



Mid-South Search & Rescue Dog Association

Serving Tennessee, Mississippi, Arkansas and surrounding states

Guidelines for Flankers[©]

Flankers are the glue, the wheels, the muscle; also the eyes, the ears, and the voice of the K-9 field team.

While the K-9 handler should also be capable of tracking the team's position, especially relative to the command post—and should also be able to handle radio communications and maintain a vigilance for clues—the handler's primary job when fielded with his/her dog is to observe and interpret the K-9's subtle body language, and to monitor and support the K-9's performance.

Thus it falls to the flanker(s) to provide the vital and necessary support that allows the dog handler to more effectively focus on the dog:

Ideally, there should be two or more flankers per K-9 team:

***The Communications Flanker** is responsible for radio communications with Incident Command.

- ♦Typically, this flanker will report the team's condition and position to Command with a check-in call every 10-15 minutes. The preference of Incident Command regarding reporting intervals should be determined before leaving the base on deployment.

- ♦The Communications Flanker should also determine any necessary communications codes before leaving the base. E.g. if victim is found deceased, a predetermined code should be used to convey this information to incident command.

- ♦Any new information, questions, or concerns that need to be transmitted to Incident Command should be conveyed by the Communications Flanker, as the spokesperson for his/her field team.

- ♦It is advisable that the Communications Flanker also carry either an extra radio, or replacement batteries for his/her radio so that communications may not be lost or disrupted. Alternatively, another member of the K-9 field team may carry a radio for use as backup.

***The Navigation Flanker** is responsible for keeping track of the team's location in the field, and shall keep the Communications Flanker apprised of the team's position to ensure that accurate location information is relayed to Incident Command.

- ♦This flanker should carry and use both a map of the area where the team is searching, and a compass and/or GPS.

- ♦The Navigation Flanker should be able to indicate on the map the area covered by the K-9 team, either tracing the trail followed by the mantrailing K-9, or noting the perimeter of the sector cleared by the air-scenting K-9 team. It is the Navigation Flanker's responsibility to convey this information to Incident Command upon the team's return to base. The Navigation Flanker should also share this information with the K-9 handler to ensure consistency and accuracy in the report to be submitted later by the K-9 handler.

- ♦The Navigation Flanker should at all times be aware of the K-9 team's field position—both relative to the command post, and on the flanker's map of the search area in which the team is working.

- ♦In the event of a recall to base, it is the Navigation Flanker's responsibility to lead the team back to the command post by the most expeditious route, with appropriate consideration for the team's safety.

***All Flankers** are responsible for using their observational skills—and identifying potential clues that may lead to the subject's recovery.

- ♦Potential clues should be not be moved or disturbed, but should be clearly marked with flagging tape, and their location reported to Incident Command by the Communications Flanker, after consultation with the Navigation Flanker to determine the location coordinates or description.

- ♦Potential clues consist of anything that Nature did not originally place in that area—and suspicious disturbances of or damage to those things that Nature did place there.

- ♦Although not essential, it is advisable that flankers have some familiarity with K-9 search methods—the more experience they have, the better. Flankers will thus be able to also use their observational skills to note changes in the dog's attitude or behavior that, due to intervening vegetation or terrain, might have escaped the handler's eye—changes that could indicate the presence of scent.