 SAR DOG Myth Busters

The following myth busters for Search & Rescue Dogs are designed to aid law enforcement. Through respect and admiration of the work done by law enforcement it is the hope that this type of information will ensure the most effective use of available resources and assets. Detector dogs all have the same abilities, training and behavior whether the task is evidence, explosives, narcotics or search & rescue.

Myth #1: Parks/areas must be closed and/or cleared of civilians/people: While it is certainly an added benefit if the area is closed, this statement is completely false. Much like a bomb dog working in airports, the dogs know their target odor and by the time that they are responding they should be fully proofed off distractions.

Myth #2: Dogs getting “hits” in various areas: Sadly, this misinformation causes lots of extra work and is a drain on resources which may be called in to pursue these “hits”. An operational dog will have a trained indication also called a final response. An analogy would be that after an explosives K9 handler works in a building, it later explodes and the K9 handler claims that his K9 did have “hits” there when he cleared the building. This would not be an acceptable practice.

Myth #3: Having as many dogs and handlers as possible is good, or any responder is better than having none: This is a myth popularized by untrained responders. When a properly trained search dog is deployed, the handler will be able to provide a Probability of Detection (POD) to the incident commander. This is not possible when the wrong tool is utilized. Would an untrained K9 be used to clear an area for explosives or drugs?

Myth #4: All search Dogs are able to do the same work: While all search dogs do locate human scent, there are many different disciplines. A cadaver dog, a water recovery dog, a trailing dog, an air scent dog all have different training and certifications. While a dog could be cross trained (dual purpose), there are very specific requirements and proficiency tests. For example, bringing a bomb dog to a drug bust and saying that the area is clear would not be effective. There is currently no national, state or local requirement for certification for search dogs in most states, however, there are many who voluntarily obtain proper documentation and are happy to provide this information.

Myth #5: Unlike police dogs search dogs are not aggressive: Unfortunately, there are still some uneducated search & rescue teams who like to promote this. Today’s working police dogs go to many public relation events & schools, as well as going home with their handlers and families often, with children. Most police dogs are trained to a higher level than most search & rescue dogs. Additionally, most police dogs are bred to have temperaments enabling them to behave non-aggressively except as needed for their job. Many search dogs are also specifically bred and trained for this work, however, most are not. There are definitely aggressive search dogs out there as well as dogs with such little training that they cannot even be taken off their leashes.

This information is provided by Search & Rescue Dogs of Pennsylvania [www.sardogs.org](http://www.sardogs.org/)