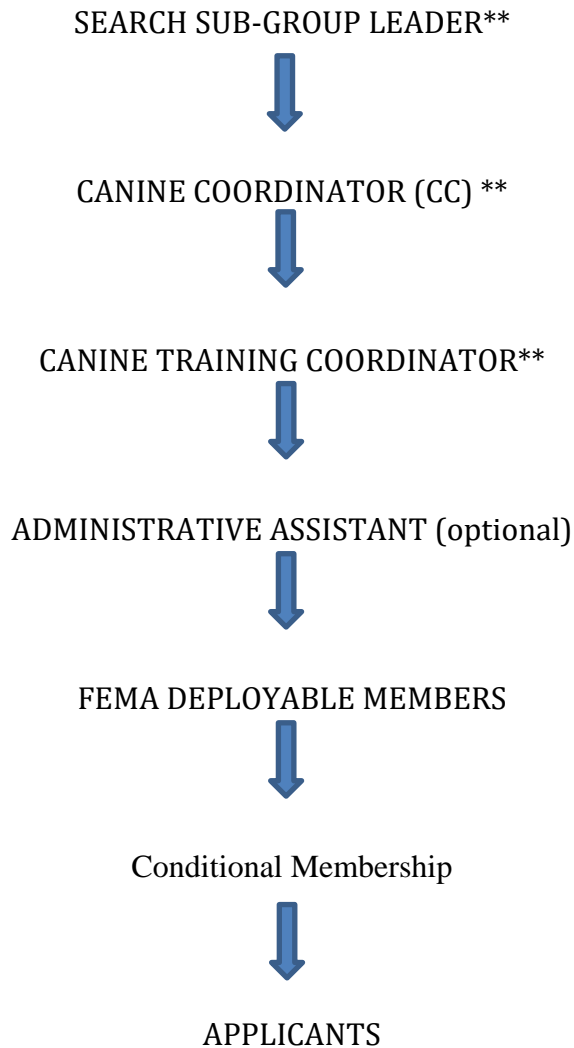
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### Organizational Flow Chart



\*\*Denotes Canine Leadership Team



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### **Status Levels:**

#### **Applicant Status:**

The application period for VA-TF2 normally occurs at the beginning of each calendar year. Due to the unique nature of a certified Canine team, applications may be accepted at any time based on need and at the Task Force Program Managers discretion. Canine training is time sensitive and requires several levels of testing. Due to the extensive training requirements of the Canine Search unit, it is often necessary for an applicant to train with the other members of the Canine unit prior to submitting an application.

The FEMA US&R System considers detecting, locating and rescuing live humans a priority and the primary mission of canine teams, therefore live find Canines are the primary consideration for the task force. Human Remain Detection Canines are secondary considerations. Applicants that do not have a Live Find Human Detection Canine may not be a priority in consideration for membership.

The first step in joining VA-TF2 is to meet with the Canine coordinator. Depending on where the meeting occurs, a formal interview may or may not be conducted; however the applicant will be given an overview of the Canine search unit and the process to become a member will be explained. The applicant will have an opportunity to ask any questions they may have.

Second, the prospective member will have their canine screened by two or more certified Canine handlers and the Canine coordinator. They shall use the screening method accepted and published in the *Canine Search Specialist Technician* course.

In order to become a Canine Handler that is considered to be a deployable member on VA-TF2, the handler must have a K9 that is currently certified in Live Find Human Detection.



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#### **Applicant Status continued:**

Based on the screening results, one of the following actions will occur;

1. Applicant Status may be offered.
2. Applicant Status may be offered to the applicant but not with the screened Canine; the applicant may be considered to be a back-up handler to a VA-TF2 owned Canine, if available.
3. Applicant Status may not be offered to the handler and/or the Canine at that time.

The Canine coordinator will be responsible for obtaining and delivering the application package to the applicant or arrange for the applicant to meet with the TF training coordinator at the VA-TF2 office.

Before any applicant can begin training their dog, the following requirements must be met:

1. All dogs must have proof of current vaccination for Rabies, DHLPP, and Bordatella.
2. All applicants must read, understand, and adhere to the Canine search policies, and procedures.
3. All applicants are required to participate with work projects that are organized by the sub-group and unit.
4. All applicants are required to volunteer to subject for their team members. (This means to be a victim and/or assist while other team members are working.)
5. All applicants must be made aware and adhere US&R site safety plan. Policy RM 4.03.
6. The applicant will be responsible for the health and safety of their Canine as well as their own health and safety as indicated in the Liability Waiver.



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#### **Applicant Status continued:**

Once accepted at the applicant level, the team will be provided with various training goals to accomplish and will be monitored by the Canine coordinator and Canine training coordinator. The applicant will be evaluated in **six** months and shall demonstrate improved skill level on the following elements:

- Search ability and nerve strength
- Heeling on lead attentive to the handler
- Five minute in-sight down stay
- Fifteen foot directional field; going to three bases
- Agility course to include:
  - a. Three foot high plank walk with a small ladder up to it
  - b. Teeter-totter
  - c. Two unusual/unsteady surfaces
  - d. Demonstrate a wait on a plank.
- Ten second bark barrel alert
- Alert from a pop-up or call out; from either a barrel field or building. The dog must stay focused on the subject, indicate, and not leave the subject until the handler leashes them.

Once the applicant has demonstrated an improvement in skill level elements, the Canine Training Coordinator and Canine Coordinator will set a timeframe to complete the Fundamental Skills Assessment (FSA). Once the applicant successfully completes the FSA, a Conditional Membership may be offered. If the applicant does not show improvement the Canine leadership team may grant an extension (this will be a case by case basis).

If the applicant is granted an extension, an agreed upon date shall be set to re-evaluate the Canine team at the end of the extension time period. The VA-TF2 Canine Leadership Team is consisted of the Search Sub-group Leader, Canine Coordinator, and Canine



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Training Coordinator.

Conditional Membership:

Personnel who are offered a Conditional Membership are teams that have successfully passed an official FSA.

Individuals offered Conditional Membership shall maintain the requirements of the applicant status with the following additions:

- Canines at the Conditional Membership status should be no younger than twelve months and no older than three years old.
- After passing the VA-TF2 administered FSA given at the Applicant Status level, the member will have **one year** to pass a FEMA or FEMA equivalent Certification Examination (CE). (Note: a second FSA may be necessary to ensure a six month window for testing. This CE test will be funded by VA-TF2.)
- If the team fails the CE twice, the VA-TF2 Canine leadership Team will make a recommendation to the Task Force Leadership as to whether the team should continue in the system. Any additional attempts, beyond the 2 that VA-TF2 will fund to pass the CE will be at the handler's expense.
- 6 weeks prior to participating in the Certified Examination, the member will submit their VATF2 application.
- The handler must complete all required FEMA training as is listed in the General Requirements and Position Specific Requirements. A list of those requirements can be found in the Canine Search Specialist Position Description or by contacting the TF training coordinator.
  - The handler will review and sign the national code of conduct
  - A handler in the Conditional Membership status will receive a limited amount of Task Force uniforms and required PPE for training and representing the



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- Task Force at the Certified Examination. (2 pairs of BDU pants, 2 Task Force T-shirts, Boots, helmet, gloves, eye pro or additional gear as appropriate)

### **Deployable Task Force Members**

Once the handler being offered Conditional Membership has completed all required training as stated in the application, and passed a FEMA (or equivalent) CE, the member will be placed in “Deployable Status.”

Once a handler is placed in a “Deployable Status” with a certified live find Canine, the member is provided with care and maintenance funds (C&M).

The member will receive Care and Maintenance funds in accordance with M1.14 Care and Maintenance of VA-TF2 Member Owned Canine’s or M1.15 VA-TF2 Owned Canine as applicable.

### **The following situations apply for Member Owned Canine’s:**

1) If a VA-TF2 Canine Handler has a certified live find Canine, that becomes unavailable for further duty due to injury, age or death, the handler will STOP receiving C&M funds for that Canine. However, if the Canine handler is in good standing following the VA-TF2 Operational Guidelines and is actively acquiring or working a replacement live find canine candidate towards certification, C&M will continue for **18** months. If within the **18** month timeframe the handler and canine fail to certify as a FEMA Live Find Team, the C&M will stop.

**Reasoning:** the Handler does not have a certified canine at this point, and maintaining a “certified” LF canine is required. The TF is allowing the handler 18 months’ time frame to acquire and



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certify a Canine and continue to receive C&M funds.

2) If a VA-TF2 Canine Handler has a certified live find canine, and that fails to pass a recertification test, the handler will continue receiving C&M unless it fails to pass the next recertification test, at which time C&M will stop. C&M will remain discontinued until such time that the Canine certifies not to exceed **12** months.

**Reasoning:** the Handler still has a Canine that is not “certified” however the Handler has possession of a previously certified Canine, awaiting an opportunity to retest.

3) If a VA-TF2 Canine Handler has a certified live find canine, **and** a certified Human Remains canine, and the certified live find canine becomes unavailable for further duty due to injury, age or death, that handler will STOP receiving C&M funds for **both** canines, UNLESS option 1 or 2 above apply.

**Reasoning:** At this time, VA-TF2 does not support an HRD ONLY canine team.

All VA-TF2 Canine handlers shall sign a Memorandum of Understanding acknowledging these requirements.

### Callout Procedures

The Search sub-group leader retains the right to select any team at any time, but generally will consider the following:

- Current certification
- Availability
- Newly certified teams
- Prior deployments (experience)
- Other deploying teams experience
- Training participation





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The Search sub-group leader will provide the CSS teams with a letter for their employers regarding their involvement and probability of deployment, if so desired.

#### **Training Requirements**

The Canine unit routinely trains together as a team the first weekend of every month. In cases where weather or extenuating circumstances do not allow training on the first weekend, additional dates may be scheduled. Each handler is responsible for his or her individual training style and regime. Everyone has the obligation to assist with the overall training of all the teams but no one handler is responsible to train other dogs on the team.

**Some minimum requirements:**All members are required to attend at least two thirds of the unit training sessions per year that equates to a minimum of **8** documented team training sessions per year. There are make-up dates that can be utilized, however all unit training shall be documented and have at a minimum of 2 VATF2 Canine handlers present. In addition, all Canine unit members are required to attend the annual TF drill and TF maintenance.

Excuse from mandatory events may be allowed but are situation dependent and approved by either the Search Sub-group Leader or Canine Coordinator prior to the event.

1. Complete a training roster for each training event.
2. Canine unit training must have a minimum of two members.
3. Members may be required to sign a performance agreement that will be mutually agreed upon by the handler and the Canine Coordinator. Agreements will define the performance parameters expected to be accomplished in the agreed upon time frame.
4. Members attending monthly training shall be given credit if they have attended the full day of training slated for that day. Example: the planned training for the day is scheduled to run 8 hours in order to accomplish the goals of the team members; however the objectives are met in 6 hours. The members attending will receive credit for attendance for that particular training event. The intent is to maximize training by utilizing all personnel and the



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time allotted for all members to meet their training needs and the needs of other members of the Canine unit.

5. When due to unforeseen circumstances a member cannot make training as required, they shall provide the VA-TF2 Canine unit Leadership in writing stating reason for missing training.
6. Training that occurs at another training locations shall be documented and submitted in writing to the Canine unit leader. Information included shall be date, timeline, location, other handlers or task force members present and the skills that were worked on.

### **Physical Readiness Assessment**

Due to the physical nature of Urban Search and Rescue deployments, a physical readiness assessment will be conducted on an annual basis. This assessment is not designed to be used as a disciplinary tool; it is an assessment that will:

- 1) Assist each handler in evaluation their personal physical fitness
- 2) Help in the process of evaluating potential new handlers.

This Assessment will be applicable to the types of environments and workloads expected of the CST while on a deployment. Maintaining a level of physical readiness is paramount to the Task Force in meeting its overall objective of detecting, locating, and rescuing lost or trapped persons

### **Inactive Status**

Any team that does not meet attendance requirements will be placed in an inactive status immediately. Written documentation explaining their reason(s) will be submitted to the VA-TF2 Canine Leadership Team. The VA-TF2 Canine Leadership Team will consider the documented reason(s) when granting a return from inactive status.

### **Performance Agreement**



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A performance agreement is a written document between the Canine handler and the CC. It will document expected performance, performance deficiencies, corrective actions, a plan and a date by which those expectations shall be accomplished.

Handlers may be required to sign a performance agreement at any time or when their application being accepted. These agreements will be reviewed and renewed at least every three, but no more than six months by the CC and the individual handler. **This agreement is performance related only. It does not, in any way, relate to monetary compensation.**

### **Removing a Team from the Unit**

Members who fail to meet the requirements including but not limited to failure to attend annual task force maintenance, failure to obtain their biennial physical within 60 days of notification, failure to meet training requirements, failure to maintain current certifications in their training file, may have their membership terminated.

Some reasons that are specifically related to the Canine unit may be but not limited too;

- The Canine Training Coordinator can make a recommendation to the CC that a team is not capable or willing to perform to the standard.
- Performance agreements are not met
- Minimum training requirements are not met
- Failure to meet certification and/or recertification requirements

When a determination has been made to terminate a member from the team, the guidelines set forth in VA-TF2 Administrative Manual 3.11 Separation from VA-TF2 shall be followed.

### **Requirements of the Canine Coordinator (CC)**



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The Task Force Leader(s) (TFL) with input from the Program Manager select the Canine Coordinator.

The CC is the direct chain of command for all Canine search teams to the Search Sub-group Leader, Task Force Leaders and other sub-group managers. He/she is directly responsible for the administration and training of the canine unit.

The duties include, but are not limited to:

- Develop and maintain Canine unit Policies and Procedures that define organizational positions, job responsibilities, and selection to those positions.
- Provide availability of Canine teams for deployment at time of roster to the Search Sub-group Leader.
- Manage training and training records of the canine unit as well as monitoring progress of each team.
- Foster and maintain a high level of morale and motivation towards the ultimate goal of search and rescue.
- Completing performance contracts with individual Canine teams.
- Maintain applications to the Canine search group.
- Facilitate training sites when needed.
- Attend and participate in monthly training, as well as, in-house tests.
- Insure safety is promoted and emphasized.

#### **Requirements of the Canine Coordinator (CC)**

- Provide for a mechanism of recruitment for new Canines as well as teams.
- Other duties as directed by the Search Sub-group Leader/Task Force Leader

#### **Requirements for the Canine Training Coordinator**



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The CC selects the Canine Training Coordinator. This person will typically have expressed an interest in the position and has a significant background in Canine training. This would include, but not limited to:

- A previous certification.
- Experience equivalent to certification

Duties of the Canine Training Coordinator include, but are not limited to:

- Organize training sessions or designate a replacement
- Communicate with the administrative assistant (if there is one in place) to develop and publish a quarterly schedule of full sub-group training with dates and locations.
- Provide a direct line of communication to the CC regarding Canine teams.
- Organize FSAs as necessary.
- Provide at least one STM or sub-group manager to assist in evaluation at in-house tests.
- Keep records of all team's progress through the testing process.
- Give or designate someone to give lectures on relevant topics at training. i.e. Mapping, GPS, etc.

Duties of the Canine Training Coordinator include, but are not limited to con't:

- Provide attendance records at each full unit training.
- The Canine Training Coordinator DOES NOT have the authority to demand a specific methodology for individual training.

### Administrative Assistant



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The administrative assistant will serve as the group's recorder. This position may or may not be filled. If not, the duties listed here will be the responsibility of the CC.

The duties and responsibilities of the administrative assistant are, but not limited to:

- Maintain vaccine records of all Canines training with the group.
- Maintain a roster of all members in the group; divided into the three levels of membership.
- Maintain attendance records of training hours.
- Assure all training and attendance records are forwarded to the task force training coordinator
- Assist the training coordinator as needed. the Search sub-group leader as needed.

This policy has been reviewed and approved as of the date of signatures of the Task Force Leader/Program Manager and the Search Sub-group Leader.

TFL/Program Manager

\_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Search Sub-group Leader

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



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#### **Public Safety Personnel:**

This section is related directly to any individual that is considered employed as a Public Safety servant.

All items that are listed in the Policies and Procedures of this manual will be followed by all personnel, including Public Safety personnel. The following is additional information that pertains to Public Safety personnel and further outlines the requirements and benefits.

#### **Applicant Status:**

Public Safety personnel will not be offered TDA, or any other compensation while that member is in the Applicant Status.

All training is the responsibility of that applicant. No Task Force equipment shall be utilized and all applicants shall sign a Liability Waiver. The applicant is responsible for the health and maintenance of their canine.

#### **Conditional Membership:**

Upon Conditional Membership, the Public Safety individual will receive support from the Task Force to include TDA for training, a limited set of Task Force uniforms and required PPE.

The Task Force will support the member in all necessary travel expenses required in travel to and participate in a sanctioned Certified Live Human Detection Certification Test. The Task Force shall support the member in taking the test twice, any further attempts will be the responsibility of the handler.

#### **Deployable Member Status:**

Upon the successful completion of the Certified Exam with the canine, the member is to receive care and maintenance funds for the canine.

The member must complete all required Task Force items outlined on the application to become deployable.

The member will be issued all Task Force gear at this time.

The member will receive compensation for the 12 scheduled monthly training sessions. The member will receive 16 hours per month, for a total of 192 hours annually.

If a member is granted a TDA, and his/her position was backfilled by a department member on Overtime, that time will be counted towards (against) the 192 hours.



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If a member is granted a TDA, and his/her position was backfilled with an “E” body, that time will NOT count towards (against) the 192 hours.

Any travel or incidentals to or from a training site will not be compensated. Any training conducted beyond the 192 hours annually will not be compensated.

All overtime hours will be submitted to the Canine Coordinator or VATF2 Training Manager for tracking purposes.