



*State of Rhode Island*  
**URBAN SEARCH AND RESCUE TEAM**  
**RI-TF1**



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## CANINE TEAM POLICIES

Effective April 5, 2007

### 1. PURPOSE

To establish RIUSAR's Canine Search Specialist Teams status as they join the Task Force, initiate training, complete certification, and to identify expectations of continued team affiliation.

### 2. SEARCH SPECIALIST TEAM PROCESS

2.1. RIUSAR shall roster a maximum of twelve Canine Search Specialists at any time.

2.1.1. The maximum number of Canine Search Specialists may be increased due to operational need.

2.2. On the first visit all individuals are considered visitors.

2.2.1. All visitors to a RIUSAR canine training session must sign a liability release form.

2.2.2. Visitors, who return for a second canine training session with the intention of attending on a regular basis, will be considered either an interested handler or a helper. Upon the second visit, interested handlers will be advised to complete the RIUSAR application and will be given CSS position description, which explains the requirements and demands of disaster canine search work.

2.2.3. At the third visit, the interested handler should return the completed application.

2.2.4. No application will be accepted later than 30 days after receiving the packet and the interested handler will not be allowed to continue participation in the canine training session. An interested handler without a canine will remain a helper until he/she acquires a canine.

2.3. The interested handler must attend one training session and participate without his/her canine, and then attend two training sessions with their canine, within a two-month period.

2.4. During this period the canine will be screened using the RI USAR Canine Screening Process for screening canine candidates. The canine must successfully complete the screening process.

2.5. The interested handler shall provide a canine vaccination certificate at the first visit with canine.

2.5.1. Canines without current vaccinations will not be allowed at training sessions.

2.6. After the two month period, the handler will be given an interview and handler assessment of their attendance and performance.

2.7. After the assessment the handler will either be accepted as a Developing Canine Search Specialist Team (DCSST), and may continue to attend regularly scheduled training sessions, or they will be asked to discontinue attendance at canine training sessions.

2.8. The interview process for the Candidate CSS position will include the Canine Search Team Officer, and one or both Canine Officer Assistants.

2.8.1. The input from current RIUSAR K-9 team handlers may be considered in the handler assessment.

2.9. If a canine handler is coming from another Task Force, a letter of recommendation from the current or prior Task Force's Canine Coordinator/Officer will be required.

2.10. Verification of any certifications will be required.

2.11. Any history of felony convictions shall result in the handlers being dismissed from RIUSAR.



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### **3. CANINE TEAM CATEGORIES**

A Canine Search Specialist Team consists of a Canine Search Specialist and a RIUSAR Sponsored Dog.

#### **3.1. DEPLOYABLE CANINE SEARCH SPECIALIST TEAM**

3.1.1. A Canine Search Specialist Team who has successfully completed the IPWDA and/or SUSAR certification requirements.

3.1.2. Must also be a member in good standing with RIUSAR and deploying with a RIUSAR sponsored canine.

#### **3.2. CERTIFIED CANINE SEARCH SPECIALIST TEAM**

3.2.1. A Canine Search Specialist Team that has passed the Type II or IPWDA, US&R Disaster Certification.

3.2.2. Only handlers with a certified dog will be permitted to start a new dog while actively training his/her certified dog.

#### **3.3. CANDIDATE CANINE SEARCH SPECIALIST TEAM**

This team has gone through the resume, interview and canine assessment and has been accepted to fill a Candidate CSS position on RIUSAR, but has not yet completed all of the requirements for a Certified Canine Search Specialist Team. This team is preparing to attempt certification in SUSAR/IPWDA sponsored evaluations; the team consistently demonstrates competence in obedience, direct ability, alert, agility, and rubble elements of the evaluations.

#### **3.4. INTERESTED HANDLER**

3.4.1. A Handler who is interested in the program and is attending the required number of canine practices in anticipation of being accepted as a Developing Canine Search Specialist Team.

3.4.2. This may also be a handler from another task force or search and rescue agency interested in attending training with the RIUSAR team on a regular basis.

#### **3.5. HELPER**

Anyone who is willing to assist in the development of canines for the benefit of the task force and who is not training a dog, but will be attending RIUSAR on a regular basis.

#### **3.6. VISITOR/GUEST**

This is an interested individual who is not planning to visit canine training on a regular basis. This includes members of other SUSAR or FEMA task forces attending RIUSAR team training, but not on regular basis and with permission of the Canine Search Team Officer.

#### **3.7. RIUSAR SPONSORED CANINE**

3.7.1. This is a canine that is supported for the purpose of allocating time, money and resources for the advancement of a canine's training as it relates to USAR deployment readiness.

3.7.2. If a handler wants to add another canine beyond the limit of 3 he/she must first permanently retire one of his/her sponsored canines.

3.7.3. Only canines attached to the canine team are sponsored by RIUSAR.



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#### **4. PHYSICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR CANINE HANDLERS**

In general, a USAR deployment involves long days of often-stressful events; and in the case of canine handlers, accessing and traversing rubble and/or collapsed or damaged structures. Therefore, canine handlers must demonstrate:

- 4.1. No limiting medical problems
- 4.2. Physical endurance
- 4.3. Mental stability
- 4.4. Ability to traverse rubble
- 4.5. Ability to be a buried victim
- 4.6. Ability to crawl through a tunnel
- 4.7. Ability to climb a ladder
- 4.8. Ability to be lifted and lowered on rope.

Items 4.2 through 4.8 can be informally assessed at regularly scheduled training sessions, which involve long hours, varied activities and sometimes-stressful situations. Any problems apparent at a training session will be magnified on deployment and will therefore be further assessed.

#### **5. GENERAL CANINE REQUIREMENTS**

Handlers should be aware that disaster search is one of the most physically and mentally stressful tasks a canine can be asked to perform.

- 5.1. Canines determined to be physically or mentally unsuitable for disaster work will not be accepted on the team. Those canines already on the team may be removed.
- 5.2. All canines will be assessed to determine their suitability for disaster work according to the following guidelines:

##### **5.2.1. PHYSICAL HEALTH:**

Written verification from a licensed veterinarian is required to show that the dog is free of heartworm and has no apparent health problems, which would preclude strenuous physical training. Baseline blood panel, hip and/or elbow x-rays, and eye examination are strongly recommended: particularly in breeds with predisposition to these conditions.

5.2.1.1. All RIUSAR sponsored canines must have DHLPP, Rabies, and Bordetella vaccinations.

5.2.1.2. All vaccinations must be kept up to date.

5.2.1.3. All RIUSAR sponsored canines must use an effective form of Flea Protection.

##### **5.2.2. MENTAL STABILITY:**

No aggression toward people will be tolerated; dog aggression will be handled on a case-by-case basis. Extreme shyness or sound sensitivity is not acceptable.

##### **5.2.3. APTITUDE:**

Various instruments are available to help ascertain the likelihood of success in disaster search. RIUSAR will use the RI USAR Canine Screening Process for screening canine candidates.



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## 6. PROCESS

All Canine Team categorizations and in-house testing will be done by the Task Force's Canine Search Team Officer (or his/her designee). Re-categorization of teams will be done when significant changes in capabilities occur. SUSAR Disaster Search Canine Readiness Evaluation Process (DSCREP) or IPWDA US&R Disaster criteria will be used to assure consistency.

## 7. PROFICIENCY EVALUATIONS

- 7.1. All canine teams will undergo annual proficiency evaluations.
- 7.2. The date of the proficiency evaluations will be scheduled by the Canine Search Team Officer.
- 7.3. Canine handlers will be evaluated according to the RIUSAR K-9 Handler Performance Evaluation.
- 7.4. The contents of the canine evaluation are at the discretion of the Canine Search Team Officer.
- 7.5. A Canine Search Specialist who is unable to maintain canine capability with their USAR certified dog as described in this policy may be re-classified to an appropriate level and asked to commit to a training regiment to regain level of proficiency.
- 7.6. Any canine team unable or unwilling to progress through the RIUSAR K9 training process as expected may be dismissed from the Canine Team.

## 8. PRETEST POLICY

In order to be endorsed by the Task Force Canine Search Team Officer a team must satisfactorily complete a pre test for that specific certification administered by two team evaluators within six months of the IPWDA/SUSAR evaluation.

## 9. TASK FORCE FUNDING

The task force provides funding support for training and testing costs. This funding is reevaluated and allotted with each year's grant award. The funding in each category may vary depending upon availability of funds.

- 9.1. The Canine Search Team Officer will provide a budget estimate for each year's training and testing estimated costs and give recommendations to the Task Force Leader.
- 9.2. Priority of available funds are given in this order:
  - 9.2.1. Certified Canine Search Specialist Team
  - 9.2.2. Certified Canine Search Specialist Teams seeking re-certification
  - 9.2.3. Certified handlers training or testing a second canine
  - 9.2.4. Candidate Canine Search Specialist Teams pursuing certification
  - 9.2.5. Handlers seeking to certify with another handler's already certified canine
  - 9.2.6. Subsequent canines with the same handler with a cap on three RIUSAR Sponsored Canines
  - 9.2.7. The funding is available to task force supported canines only.
  - 9.2.8. The maximum number of supported canines per handler is three, but subject to change when deemed necessary by the Canine Search Team Officer.



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### 9.3. VETERINARIAN EXPENSES

- 9.3.1. Only RI USAR Canines may receive general medical expense coverage. Medical expense coverage may include but is not limited to the following: yearly physical exams, spay/neutering, injuries sustained during a regularly scheduled USAR training or deployment, other illnesses as approved by the Canine Search Team Officer.
- 9.3.2. Veterinary bills shall be invoiced to the RI USAR Team and given to the Canine Search Team Officer or designee to be submitted to the task force for payment.

### 10. EQUIPMENT

- 10.1. Canine Search Specialists will be issued all required personal safety equipment.
- 10.2. Candidate Canine Search Specialists teams will be issued personal safety equipment on an as needed basis for official training or testing.
- 10.3. Any misuse of equipment or misrepresentation of RIUSAR may result in termination from the Task Force.

### 11. PRE-SELECTED CANINES

- 11.1. The Canine Search Team Officer may assign a pre selected canine to a handler who is in need of a canine partner. The canine shall be tested by the Canine Search Team Officer or designee prior to the match up and must pass the RI USAR Canine Screening Process.
- 11.2. Interested Handlers/Handlers without a dog, or those with a dog that has been determined to be unsuitable for disaster search work, may be offered a pre-selected dog by the RIUSAR K9 Team. Membership on the team may be conditional on acceptance of the pre-selected dog.

### 12. HUMAN REMAINS DETECTION

- 12.1. Canines who demonstrate proficiency in human remains search will be listed as "Human Remains Detection Trained" in their respective category.
- 12.2. For Cross-Trained Dogs, Human Remains Detection training will be introduced after the dog has certified in his primary task of live person search.
  - 12.2.1. This requirement may be waived by the Canine Search Team Officer.
- 12.3. RIUSAR handlers must have permission from the Canine Search Team Officer to begin HRD training with a RIUSAR sponsored dog with any other team or on their own.

### 13. TRAINING SESSIONS

- 13.1. Regularly scheduled canine training sessions are held at minimum of twice a month. Dates, times, and locations will be determined by the Canine Search Team Officer or his/her designee.
- 13.2. All Canine Team Members are required to attend at least 15 RIUSAR Canine Team training sessions per year. This requirement may be waived by the Canine Search Team Officer.
- 13.3. Failure to attend three or more consecutive scheduled training sessions, without approval of the Canine Search Team Officer, may be cause for dismissal from the team.
- 13.4. Training logs of all canine training will be recorded on an approved canine training form.



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- 13.5. Visitors must contact the Canine Search Team Officer/or designee who makes the final determination of visitor attendance.
- 13.6. Only RIUSAR Supported Canines may attend RIUSAR training sessions without prior approval from the Canine Search Team Officer.
- 13.7. Only RIUSAR Supported Canines are allowed in designated training areas and on team agility equipment and courses without prior approval from the Canine Search Team Officer.

#### **14. DEPLOYMENTS**

- 14.1. RIUSAR will only deploy those Canine Search Specialist Teams who have met the following criteria:
  - 14.1.1. Fulfilled the General Membership Requirements.
  - 14.1.2. Fulfilled the position requirements for Canine Search Specialist, given availability of required courses.
  - 14.1.3. SUSAR or IPWDA US&R Disaster Certified.
  - 14.1.4. Except in extenuating circumstances, Type I teams will precede Type II teams, and Type II teams will precede IPWDA light Disaster teams and IPWDA Light Disaster teams will precede those who have passed the in house pre test. The deployment order is at the discretion of the Canine Search Team Officer.
- 14.2. Deployable Canine Search Specialists who have an alternate position on the Task Force must deploy as a member of the Canine Team if selected for deployment by the Canine Search Team Officer.
- 14.3. Typically 4 CSS Teams deploy with a task force on a mission. In some circumstances, the deploying Task Force Leader, (TFL) may permit more than 4 canines to respond on a mission. The additional canine handler(s) will either deploy as a member of the Logistics Unit, or as their primary position.
- 14.4. All certified handlers should respond to activation in case the pre-rostered CSS are not available.
- 14.5. Only RIUSAR supported canines may deploy to searches.

#### **15. HANDLER AND CANINE INJURIES**

- 15.1. All handler and canine accident or injuries during deployment must be reported to the Safety Officer immediately and then to the Canine Search Team Officer or Search Team Manager.
- 15.2. Accidents or injuries during training events must be reported to the Canine Search Team Officer.

**16.** Any Canine Search Specialist unwilling or unable to agree to these policies will be removed from the Canine Team.

These policies have been accepted and approved and shall apply to all RIUSAR Members. These policies become effective on April 5, 2007 and are subject to amendments.

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Matthew T. Zarrella  
Canine Search Team Officer

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Robert Seltzer  
Task Force Leader