

National Network Canine Detection Services (NNCDS)

Area Search

Certification Standard

Effective 9-24-2026

Purpose of Certification

This certification evaluates the operational effectiveness of a canine team in Live Find Area Search under diverse conditions, ensuring competency in:

- A. The canine's ability to independently and effectively search for and locate live human subjects within an assigned search area.
- B. The canine's ability to maintain productive search behavior, endurance, and appropriate range throughout the search assignment.
- C. The handler's ability to recognize and interpret canine behavior, including changes associated with locating and working human scent.
- D. The canine's ability to communicate a find through a trained final response that is clearly recognized by the handler and evaluator.
- E. The handler's ability to develop, execute, and modify an effective search strategy based on terrain, vegetation, environmental conditions, scent movement, and canine behavior.
- F. The team's ability to provide effective coverage of the assigned search area while demonstrating appropriate canine independence, handler control, and operational efficiency.

2. Canine and Handler Requirements

A. Canine Requirements

- 1) Canine must be at least 12 months old at the time of testing.
- 2) The canine must remain under the handler's control at all times.
- 3) Aggression toward handlers, evaluators, or other dogs will result in immediate failure.

B. Handler Requirements

- 1) Handler must provide proof of at least six (6) months of Area Search training upon request.
- 2) Any abuse or harsh handling of the canine during testing will result in automatic failure.
- 3) Handlers must demonstrate proper care of their canine at all times.
- 4) Handlers are recommended to take the following courses prior to certification:
 - a) Crime Scene Preservation Training.
 - b) CPR and Basic First Aid (human and canine).
 - c) Blood borne pathogens
 - d) Hazardous Materials Awareness (NFPA 472 or CFR 291910.120(q)(6)(i)).
 - e) Incident Command System (ICS) 100 & 200 and NIMS IS-700 & 800.

3. Evaluation Process

- A. Certification remains valid for 1 year from the date of successful completion.
- B. A team that fails certification must wait 60 days before retesting.
- C. The handler must articulate an initial search strategy based upon the assigned area, terrain, vegetation, environmental conditions, wind/scent movement, and canine search behavior. The handler must demonstrate the ability to modify the search strategy when conditions or canine behavior indicate modification is appropriate.
- D. The handler must advise the evaluator of the dog's trained final response. This response must be freely offered by the canine without prompt from the handler.
- E. The canine must demonstrate independent search behavior appropriate to the terrain and environmental conditions. Handler direction and control are permitted; however, the canine must demonstrate active searching independent of simply following the handler's travel path.
- F. The handler is encouraged to utilize a handheld GPS and or other online mapping software (such as CALTOPO).

4. Comprehensive Area Search Assessment

Station	Size Area	Subject(s)	Time Limit
Wilderness	40-60 acres	1	*1.5 hours

**Evaluator discretion may be used to adjust the time limit when terrain, vegetation, environmental conditions, or other factors significantly increase the complexity of the assigned search area, provided canine and handler safety are not compromised.*

Additional Conditions:

- All certification searches will be conducted single-blind. The handler shall have no prior knowledge of the subject's location.
- A scent article will be available but provided only upon handler's request.
- Subjects will be placed in position at least 30 minutes prior to certification.
- Subjects may be concealed in a structure such as a tent, shed, etc., if one is located within the assigned search area.
- Subjects used in the day-to-day training activities of the team being certified shall not be used in the certification process. Subjects also may not have been used in training within the last 30 days.
- Each search area may be used for no more than two certifications.
- The handler may rest, water, or otherwise appropriately manage the canine during the evaluation. Any such breaks will count against the allotted search time.
- The handler shall be provided an electronic map of the search area (i.e. GPS coordinates, CALTOPO link).
- The canine must locate and perform its trained final response on the subject independent of directions from the handler upon initial location of the subject.
- Any false trained final response constitutes a failure.

- Handler must be able to articulate the location of the subject (once found) via GPS coordinates to the evaluator.
- Finding the subject is mandatory, but finding the subject alone is insufficient to pass all requirements of the certification.

5. Retesting Policy

Retesting Due to Safety Concerns

- If a test is halted due to safety (severe weather, hazards), the team may retake the full field portion without penalty.

6. Test Results & Debriefing

- A. Handlers receive results during an official debriefing with the Evaluator.
- B. The debrief provides constructive feedback on strengths and areas for improvement.
- C. Decisions made by the Evaluator are final.