NNCDS
Trailing Standards

Effective 10-29-2026

1. Purpose of Certification

Scent-specific trailing tests involve the canine/handler team searching for and following a specific person's odor trail across different surface types after the canine has been "scented" on an object containing the target's odor. The dog works from an article to a person. The goal is for the canine to detect and follow the matching odor trail, excluding all other odor trails, to a specific person and/or location associated with that person. These canines are used to find a specific person and/or location associated with that person after scenting the canine on an object containing the target's (trail layers) odor.

2. Canine and Handler Requirements

1. Canine must be at least 10 months old at the time of testing.
2. Handler must provide proof of at least six (6) months of training records upon request.
3. The canine must always remain under the handler's control.
4. Aggression toward handlers, evaluators, or other dogs will result in immediate failure.
5. Any abuse or harsh handling of the canine during testing will result in automatic failure.
6. Handlers must demonstrate proper care of their canine at all times.
7. Handlers are encouraged to take the following courses prior to certification:
    - Crime Scene Preservation Training.
    - CPR and Basic First Aid (human and canine).
    - Bloodborne pathogens
    - Hazardous Materials Awareness (NFPA 472 or CFR 291910.120(q)(6)(i)).
    - Incident Command System (ICS) 100 & 200 and NIMS IS-700 & 800.

3. Evaluation Process

1. Certification remains valid for 1 year from the date of successful completion.
2. A team that fails certification must wait 30 days before retesting.
3. The handler must advise the evaluator of the dog's trained final response. This response should be freely offered by the canine without prompt from the handler.
4. The handler is encouraged to utilize a handheld GPS and/or other online mapping software (such as CALTOPO).
5. All distractors will be naturally occurring in the environment.

4. Comprehensive Trailing Search Assessment

Each team may restart once during testing. The maximum time is 1 hour per mile, and the handler may declare one 10-minute break at any time.

If the testing official deems it necessary, they may stop testing immediately for safety reasons involving the official, handler, trail layer, or canine.
The test will simulate a mission-oriented test environment.
The target (trail layer) must not be someone that the dog has repeatedly trained on in any live-find discipline (trailing, area, avalanche, or disaster); nor someone that regularly associates with the dog (i.e., family, teammates, etc.); nor someone who has recently (within 90 days) been used as a training subject for the dog. The trail layer (s) should preferably be someone the dog has never trailed before.

The testing official is responsible for the safety of the testing site and for properly controlling scent-article retrieval for the canine handler.
Scent articles must be obtained directly from the target (track layer) using a sterile gauze pad, held only by the target, and placed inside a sealed container, such as a Ziploc bag.
There shall be one trail set for each trailing candidate/dog team. Multiple teams shall not run the same trail. Special exceptions may be made if the previous testing canine did not complete the start.
Trails for each participant shall not be laid in the same pattern.
Length and turns:
Trail length shall be a minimum of ¾ to 1 mile, with no less than 3 turns. Maximum of 6 turns.

Trail layers shall follow the evaluator's exact instructions when laying the designated trail. The trail layer will start at the beginning and walk to the end.
The place last seen (PLS) will allow the initial direction of travel to be in any direction within ±90 degrees (a 180-degree arc) from where the trail layer approached.
No indication of the subject's initial direction of travel should be present at the PLS.
Set the trail to minimize the likelihood of an air scent on the subject whenever possible.
No discontinuous/skips or other features should be placed onto the trail. This trail should be laid out in a basic, uncomplicated manner.
The candidate team shall be allowed time to perform a start routine/scent inventory immediately prior to the start of the trail. The candidate team should be informed that this can take no longer than 5 min. Official trail time begins when the handler scents the dog or issues a "search/trail" command.
The Evaluator/s shall make every attempt to ensure that the trail starts in an area with limited additional access once the trail is laid to avoid additional unknown contamination

The testing official will follow the handler and in no way interfere with or distract the canine. Due to climatic conditions, the age of the trail shall be at least one hour, with a maximum of three (12) hours.

Surface cover at the start of the trail will be a normal operational scenario but will run at least 500 feet on pavement or periodically with pavement, rock, and/or gravel, cross a stream if available, and cross two (2) fresh human trails. There will be at least 3 turns in this trail. The suspect will remain at the end of the trail until found.
This test will begin at the direction of the testing evaluator in the designated area. The

handler will not be instructed in which direction the trail has been laid. The handler may encourage his/her dog as needed with commands and praise.
All tests given to the K9 team will be pass/fail. The testing evaluator will determine if the team will be certified upon the completion of the test. The handler and dog will be considered as a team, and it is the team that will be certified. If the dog changes handlers, a new team exists, and the team must be certified.
This certification will be valid for one (1) year from the date of issue

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.