

# Civil Defence Search Dog Policy

## Introduction

Civil Defence acquired its first search dog in 2006. As of January 2016, Civil Defence has four search dog teams based in Dublin, Meath, Laois and Tipperary. These comprise 2 air-scenting dogs used in searching for live persons and 2 cadaver dogs used in searches for deceased persons. These dogs are regularly called out to assist An Garda Síochána in missing person's searches throughout the State. The volunteer search dog handlers have shown great commitment to this work.

This policy was written following a review conducted during the autumn of 2015. The following groups were consulted in the course of the review – An Garda Síochána, Revenue's Dog Unit, Search and Rescue Dogs Association, Irish Search Dogs Association, some Civil Defence Officers and also volunteers currently involved with search dogs.

## Resource

Civil Defence will maintain its four existing search dog teams (K9 teams). Subject to suitable volunteers coming forward this may be expanded to a maximum of 8 search dog teams. This number will not exceed a maximum of 4 air scenting dog teams and 4 cadaver dog teams. Some of the cadaver dogs shall also be trained as drowned victim recovery dogs, i.e. capable of operating in a boat.

Civil Defence Branch will determine where the K9 teams are to be based. The teams will generally be based in the centre of the country to allow for regular joint training.

Prior sanction must be sought from Civil Defence Branch before any further search dogs are acquired. Civil Defence dog teams are a national rather than a local resource and shall be available to travel throughout the State.

## Training

Training will be based on the relevant sections of the UK Association of Chief Police Officers standard, known as ACPO. This British standard is used by both an Garda Síochána and the Revenue Dog Unit.

Detailed records must be kept of all training. A standard training log will be developed by Civil Defence Branch in consultation with our existing dog handlers. This will specify the minimum number of training sessions per year required of all Civil Defence K9 teams. Ongoing training will continue to be organised by the Civil Defence dog handlers, subject to some external supervision, and the general oversight of the Civil Defence Branch.

All K9 teams, i.e. both the dog and the handler, must be independently assessed at least every 2 years. Civil Defence shall have both an independent training supervisor and a separate assessor. These individuals shall hold the appropriate ACPO qualifications.

### **Prospective Dog Handlers**

Prospective Civil Defence search dog handlers will be required to attend at least 3 training sessions with our existing K9 teams. This is to ensure that they understand the commitment required of a search dog handler. The candidate should be qualified in missing person search skills, radio communications and first aid. They must be willing to travel throughout Ireland. They must also be recommended for this role by their Civil Defence Officer.

Before being allowed to commence training prospective handlers will be subject to interview by a board chaired by Civil Defence Branch. This board may include a Civil Defence Officer and an independent person with expertise in this area. The board must be satisfied that the volunteer has both the commitment and the qualities required to make an effective search dog handler. An individual training plan will be devised for each new dog handler.

### **Dogs**

Dogs can either be bought in pre-trained or can be trained up by the handler. Approval must be sought from the Civil Defence Branch prior to purchasing a trained search dog. Dogs purchased by Civil Defence are the property of the organisation rather than the handler.

K9 teams, including trainee dogs, which have not passed an independent assessment (approved by the Civil Defence Branch) will not be allowed attend at missing person searches.

Civil Defence search dogs must be transported in appropriate vehicles. Where possible, and within available resources, Civil Defence Branch will provide financial assistance towards the purchase of suitable vehicles, the purchase of dogs, training costs, veterinary expenses food and transport.

In the event of any concerns about animal welfare the K9 team will be stood down immediately and the Civil Defence Branch informed by the Civil Defence Officer.

This policy may be revised at any time by the Civil Defence Branch. It will be formally reviewed after a maximum of five years.

Policy & Planning  
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