

# Crime Scene Guidelines for Human Remains Detection Dog Handlers or Forensic Evidence Dog Handlers

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The purpose of a crime scene investigation is to establish if a crime has been committed, what happened and to identify the person or person's responsible. Most of this process is not the responsibility of the canine handler.

However, a better understanding of the process will ensure that the canine handler is a valuable resource. The last thing we want to do as handlers is to compound the crime scene by adding something or by not properly protecting it. The role that the canine handler will most likely fill is finding possible evidence or the location of human remains.



## CRIME SCENE PRESERVATION

### Maintain control of your dog

Continue to observe your dog, never taking your eyes off the dog. Use another person to observe the scene, help with taking the notes for you, etc. Don't move or change anything in the crime scene. When you are finished take your dog to a safe location away from the crime scene.

### The Correct resource for the job

A dog chosen for a building search has been trained for the job. Only have the best dog or dogs do the building searches. Should the dog locate potential evidence, quietly take notes and mark the location.



### Document everything you do

Because you are working a crime scene chances are the case may go to court. Document the facts.

## BUILDING SEARCHING



When a house or a building has been established as a crime scene, there are several things that the canine handler needs to know and do before entering. It is the Canine Team Leader's responsibility to advise the teams of any information that has been given by the requesting agency. The teams should be advised of any areas that are off limits or not covered in the search warrant, what they can and cannot touch, and what they are looking for. Evidence can be inadmissible to the case (even if it's

a dead body) if you search an area that is not covered in the search warrant.

The team leader needs to choose carefully those teams that will search the buildings. Usually only two teams will search a building. This is not the time to see how a new dog works in a house or a building. Chosen dogs should have the ability to search calmly and not interfere with other ongoing activities. It is inappropriate to have a dog search a house or a building that will dig, retrieve items or damage things.

Many times there are house pets like cats, rats and rabbits that the dog will have to ignore. Dogs should be given ample time to urinate and defecate before entering the house. We must remember this is someone's home. The person may not like animals and may be innocent.

Teams are chosen for the handler's experience, understanding how scent travels and pools in buildings, cold wall syndrome, heating and air conditioning scent problems. Only a few teams will be selected for building searches and it should be clearly understood that this is not the time to train or have your ego hurt because you were not chosen for this search.

The canine teams should expect that the person documenting the entrance of all people entering the building would ask them their name and agency. Most of the time they will have the dog teams enter the building first. This means that evidence has not been established and you should consider everything as evidence.



Each dog working the building should be observed by the same person from the canine team, documenting

what the team did in the building. The notes this person takes should be part of the group report that the agency may request. Gloves should be worn by the handler and all off limit areas should be clearly understood. A good way to do that is for the person documenting the teams to keep the team in the proper areas - that way the canine handler can concentrate on the dog.

All teams entering the crime or the potential crime scene must be willing to provide samples of their hair, blood, shoe prints, fingerprints etc. for evidence elimination purposes if requested.

One of the first things done by one of the technicians at the crime scene is to videotape and photograph everything. This is done before any evidence is collected.

One of the techniques used by law enforcement agencies is to document the crime scene using a video camera. Once the video camera begins recording it usually will continue to run until the search is finished. This means we want to keep the canine teams out of the way of the camera not to obstruct the view. And remember sounds are also being recorded. This also holds true in taking still pictures.

## **VEHICLE SEARCHING**



Vehicles are very difficult to search. Dogs are looking for residual scent, small amounts of blood or body fluid. Teams chosen for these searches need to have the same qualities described for house / building searching. Keep in mind that in house and vehicle searching, we are looking for small amounts of scent and most of the time the alert or interest from your dog will be subtle.

There are different schools of thought in vehicle searching. The important thing is to work with the agency in charge and have them decide what is the best method for them and the case they are working on.

They may want a single vehicle search or a blind vehicle line up. One technique for vehicle line-ups can be done in the following manner. Prior arrangements with the law enforcement agency need to have been made so more than one vehicle can be available to search. Anywhere from 2 to 4 negative vehicles will be needed. The team or teams are not given any information on the type of vehicle or how many suspect vehicles there are. License plates should all be covered if obvious law enforcement plates are present on any vehicles. The team leader needs to find out if the technicians have gone through the suspected vehicle to look for evidence and fingerprints. It is always a good idea for the handler to wear latex gloves as to prevent adding their own fingerprints.

The team leader will have to decide with the agency what will be best, working one team or working two teams, both have pros and cons. But the best and most experienced team(s) should be chosen to do the vehicle search. If it is decided to work two teams, they should not observe each other working the vehicles. Each team will have their dog search the vehicle blindly from the other canine team but observed by the team leader. Some team leaders prefer not to know which vehicle(s) is the suspect vehicle. This way they observe the dogs working without prejudice. When the team has finished they leave the vehicle line up and call in the next team. As with all forensic searching, the team must not discuss what their dog did with teams that have not yet worked. If it is agreed within the group, the teams that have already worked can observe the other teams working.



After all teams have searched, the team leader may want teams to re-search a vehicle or area of a vehicle depending on what they have observed.

An explanation of the different types of things the dog could be alerting on is important for the agency to understand. Remember that by telling the agency a dog showed interest in a vehicle they might decide to put thousands of dollars and man hours into searching it.

Most dogs will alert on semen, so it is important to know if the dog that has worked the vehicle has been trained on it as a negative and to let the law enforcement agency know.

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