

Working with SCSARDA

Introduction

SCSARDA is a team of volunteer professionals and highly trained search dogs dedicated to helping find those who are lost, from children to hikers, to Alzheimer's patients, to drowning victims to human remains. Ideally, your agency identified SCSARDA as a possible resource and perhaps has even trained with us in the field or through workshops and seminars. If not, you may have heard of us through referral from another agency, whether emergency services, sheriff or fire department. We're glad you've considered us as a possible specialized tool for your search and rescue needs.

How soon should you call out SCSARDA and what information do we need?

SAR K9s are best used **early in the search effort**. As time elapses in a search, the scent picture can change -- and scent contamination increases with more searchers in the field. Though SAR dogs are trained to work through contamination, it is always more desirable to have an uncontaminated area. Also, as each hour passes, the possible search area grows if the victim is moving. If you determine that you need a specialized K9 SAR team the sooner you call SCSARDA, the better.

Much of SCSARDA's training occurs at night and **our team is equipped for night conditions**. K9 SAR teams often find searching at night to be productive for several reasons. A lost person typically will find a place to rest and may fall asleep. This allows the scent to pool and may make it easier for K9s to locate the subject. Scouting conditions are generally better for the dogs. Also, many of the citizen volunteers go home and leave a less contaminated area to search.

If you are uncertain about the need for a K9 Team, we are happy to be called and **placed on standby**. Since we are a civilian team made up of all volunteers, and our team is located throughout the upper 1/3 of the state of South Carolina, portions of our team can often respond rapidly wherever the location of the search. But we also appreciate a standby call so that we can mobilize in preparation for activation.

In a **search for human remains**, there is usually less urgency if the call is for a clandestine grave or scattered remains, and many of these calls are scheduled on a date convenient to the requesting agency and SCSARDA. Searches for drowning victims are treated with more urgency because everyone wants to get the body out of the water as soon as possible and using dogs to pinpoint a drowning victim can increase the safety for the recovery divers by limiting the area they must scan.

What does SCSARDA need during a call-out?

A **briefing** by the Incident Command on the search, as well as a clear understanding of our role in your search process. We are capable of fully planning a search operation or working under direct supervision of the incident command and deploying our resources as directed. We have many hours of experience and training in finding missing people as that is our sole focus. We also have state of the art computerized topographical and aerial maps of South Carolina, Georgia, and North Carolina as well as GPS units for all

K9 handlers. Our search efforts are well documented to assist in planning should the event expand and to aid your own reporting purposes.

Opportunity to conduct a **missing person questionnaire** with a knowledgeable family member; we prefer that a representative from the call-out emergency agency is also present.

Opportunity to obtain our own **scent articles**. Most K9 SAR teams prefer to collect their own article; we prefer that a representative from the call-out emergency agency is also present.

A place to park 8-10 vehicles where the dogs will be cool and safe, and one that facilitates a unified command structure. For live person searches, SCSARDA operates a base trailer, a generator, small radio tower, other communications equipment, and various other tools that are best deployed near Incident Command. We are capable of scaling up or down as the search demands.

A full operational search period of eight deployable hours; during hot summer months, we typically do not use SAR dogs during afternoon hours, so eight deployable hours may stretch from early morning into the late evening and night. Our team can still conduct ground searches without the dogs during those times when conditions are not optimal for them.

After working a full operational search period, SCSARDA will assess the search strategy and tactics, special needs, any new information, and other matters to determine if we will suggest continuing the search effort.

We often place other trusted K9 SAR teams on standby to serve as our backup should a search run into a second or third day, but will ask your permission before we bring them in. SCSARDA usually will not deploy solely for a half hour of "hasty searches" or other brief periods that do not effectively use the unique skills of our search dogs.

The ability to start dogs in areas that may have been searched before. Depending on the nature of the terrain, the challenges of the search, and scent conditions, we may ask to start our dogs in areas around the Point Last Seen or other areas, even if those areas have already been searched.

How should you best organize different groups during a search?

Consider **placing the staging area and the incident command away from the Point Last Seen (PLS) or the victim's residence**. This can help preserve the scene for deployment of trailing dogs, keep the press away from the family, and keep the family from accidentally overhearing delicate information.

Acquire and distribute to arriving SAR resources **a recent picture of the victim**.

Designate a public information officer to help inform the news media and assure that information released to the public is accurate and appropriate. A public information officer can also help lessen contact between the media and SAR teams that may slow the search effort.

Designate an area for family members separate from the staging area or K9 base and nearer Incident Command; family members have similar scents and can hinder the search ability of K9 teams, while having them nearer Incident Command allows easier access for them to answer any new questions.

Consider using other trained resources such as local CERT teams. Though they may not train specifically for a wilderness search, they are trained for search tactics that can be employed in rural or wilderness environments. Ask if they are covered under a liability policy. (Making arrangements with these resources is also best done during the pre-planning stages, rather than at an actual search event). Local hunters often have a clear understanding of the terrain in the area and may provide useful information for searchers.

Allow untrained volunteers who are present at the search to contain the search area, distribute brochures, and provide local knowledge of the search area. It is generally best to deploy them away from the major search areas as they may inadvertently remove, miss, or destroy valuable clues such as footprints or dropped articles. They also present a liability for the agency if someone gets hurt or commits a crime during the search.

How are K9s used in the field?

Dog teams are best deployed by those who know how SAR K9s are trained and how they work -- usually a **K9 team leader who collaborates within a unified command structure**.

Suggested first deployment strategies often include **fielding a trailing dog to discover direction of travel of the victim**, or hasty searches along high probability areas along trails, roads, around ponds, and other areas; if a law enforcement K9 has already been used, information from the K9 officer who ran the trail is very important.

Often "**detailing**" of areas occurs later, as information from initial deployments flows back to K9 base. After a direction of travel is established, **area search dogs can be deployed in sections, extending out from the direction of travel**.

For persons who went missing near their home, typically dementia patients and children, searching areas near the home that have already been searched is worth the effort. These victims may be evading their searchers and may be constantly moving into and out of the search area. They often wind up in places that don't make sense to a healthy adult human's mind, such as in heavy brush or under buildings.

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With missing-person searches, as with any type of emergency response, planning and preparation are the best ways to avoid problems. By developing a relationship with a K9 SAR organization and training with them, you can have another tool at your disposal to improve the chances of a positive outcome for the victim.