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# National Canine (K9) Unit Manual

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U.S. Fish & Wildlife  
Service

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Division of Refuge Law  
Enforcement  
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# Division of Refuge Law Enforcement National Canine (K9) Unit Manual

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## 1. OVERVIEW

**1.1 Purpose.** This manual establishes national standards for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) Federal Wildlife Officers’ (FWO) use of law enforcement canines (K9). The manual supplements the Department of the Interior’s manual chapter on canine units, 446 DM 23, and our policy at 471 FW 1.

**1.2 Objective.** Our objective is to establish uniform standards that will promote the proper use, training, selection, and management of K9 teams within the Division of Refuge Law Enforcement (DRLE).

**1.3 Scope.** All NWRS law enforcement K9 teams and their supervisors must use this manual and follow the policy in the corresponding chapter (471 FW 1).

### 1.4 National Coordination and Structure:

#### National Canine Coordinator:

The National Canine Coordinator must be a current FWO K9 handler from DRLE at Headquarters (HQ). The Coordinator will advise and assist in recommending training curriculum. He or she will also help evaluate K9 teams (i.e., the FWO handler and his/her canine), and review handlers’ records.

## **K9 Unit Organizational Structure:**

Departmental policy, 446 DM 23.6 A (1), requires that we establish a clear supervisory chain-of-command for FWO K9 handlers in the field. FWO K9 handlers must report directly to their respective law enforcement supervisor or Project Leader for day-to-day activities. The Regional Chief – DRLE manages deployment and incident reporting.

The National Canine Coordinator must ensure all pertinent information is provided to law enforcement supervisors/Project Leaders or their FWO handlers relating to the national K9 program, and to advise the Chief – DRLE on programwide matters.

The National Canine Coordinator will consult with the Branch Chief of Operations – DRLE on issues relating to the national K9 program.

## **2. K9 TEAM**

### **2.1 Conditions**

#### **2.1.1 FWO Handler Responsibilities**

K9 handlers are responsible for the actions of their assigned K9s at all times—when performing duties and during off-duty hours.

- Do not leave K9s unattended in any area where the public may have access.
- If the handler must leave his/her K9 in the care of non-Service personnel, he/she must ensure it is another handler or a veterinarian.

The FWO handler makes the final decision to deploy a K9 (see 471 FW 1 and sections 4.1 through 4.3 of this manual). The FWO handler makes the decision based on the facts of the case provided to him/her. The decision to deploy or not deploy cannot be superseded.

#### **2.1.2 Compensation**

When FWO handlers provide K9 care off duty, we must compensate them in accordance with the Fair Labor Standards Act.

- We must provide at least 8 on-duty hours per pay period of training time to the FWO handler.
- We must provide 30 minutes of regular pay per day during regular work days, and 30 minutes of overtime pay per day on non-work days for the care of the K9. If for some reason the handler is unable to take the 30 minutes due to other work, we must pay their respective overtime rate.
- On days of annual leave, the handler should take one less hour of annual leave per day for the time period to make up for the hour they spend caring for the K9.
- We may use Administratively Uncontrollable Overtime (AUO) to compensate the FWO for the hours beyond the scheduled workday when the handler has performed unforeseen duties that did not give him/her the opportunity to train or care for the K9. The care and the training of the K9 is compelling to the interests of the Service (see 225 FW 8).

### **2.2 K9 Team Selection and Training**

#### **2.2.1 FWO Handler Selection.** The FWO handler must:

- Have at least 3 years of experience as a full-time, commissioned FWO;

- Have an overall performance rating of “meets standards” or higher on the last three performance evaluations;
- Have received a recommendation and approval from his/her supervisor, with concurrence from the NWRS Zone Officer, Refuge Manager/Project Leader, Regional Chief – DRLE, and the National Canine Coordinator;
- Agree to provide a home environment for the proper care and supervision of the assigned K9;
- Be physically fit; and
- Pass a Service-approved canine handler course and perform all the requirements associated with the position.

### **2.2.2 K9 Selection**

K9s must meet the following criteria to be selected for the DRLE K9 program:

- They must be a German or Belgian Shepherd, retriever, or like breed.
- They must have proportionate lines harmonious with a straight solid back and shoulders per a veterinarian examination. This examination should also include a detailed eye exam.
- They have to be at least 11 months old.
- Their teeth must pass a veterinarian examination.
- They must be x-rayed for hip dysphasia and rate in one of the following categories (1) Schnelle grading of -0 and #1, (2) a rating of a good from the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals, or (3) a German “A” stamp rating of “normal” or “fass normal.” X-rays should also include the spine and elbows.
- Before any K9 is considered for police training, the National Canine Coordinator and another FWO or other qualified K9 handler will test and evaluate it for its fitness for service. The purpose of pre-testing is to determine if the K9 has any undesirable temperament characteristics that would adversely affect its serviceability. The Chief – DRLE has final approval authority based on the recommendation after testing.
  - Pre-testing must measure the following qualities for all K9s considered for service:
    - (i) Temperament
    - (ii) Alertness
    - (iii) Prey and defense drives
    - (iv) Play and retrieving drives

All K9s must have a general physical examination to include fecal exam, DHL, and rabies boosters. The physical examination is an important element in the pre-testing program. For economic reasons, K9s must successfully complete temperament testing and meet all other requirements prior to scheduling the physical exam.

### **2.2.3 K9 Team Certification and Training**

- The Chief – DRLE, through the Branch of Refuge Law Enforcement Training and with guidance from the National Canine Coordinator, approves training curriculums related to K9 handling.
- K9 teams must receive recertification annually through an approved nationally-accredited certification program.
- Evaluators outside the Service may conduct the annual certification program if they have been approved by the Branch of Refuge Law Enforcement Training and the National Canine Coordinator.
- Handlers are given duty time for training.
- The FWO handler must keep logs and records of all certification, and annual and maintenance training that include the date, location, skills evaluated, and length of training.
- The Regional Chief – DRLE and the National Canine Coordinator must review K9 team certification, training, and maintenance records every-other-year.
- Training aids, such as drugs, explosives, and wildlife must be properly secured and maintained in accordance with Service policy and Drug Enforcement Administration requirements. FWO handlers must not use pseudo training aids.

- The FWO handlers and the K9 must undergo frequent maintenance training in accordance with accreditation standards. At a minimum, dual purpose patrol K9s must train a minimum of 8 hours a pay period, and single purpose detection K9s must train a minimum of 6 hours per pay period.

**2.2.4 Annual In-Service Training.** Annual in-service training, which must be a minimum of 24 hours, covers:

- K9 team fundamentals (e.g., legal update, obedience, scent work, etc.),
- K9 care (e.g., basic grooming, health care, and first aid for canines, etc.),
- K9 team bite response (e.g., medical treatment, photographs, investigation, etc.),
- K9 team reporting requirements, and
- K9 team use policies.

### **2.2.5 Failure to Certify**

The FWO handler must immediately report a failure to certify to his/her supervisor, Regional Chief – DRLE, and the National Canine Coordinator. If a K9 team fails to certify, a Service K9 trainer or non-Service trainer (approved by the National Canine Coordinator) will provide remedial training. They will base the duration and content of the training on the task requiring remediation. Until the team successfully completes and passes a recertification, the FWO handler cannot use the K9 for law enforcement functions.

If, after remediation, the team still does not pass certification, the managing Regional Chief – DRLE must assemble an evaluation team to determine the cause of failure and to make a decision on the future use of the K9 or K9 team. The evaluation team will also include the National Canine Coordinator, the FWO handler's supervisor, and the trainer.

### **2.2.6 Credentials**

The Service issues K9s who pass certification credentials, which include a badge and a photo of the K9. FWO handlers must keep these credentials on them at all times when on duty with the K9. The K9 will also receive and must wear a badge insignia while on duty to readily identify the animal as a Service K9, except in cases where doing so would endanger the team or others.

Service K9s are commissioned in their role and subject to Service policy in 470 FW 2, as applicable.

### **2.2.7 Instructors for K9 Team Training**

***Designating instructors:*** The Chief – DRLE, with concurrence from the National Canine Coordinator, designates FWOs to provide K9 training to other FWO handlers. A K9 Team Instructor must attend and successfully complete instructor training approved by the National Canine Coordinator in conjunction with the Branch of Refuge Law Enforcement Training.

To be designated, a potential instructor for the K9 program must have a minimum of 5 years of K9 handling experience with at least 3 years of K9 handling experience in the Service.

***Refresher training for instructors:*** The Chief – DRLE, through the Branch of Training and the National Canine Coordinator will determine what refresher training Service K9 instructors must take. Instructors who do not receive appropriate instructor refresher training every 3 years may not provide K9 training to FWO handlers.

## 2.3 Uniforms and Equipment

### 2.3.1 FWO K9 Handler Uniform

The assigned K9 uniform should be equipped for the duty of a handler. BDU style pants and shirt are adequate. Uniform components should be made of a rip stop material. The uniform must be brown, have a Service patch on both shoulders, and a badge and name plate that says:

“K9 Officer”  
“Name”

. The back of the shirt must have a patch across the shoulder with the wording:

“FWS K9”

When a dress uniform is required, the FWO must wear the appropriate uniform.

**2.3.2 K9 Vehicle.** Refer to existing Service policy (451 FW 1) for law enforcement vehicle markings.

- Stations may request a waiver on vehicle standards from their Regional Chief – DRLE when they can clearly explain how the vehicle poses a threat to an FWO handler or K9 safety, or when the K9 must be transported in a rental vehicle during a detail.
- A secure and stable transport system must be configured or installed.
- A security screen must be installed where any passenger area opens up to the K9 transport area.
- Window screens of metal mesh must be installed on rear doors of SUVs to prevent unintentional bites or exits.
- Vehicles must be equipped with a heat sensor that monitors the interior temperature and activates either the horn or lights to tell the FWO handler that the canine may be in distress due to heat. This requirement can be waived based on a detailed explanation explaining why the vehicle shouldn't be equipped this way. The request for a waiver has to be approved by the FWO's Regional Chief – DRLE with concurrence from the National Canine Coordinator.
- For patrol-certified K9s, a bailout system must be installed to allow the FWO to summon the canine in an emergency.

### 2.3.3 Equipment

New K9 teams must be provided with the following basic equipment for their role as a Service K9 team. These items are only the basic requirements. Given the diverse locations of our teams, additional items may be required:

***Required items:***

- Stainless non-tip food dish (2)
- Stainless choke chain (2)
- Undercoat hair rake
- Tracking harness
- Tracking long line (15' and 25')
- Tracking short line (10')
- Police leather or leather alternative lead (back-up waist lead and 4' light lead)
- Kong toy (2)
- Stainless steel water bucket (2)
- Collapsible kennel for canine during details requiring lodging

***In addition to items above, these items are required for a single purpose detection K9:***

- Tugs and reward toys (3)
- Storage containers for training aids (this depends on whether the K9 is trained to detect wildlife or drugs)
- Hide boxes (magnetic)

Hide bags (cotton and nylon, 3 each)

***In addition to the items above, these items are required for a Service dual purpose K9:***

Leather collar: agitation with a 2-inch minimum width

Police leather lead (6' agitation lead)

Traffic lead (minimum 8 inches in length)

Leather muzzle

Bite sleeve

Bite suit

Equipment bag

### **3. K9 CARE**

#### **3.1 K9 Housing**

The Service must ensure that K9s are provided with appropriate housing, both at the FWO handler's residence and in temporary kennels at the office, if required. Housing must provide security for the K9 and appropriate safety, such as shade, water, and heat and air conditioning if the climate requires it. Kennels located at an officer's residence must be made of all metal, chain link fencing, or other fencing material to minimize the chance of escape or injury. The kennel must have a hard floor of concrete or brick to easily clean urine and fecal matter. It must have either a hard or soft top to aide with shade and security. The sides must be made so they provide a solid wall reaching from the floor to a minimum of 4 feet tall. If the duty station purchases a prefabricated kennel that is made to contain a K9, the above-listed specifications may be waived.

#### **3.2 Medical Care and Grooming**

- The FWO handler must ensure the K9 gets an annual medical examination by a licensed veterinarian.
- Funding for all K9 medical and grooming expenses are the responsibility of the Region the K9 serves.
- The FWO K9 handler must ensure the K9 receives proper nutrition, grooming, training, medical care, affection, and living conditions.
- The FWO K9 handler must be involved in the decisionmaking process for those decisions related to useful life and euthanasia.
  - If there's a serious injury to a K9 and the injury, treatment, and recovery will not allow the K9 to return to Government service, the FWO handler must be given the opportunity to obtain medical care for a K9 in lieu of euthanasia.
  - If this happens, ownership of the K9 must be officially transferred to the FWO handler in accordance with property management requirements.

#### **3.3 K9 Retirement**

A Service K9 may be retired from the program when the K9:

- Is no longer needed for official purposes,
- Has a temperament incompatible with Service guidelines for the type of work that the K9 is trained,
- Fails to pass certification based on the approved standards, or
- Can no longer perform the requirements for the certification due to age, sickness, or injury.

The FWO handler, his/her supervisor, the Regional Chief – DRLE, and the National Canine Coordinator must have input in the decisionmaking process concerning retiring a K9. If the team decides to retire the K9, the duty station or Region must follow the requirements for personal property (see 310 FW 5).

The FWO handler must be given the first opportunity to adopt the K9.

## 4. DEPLOYMENT

### 4.1 Deployment

**4.1.1 When to deploy a canine:** All decisions to deploy a canine must be consistent with *Graham v. Connor* (490 U.S. 386 (1989)), and include balancing:

- (1) The severity of the crime at hand,
- (2) Whether the suspect poses an immediate threat to the safety of the officer or others, and
- (3) Whether the suspect is actively resisting arrest or attempting to evade arrest by flight.

Before deploying the canine, the FWO must give a clear release warning, taking into consideration such factors as language barriers, distance, type of deployment (apprehension versus detection), and probable location of the suspect; and allow a reasonable amount of time for the suspect to comply with commands. The FWO does not have to give this warning if it may endanger the safety of the canine, officer, or others. Except in exigent circumstances or where there is imminent danger of death or serious injury, the FWO should ensure that he/she can continue to see the canine when deployed.

An FWO may NOT use a canine team for crowd control. An FWO may deploy a canine to locate and apprehend a suspect if he/she believes that the individual has either committed or is about to commit a serious offense, and in any one of the following situations:

- The officer believes that the individual poses an immediate threat of violence or serious harm to the public or any officer,
- The canine is needed to search for and locate suspects who have fled the scene of a serious crime or to locate evidence of a crime when the officer believes the person is hiding or the evidence has been abandoned in a specific area,
- The canine is needed to assist in the arrest of suspects when the suspect is known to be armed with a weapon, or
- The canine is needed to assist in the arrest of, or to prevent the escape of, serious or violent offenders.

DRLE recognizes that situations may come up that don't fall within the provisions in this policy, but may still compel deployment. In such a case the FWO must use his/her best judgment and consider the totality of the circumstances. Unless an FWO reasonably believes that an individual has committed or is about to commit a serious criminal offense, mere flight from a pursuing officer is not cause for deploying a canine to apprehend someone. FWOs may use canines in accordance with law and Departmental policy to search vehicles, buildings, bags, outdoor areas, and other articles that he/she believes is necessary to further an investigation or protect the public or trust resources.

### 4.2 Bites

**4.2.1 Bites not related to training:** The FWO handling the canine must report any bite that occurs in a non-training environment following the serious incident reporting requirements in 054 FW 1 and 446 DM 17. The FWO must ensure that his/her supervisor, the Regional Chief – DRLE, and the National Canine Coordinator are advised as soon as possible. We consider bites to be a use of force, so the FWO must also follow the policy in 442 FW 2, Use of Force.

- If a canine bites someone when it's deployed, the FWO handler must call off the canine when it can be safely removed, taking into consideration the safety of the handler, other officers, and anyone else at the scene, and whether the suspect has been controlled.
- Whenever there's an injury or a complaint of an injury related to the deployment of a canine, the FWO handling the canine must ensure the following takes place:



- Anyone who needs immediate medical attention gets it.
- The FWO must document reported injuries, including color photographs of the injuries at the time of the incident or as soon as possible after.
- The canine involved in the bite should be removed from the scene as soon as practical. If possible, the FWO involved in the deployment should not be the investigating officer for the bite investigation.
- The investigating officer should take photographs (in addition to those taken by the FWO handler at the time of the incident). When practical, he/she should take photographs after the individual receives medical attention, but before the application of bandages. Treat photographs as evidence. Maintain the investigative report, canine handler report, and evidence in accordance with Service, Regional, Federal Tort Claims Act, or office reporting procedures.
- The investigating officer must document the attending physician's identification information, as well as ask for a diagnosis and prognosis of the sustained injuries. The officer should include that information in the investigative report.

**4.2.2 Bites during training:** FWO handlers must report injuries or bites that occur while training to his/her supervisor, the Regional Chief – DRLE, and the National Canine Coordinator as soon as possible.

- The FWO handler must prepare a detailed report about the incident within 48 hours, and send it to the National Canine Coordinator, through his/her supervisor and Regional Chief – DRLE.
- After receiving the report, the National Canine Coordinator will conduct an after action training review that also involves the Deputy Chief – DRLE, the FWO handler's supervisor, and the Regional Chief – DRLE. The team will determine if the FWO handler violated policy and identify any mitigating factors that might have been present during the training. The team must put their findings in a memorandum, which they send to the Chief – DRLE at Headquarters.
- The Chief – DRLE decides whether to send the incident to the Professional Responsibility Unit for a Board of Review investigation or Administrative Inquiry.

### **4.3 K9 Injured**

The FWO handler should contact his/her immediate supervisor, Regional Chief – DRLE, and National Canine Coordinator as soon as practical if a K9 is injured or ill.

He/she must report any serious injury to a K9 to his/her supervisor, Regional Chief – DRLE, and the National Canine Coordinator, and then to others as required by the serious incident reporting procedures in 054 FW 1.

If the K9 becomes seriously injured or sick to the extent that professional medical attention is required, the FWO handler must transport the K9 to the veterinarian or make other arrangements for transportation where they are present.

### **4.4 FWO Handler Injured**

Each office that has a K9 team must develop procedures to address this potential situation. All FWOs and employees at the FWO's duty station should be briefed on the following course of action if an FWO handler is injured and unable to command his/her dog. If the handler is down, the K9 is likely to stand guard and prevent anyone from approaching. The K9 may exhibit extreme protective behavior.

1. Attempt to contact another K9 handler to take control of the K9.
2. DO NOT rush in on the FWO handler or the K9.
3. Call to the FWO. If possible, the FWO will call the K9 off.
4. Drive the FWO's vehicle toward the K9 with the door open to the in-vehicle kennel, the K9 may enter the kennel. If so, close the door to the vehicle.

5. If necessary, consider removing a training sleeve from the back of the vehicle and wear it to assist in controlling the K9.
6. Attempt to contact the FWO's spouse or other family member who may be able to assist in gaining control of the K9.
7. Destroying the K9 should be the last resort.

## **5. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

**5.1** The Branch Chief of Policy and Field Support – DRLE must document and maintain the following by working with the National Canine Coordinator. This documentation must be in a computerized database, which can be accomplished in Law Enforcement Management Information System (LEMIS). The Branch Chief must keep a record of:

- K9 unit deployments, including utilization statistics;
- K9 certification and training accomplishments;
- K9 medical records; and
- Reports on bite incidents.

In addition to standard Service use of force and incident reporting requirements, the Service must report use of force incidents related to K9 teams as required in 446 DM 17, Serious Incident Reporting.