

**Fort Bend County Fire Marshal's Office**  
**Accelerant Detection Canine (K-9) Operations Policy**

**I. Policy**

It is the policy of the Fort Bend County Fire Marshal's Office to provide trained law enforcement canine teams to assist in the prevention and detection of accelerants commonly used to commit arson crimes, the promotion of favorable public image of the department, and to ensure the greatest degree of safety to the citizens within Fort Bend County.

**II. Purpose**

To establish procedures, guidelines, and responsibilities for canine handlers, and to facilitate the efficient interaction of the canine team with other departments within the county.

**III. Definitions**

- A. Canine Team – A departmental canine team shall consist of a trained canine handler and his/her assigned certified law enforcement canine.
- B. Canine Supervisor/Training Coordinator – A designated department supervisor assigned and trained in the task of supervision, administrative oversight, and coordination over canine teams. When the selection of the canine supervisor is made, it is recommended that preference should be given to supervisors with previous canine experience.
- C. Exigent Circumstances – Any emergency or unforeseen occurrence or a combination of circumstances, which requires an officer to act immediately. An emergency situation requiring swift action to prevent imminent danger to life or serious damage to property, or to forestall the imminent destruction of evidence.
- D. Handler – A law enforcement officer, selected by the Fire Marshal, who is trained and qualified to care for and use a law enforcement canine in the line of duty.
- E. Necropsy – A postmortem examination or an autopsy of an animal.
- F. Probable Cause – The total set of apparent facts and circumstances, based upon reasonably trustworthy information, which would lead a reasonable and prudent person to believe that a crime has been committed, is being committed, or is about to be committed.
- G. Public Appearances – Any situation where the public or private sector organizations have requested members of the canine unit to educate people about the unit and/or the department. (example: schools, churches, businesses, etc...)
- H. Reasonable Suspicion – An officer's rational belief, based on credible and articulable information and circumstances, that something may be true.
- I. Search Warrant – A written order, issued by a magistrate upon the showing of probable cause, and directed to a peace officer of the state, commanding him/her to search for any property or thing named in the warrant, and to seize the same and bring it before such magistrate pursuant to the order.

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**IV. General Information**

A. The Fort Bend County Fire Marshal's Office recognizes that a canine unit is a specialized unit. For this reason, the department will not try to preclude the use of the canine for specific duties as outlined in this general order, except where study and common sense have shown that the use of a canine could result in unnecessary injury or risk to the canine and/or the canine handler.

B. Unit Structure

- a. The canine unit is comprised of a sworn police officer/arson investigator who has been trained in the functions of the law enforcement canine handler. Assignment to the unit is a full-time position.
- b. The law enforcement canine handler is supervised by the Fire Marshal or designated Canine Supervisor.
- c. The total number of canine teams is determined by the Fire Marshal, and is based upon the needs of Fort Bend County and the Fort Bend County Fire Marshal's Office.

C. Utilization

- a. Situations which may call for the use of a canine team/unit includes, but is not limited to the following:
  - i. Investigation of structure fires
  - ii. Investigation of motor vehicle fires
  - iii. Investigation of wildland fires
  - iv. Investigation of miscellaneous fires
  - v. Examination of articles of clothing
  - vi. Examination of collected evidence
  - vii. Clearing tools and equipment before and after usage at a fire scene
  - viii. Public appearances & public relations
- b. When an officer encounters a situation (other than those previously mentioned above) where a canine may be beneficial, the officer should contact the Canine Supervisor and/or canine team.

D. Canine Deployment

Law enforcement service canines shall be used at the discretion of the handler, using sound judgement and with the primary focus being the safety of the public. After analyzing all available information, the handler shall have final discretion on whether or not to deploy the canine assigned to him/her at the scene. The canine handler and/or canine supervisor is the only person qualified to determine if the canine is useful in the particular situation. The handler may choose not to deploy the canine in situations where the scenario exceeds the limitations of the canine, or places the canine/canine handler in unnecessary danger.

- a. On-Duty Requests

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- i. Departmental personnel are encouraged to request the assistance of a canine team as the need arises.
- ii. Evidence located by the canine assistance shall be deemed to have been accomplished by the requesting officer. The canine handler shall be responsible for completing a supplemental report.
- b. Off-Duty Requests
  - i. Officers shall contact Fort Bend County Dispatch and request the appropriate canine team. When approved to do so by the Fire Marshal or Canine Supervisor, the on-scene officer may contact the canine team directly. If the canine team is contacted directly by the on-scene officer, the officers shall notify Fort Bend County Dispatch that the canine team has been requested and will be responding.
- c. Requests to Assist Outside Agencies
  - i. All jurisdictions requesting assistance from a Fort Bend County Fire Marshal's Office canine team shall contact Fort Bend County Dispatch and formally make the request.
  - ii. Any request that is made directly to the canine team shall be approved by the canine supervisor and/or Fire Marshal before the canine team before the canine team responds to the request.
  - iii. Any request from an agency outside of Fort Bend County shall be approved by the Fire Marshal before the canine team responds to the request.

**V. Procedures**

**A. Safety – General**

- a. In order to ensure the safety of all persons involved, the following guidelines shall be adhered to at all times when a canine is utilized:
  - i. Employees shall not tease or harass the canine or engage in horseplay near the canine, except for training purposes as authorized by the handler.
  - ii. Except in emergency circumstances or with prior approval of the handler, personnel other than the assigned canine handler shall not give commands to the canine.
  - iii. Do not approach the canine team immediately upon their arrival. Allow the canine handler to get the canine out of the vehicle and under leash control prior to approaching the canine team.
  - iv. All personnel shall follow the directions of the canine handler and/or Canine Supervisor when the canine is utilized.
  - v. NOTE: canines are loyal to their handlers. If the canine is spooked or thinks its handler is in danger, the canine may react accordingly.

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**B. Scene Deployments**

- a. When a canine team responds to a scene, the canine handler is in charge of that part of the operation which requires the deployment of the canine. The handler shall confer with the on-scene personnel in planning the approach to the situation.

**C. Handler Responsibilities**

- a. The handler shall ensure that the scene and requested usage is appropriate for the canine.
- b. The handler shall ensure that the scene is safe for the canine and handler to enter.
- c. The canine's physical condition shall be checked by the handler before and after deployment.

**D. On-Scene Personnel**

- a. All other officers shall adhere to the basic procedures to ensure the canine is able to perform to the highest level. The basic procedures are as follows:
  - i. Preserve the scene and guard the point of entry from a distance to preserve any scent at the point of entry.
  - ii. Once the perimeter is secure, do not allow anyone to enter the scene unless it is absolutely necessary to preserve human life or the imminent destruction of evidence.
  - iii. Advise the handler in detail of all pertinent facts about the situation which necessitated the canine unit to respond to the scene.
  - iv. When the canine team is ready to make entry into the scene, limit the amount of noise so the canine can utilize its sense of hearing.
  - v. Do not allow any person (officer or civilian) to enter the scene after the canine team is inside without the direct authorization of the canine handler.
  - vi. During the canine team search, do not attempt to make contact with the canine handler unless it is necessary to pass on critical information, or if the search is to be abandoned.

**E. Search of Scenes**

- a. The basic guidelines for searches are:
  - i. Search Warrants
    1. When a search warrant has been issued, the premises shall be secured by officers prior to bringing the canine into the environment.
  - ii. Searches Without Warrant
    1. If a search warrant has not been issued, an attempt is made to obtain a signed consent to search and seizure prior to allowing the canine near the area, premises, or vehicle to be searched.

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2. Voluntary verbal consent shall be formally documented on the call card with Fort Bend County Dispatch.
3. If the consent to search has been refused and reasonable suspicion exists, only a general sniff of the vehicle/area is permissible.
4. A positive alert by a trained canine constitutes probable cause to obtain a search warrant if exigent circumstances do not exist. If exigent circumstances do exist AND the canine alerts, approval shall be obtained from the Canine Supervisor and/or Fire Marshal before any further actions are taken.
5. All applicable State and Federal laws relating to building, vehicle, or object search and seizure are to be followed, regardless of whether the canine is utilized or not.
6. If suspects are present at the scene of the search, the suspects shall be removed from the scene before the canine can be deployed.

**F. Open Field Searches**

- a. In open field searches, the handler must take all precautions and clear unauthorized persons away from the area to be searched.
- b. The handler will make the decision to search on or off leash and it is dependent upon exigent circumstances.
- c. The handler shall notify all units on scene whether or not the canine will be on or off leash.

**G. Emergency Procedures**

- a. The following guidelines shall be used if the canine handler becomes incapacitated and the canine is not contained:
  - i. Officers shall follow the directions of the handler if he/she remains conscious
  - ii. Officers shall attempt to contact the Canine Supervisor and Fire Marshal to immediately respond to the scene and take custody of the canine.
  - iii. If the handler loses consciousness:
    1. Officers shall use caution around the canine, as it may react to protect its handler.
    2. The canine supervisor and Fire Marshal shall be immediately notified.
    3. If the canine will allow it, officers shall attempt to secure the canine inside of the handler's vehicle.

**H. Injured Canine Procedures**

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- a. In case of an emergency to a canine, immediate medical attention from a qualified veterinarian shall be obtained.
  - b. The handler shall notify the Canine Supervisor and/or Fire Marshal.
  - c. The handler shall keep the Canine Supervisor and/or Fire Marshal updated of the canine's condition.
- I. Public Appearances/Educational and Informational Programs
- a. All public appearances by the canine unit must be set up through the department and approved by the Canine Supervisor and/or Fire Marshal.
  - b. It will be the responsibility of the canine handler to coordinate the public appearance with his/her supervisor so that the assignment does not interfere is departmental needs.
  - c. The canine handler shall ensure the handler's conduct and the canine forms a positive impression on the public.
  - d. Only personnel of the department or other canine personnel will be allowed to actively participate in the program, unless otherwise approved by the Canine Supervisor and/or Fire Marshal.
  - e. All personnel participating in the program shall be in departmental uniform.
  - f. Safety of the audience will always be the first priority throughout the program.
  - g. The audience will only be allowed to have direct contact with the canine in the presence of and with the permission of the handler.
  - h. A special assignment calls for service be created stating a brief report on each public appearance, to include an estimate of the number of civilians present at such event.

**VI. Handler's Responsibilities**

**A. Assignment**

- a. Canine teams shall be assigned by the Fire Marshal. The canine team shall be subject to being called off any general assignment by on-call investigators should the need arise.
- b. Each canine handler shall be responsible for the following documents:
  - i. Investigative reports
  - ii. Supplemental reports
  - iii. Summary of public presentations to the Canine Supervisor and/or Fire Marshal.

**B. Use of Vehicles**

- a. The canine team will be assigned a vehicle for duty which has been modified to accommodate the canine. The vehicles procured by the department for canine usage shall provide adequate space for the handler, canine, and necessary equipment.

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- b. The department's canine vehicles shall have the following specifications
    - i. Clearly marked as K9 Unit
    - ii. Tinted windows
    - iii. Canine climate control systems
    - iv. Emergency lighting equipment
    - v. Canine transport kennel
  - c. Handlers shall be responsible for his/her assigned vehicle, and shall ensure the vehicle is maintained in a clean and sanitary condition for the canine.
- C. Reports and Records
- a. A file on each canine will be maintained by the canine handler, Canine Supervisor, or Fire Marshal. The handler will ensure that pertinent records and reports are placed in this file. These reports and records include, but are not limited to:
    - i. Registration certificates and papers
    - ii. Vaccination records
    - iii. Certificates for the canine certification process
    - iv. Certificates of training
    - v. Bite/Injury reports
    - vi. Medical reports
- VII. Canine Unit Supervisor**
- A. Responsibilities
- a. When requested to do so by the Fire Marshal, submit activity reports which includes, but is not limited to the following:
    - i. Deployment, descriptions and outcomes
    - ii. Total calls for service and canine team deployments
    - iii. Outline of canine training hours
    - iv. Public appearances
  - b. May conduct performance evaluations of canine handlers.
  - c. Conducting and/or coordinating regular maintenance training for canine teams.
  - d. Monitor handler care of the canine to ensure their well-being and compliance with departmental policies and procedures.
  - e. Review copies of all expenditures related to the canine unit.
  - f. Review copies of any medical evaluations of the canine, which includes vaccination records, to ensure the canine is fit for duty.
  - g. Review and recommend budgetary requests for the canine unit.
  - h. Notify the Fire Marshal of any significant changes in the canine unit which may affect the operations readiness of the unit.
  - i. Notify the canine unit of any upcoming in-house training events and additional outside training available to handlers.

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**VIII. Handler Selection and Canine Procurement**

**A. Selection Process**

- a. Once an opening is anticipated for the position of canine handler, the Fire Marshal will post the position to notify all sworn personnel of the career opportunity. The notification must include the selection process which includes the following information:
  - i. The job description of the canine handler
  - ii. Qualifications
    1. Two (2) years of full-time experience with the department
    2. Maintain firearms proficiency
    3. Possess a strong interest in working with dogs
    4. Should not exhibit a pattern of leave time abuse
    5. Have a low incidence of sustained citizen complaints
    6. Demonstrate the ability to work pro-actively with minimal supervision
    7. Ability to spend off-duty hours caring for the canine
    8. Ability to respond on a twenty-four (24) hour call-out status
    9. Have facilities to accommodate a medium to large sized canine and all related equipment at his/her residence
    10. The candidate shall be in physical conditioned appropriately to effectively serve the demands of the position.
- b. The applicant shall submit application (or letter of interest when requested) to the Fire Marshal.
- c. The Fire Marshal may conduct interviews and/or testing for the position.
- d. The Fire Marshal will determine the selected candidate and notify them of their selection.

**B. Canine Procurement**

- a. All prospective canines shall be tested by the Fire Marshal or his/her designee for traits consistent with the highest level of performance for a law enforcement canine.
- b. Prior to acceptance of the canine, the canine shall undergo medical evaluation by a qualified veterinarian for the following conditions:
  - i. Hip dysphasia
  - ii. Kidney functions
  - iii. Any other physical defects

**IX. Training**

**A. Training and Certification Records**

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- a. All personnel in the canine program shall receive training as described by the Fire Marshal and Canine Supervisor.
  - i. All canine units will be trained to a basic level and pass a certification before field operations are authorized. Training for the units will be conducted at a recognized canine training school approved by the Fire Marshal.
  - ii. All canines in the canine program shall maintain annual certification through a recognized certifying organization.
- b. The handler will be allowed on-duty time for training, medical care, and maintenance of the canine, as approved by the Fire Marshal and/or Canine Supervisor. It shall be the responsibility of the canine handler to maintain proficiency training of the assigned canine.
  - i. Proper documentation on all in-house training will be maintained by the canine handler using a log sheet to include the following information:
    - 1. Date of training
    - 2. Hours trained
    - 3. Type of training
- c. A minimum of two (2) scheduled training sessions per week shall be performed and documented by the canine handler. Monthly training reports shall be provided by the canine handler to the Canine Supervisor and/or Fire Marshal.

**X. Care and Maintenance of Canines**

- A. Care and Maintenance of the canines:
  - a. The Fort Bend County Fire Marshal's Office shall provide adequate medical care for the canines for the duration of the canine's service to the department.
  - b. Canines shall receive primary veterinary care from a veterinarian approved by the Fire Marshal.
- B. Each handler shall be responsible for keeping the canine in a medically sound condition.
  - a. An annual examination shall be scheduled at which time all necessary immunizations shall be obtained.
  - b. All other treatments shall be scheduled as needed.
  - c. The handler is responsible for bathing, grooming, and exercising the canine.
- C. Complete medical records for each canine shall be the responsibility of the handler and maintained by the handler.
- D. Each handler shall be responsible for the feeding of the canine on a regular daily basis.
  - a. The proper diet and feeding schedule shall be prescribed by the veterinarian chosen to care for the canine.
  - b. The Fort Bend County Fire Marshal's Office shall supply adequate food for the canines for the duration of their service to the department. Records pertaining to the purchase and distribution of food shall be maintained by the canine handler.

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**E. Insurance**

- a. Fort Bend County shall provide the necessary insurance coverage for the canines during the duration of service to the department.
- b. The Fort Bend County Fire Marshal's Office and/or Fort Bend County shall provide adequate medical care for canines owned by the county throughout their lifetime.

**XI. Equipment**

**A. Equipment**

- a. Each handler will be responsible for maintaining all equipment supplied by the department.
- b. Handlers will provide an area of their residence for a department issued kennel. The handler shall ensure the canine's living quarters are maintained in a clean and sanitary condition.
- c. Each handler shall maintain a complete inventory of all assigned equipment.
  - i. Each handler shall maintain the following minimum equipment at his/her residence:
    1. Dog crate/kennel
    2. Dog food
    3. Food/water bowls
  - ii. Each canine handler will maintain the following equipment in his/her vehicle:
    1. Temperature regulating system
    2. Collar/harness
    3. Leash/lead
    4. Water bowl and water supply
    5. Canine first aid kit
    6. Reward toy

**XII. Disposition of Canines**

**A. Retirement of the Canine**

- a. The canine may be retired upon the recommendation of the handler and a qualified veterinarian. The retirement of the canine is subject to the approval by the Canine Supervisor and the Fire Marshal.

**B. Reassignment of the Canine**

- a. The Fire Marshal maintains the right to reassign the county owned canine to another officer/handler according to the needs of the department.

**C. Removal From Service**

- a. When a canine or handler is removed from service, the canine handler may request the canine be retired to the handler. All such requests are forwarded to the

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Fire Marshal. The decision to retire the canine shall be made on the merits of the individual case. The Fire Marshal shall notify the handler of all final decisions via departmental memorandum.

- b. Removal from service includes all reasons for either the canine or the handler no longer being able to perform the duties of the canine unit. Reasons which may be considered under removal from service include, but are not limited to:
    - i. Injury or illness of the canine or handler
    - ii. Retirement of the canine or handler
- D. Death of Canine
- a. In the event of the death of a canine, the following procedures shall be followed:
    - i. The Canine Supervisor and Fire Marshal shall be immediately notified
    - ii. The veterinarian and District/County Attorney's Office shall be contacted to determine if a necropsy is required. A necropsy shall be required if the death is in the line of duty.
    - iii. The canine will be transported to the facility designated by the veterinarian and/or District/County Attorney's Office.
    - iv. Once the necropsy is completed and the canine is released for burial, the Canine Supervisor and/or Fire Marshal will be contacted for the burial arrangements.
    - v. If a necropsy is not ordered, the handler will contact the Canine Supervisor and/or Fire Marshal for burial arrangements.