



GUIDELINES FOR USING DOGS TO LOCATE LOST PERSONS

Vicki Wooters, K-9 Handler, Search and Rescue Dogs of Pennsylvania

- 1) When you arrive at the scene, determine if possible in which area the person was last seen. If a search party has been formed, have all vehicle motors shut off to prevent an accumulation of fumes. Keep area free of contamination.
- 2) Determine if a “scent article” is available. That is, a piece of unwashed clothing that the person recently wore, preferably underwear or other clothing worn close to the body (shoes and socks are the least desirable). If clothing is not available, then determine where the person slept. Sheets, pillowcases etc can be used. **DO NOT HANDLE OR PERMIT ANYONE ELSE TO HANDLE THESE ITEMS.**
- 3) While waiting for the dog and handler, check the house, under beds, closets, attics, basements, etc. Then check outside the house, window casements, porches, etc. Then check all outbuildings. Look and feel into small areas.
- 4) When the dog and handler arrive, advise him as to which areas have been searched, the availability of a scent article, the location where the person was last seen and a complete description of the lost person.
- 5) At least two people should accompany the handler on the search. They should carry the necessary equipment needed; this will leave the handler unencumbered to handle the dog. Equipment should consist of radios, first aid kit, lights, and a map.
- 6) **YOUR ACTION WITH THE DOG AND HANDLER.** Follow behind the dog and handler (distance to be determined by handler). Do not crowd the dog and handler and do not “fan out” to the sides unless the handler requests you to do so. Many times dogs will “cast about” for a scent (move back and forth across the trail). If you are off to the side of the trail, this could interfere and possibly confuse him. Under no circumstance should you search in front of the dog and handler.
- 7) Should the dog stop pursuing his forward course and begin to circle, stop and remain where you are until the dog has straightened out his course and resumed in a definite direction.
- 8) No attempt should be made by you to try to influence the dog or the handler to proceed in a particular direction due to anything you may observe along the trail. This should be brought to the attention of the handler for his evaluation. Nor should you be discouraged by the lack of physical evidence, which will make you believe that the dog is on the wrong trail. Quite often a dog will pursue a course parallel to the actual trail taken by the lost person. This is not unusual in that wind, terrain, cover and atmosphere will have an influence on the location of scent. Do not expect the dog to follow step for step the trail the lost person has taken.
- 9) Should you observe the lost person before the dog has made his “find”, do not rush ahead to the victim. This is HIS reward, this is what HE has been looking for and this is HIS moment of glory. Let him have HIS moment of accomplishment, you would want the same if you had worked hard on a case and were about to make an arrest.

(These guidelines prepared by N.P.B.A. member Sgt. W.L.Wood to be used as an aid to law enforcement agencies)

Search Dogs are on call with Search and Rescue Dogs of Pa 484-343-5204 Emergencies Dial 911

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Member IPWDA, NASAR, ARDA DCNR Search and Rescue Specialist

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