

Canines

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Policy Statement

Because of their superior senses of smell and hearing and physical capabilities, trained canines are valuable law enforcement assets. However, channeling canines' specialized capabilities into legally acceptable crime prevention and control activities requires that deputies adhere to the guidelines contained herein.

Persons Affected

All commissioned personnel.

Force Response Policy Compliance

All instances in which a canine handler chooses a canine as a force option must comply with the Sheriff's Office's [Force Response policy](#).

Handler Immunity

Any dog handler who uses a police dog in the line of duty in good faith is immune from civil action for damages arising out of such use of the police dog or accelerant detection dog ([RCW 4.24.410](#)).

Canine Team Shift Assignments

Canine teams should function primarily as cover units. However, they may be assigned by the shift sergeant to other functions based on the needs of the watch at the time.

Canine teams should not be assigned to handle matters that will take them out of service for extended periods of time unless absolutely necessary and only with the approval of the shift sergeant.

Use of Canines

Locating and Apprehending Individuals

A canine may be used to locate and apprehend a suspect if the canine handler reasonably believes that the individual has either committed or threatened to commit any criminal offense and if any of the following conditions exist:

- There is a reasonable belief the individual poses an imminent threat of violence or serious harm to the public, any deputy or the handler.
- The individual is physically resisting or threatening to resist arrest and the use of a canine reasonably appears to be necessary to overcome such resistance.
- The individual is believed to be concealed in an area where entry by other than the canine would pose a threat to the safety of deputies or the public.

It is recognized that situations may arise that do not fall within the provisions set forth in this section. In any such case, a standard of objective reasonableness shall be used to review the decision to use a canine in view of the totality of the circumstances.

Mere Flight of an Individual

Absent reasonable belief that an individual has committed or threatened to commit a criminal offense, mere flight from a pursuing deputy shall not serve as good cause for the use of a canine to apprehend an individual.

Locating Individuals

A canine may be used to search for individuals not involved in criminal activity (e.g., lost children, individuals who may be disoriented or in need of medical attention) or suspects wanted for minor criminal offenses. In such situations, it will be necessary for the handler to evaluate particular facts of the situation in light of the ability of the canine, to determine the feasibility of such an application.

Control of Canine during Search

Absent a change in circumstances which presents an immediate threat to officers, the canine or the public, such applications should be conducted under such conditions that will minimize the likelihood that the canine will bite or otherwise injure the individual.

Locating Controlled Substances

A canine trained in controlled substance detection may be used in accordance with current law.

No Search of Persons

A controlled substances detection canine will not be used to search a person for controlled substances.

Requests for Use of Canine Teams

Sheriff's Office

Personnel within the Sheriff's Office are encouraged to freely solicit the use of canine teams.

Other Agencies and the Public

The patrol shift supervisor or canine unit supervisor must approve all requests for canine assistance from other agencies and for demonstrations from the public.

Canine handlers are responsible for ensuring that the use of Sheriff's Office canine teams by other agencies is consistent with this policy.

Callouts and Off-Duty Use

The patrol shift supervisor or canine unit supervisor must authorize any callout or off-duty use of a canine team.

Deployment of Canines

Preparations

Prior to the use of a canine to search for or apprehend any individual, the canine handler and/or the supervisor on scene shall carefully consider all pertinent information that is reasonably available at the time. The information should include, but is not limited to, the following:

- The individual's age or an estimate thereof.
- The nature of the suspected offense.
- Any potential danger to the public and/or other deputies at the scene if the canine is released.
- The degree of resistance or threatened resistance, if any, the subject has shown.
- The potential for escape or flight if the canine is not utilized.
- The potential for injury to deputies or the public caused by the suspect if the canine is not utilized.

Coordination with Other Personnel

As circumstances permit, the canine handler should make every reasonable effort to communicate and coordinate with other involved personnel to minimize the risk of unintended injury.

Unless otherwise directed by a supervisor, assisting personnel should take direction from the handler in order to minimize interference with the canine.

Deployment Decision

The handler will evaluate each situation and determine if the use of a canine is technically feasible. If the canine handler chooses to deploy the canine, this decision may be overridden by a supervisor. However, a canine handler's decision not to deploy a canine may not be overridden.

Audible Warnings

Unless it would otherwise increase the risk of injury or escape, the handler or other designated person shall give a clearly audible warning prior to releasing a canine that the canine will be released if the person does not come forth. In the event of an apprehension, the handler shall document in any related report whether or not a verbal warning was given and, if none was given, the reasons why.

Securing the Canine

Once an individual has been located by a canine, appropriately secured, and no longer reasonably appears to represent a threat to persons or risk of escape, the handler should take control of the canine as soon as it becomes reasonably practical.

Reporting Canine Use, Bites and Injuries

Canine Use

Whenever a canine is deployed, the handler shall complete a canine use report.

Canine Bites

If a bite or injury results from the use of a canine, the handler shall document the circumstances on a canine use report and in the case report narrative.

Canine handlers shall carefully follow all guidance in the [Force Response policy](#) regarding obtaining medical assistance for, and photographing, injuries.

Injuries to a Canine

In the event that a canine is injured, the injury will be immediately reported to the patrol shift supervisor, and to the canine unit supervisor as soon as practicable. Medical care for any injured canine shall follow the established protocols. The handler will document the injury on the canine use report.

Canines in Public Areas and Vehicles

Canines shall not be left unattended in any area to which the public may have access.

When a kennel-equipped patrol vehicle with a canine inside is left unattended, all windows and doors shall be secured in such a manner as to prevent unauthorized access to the dog. The handler shall also ensure that the vehicle remains habitable for the canine.