



## Mid-South Search & Rescue Dog Association

*Serving Tennessee, Mississippi, Arkansas and surrounding states*

[www.mssarda.org](http://www.mssarda.org)

### **Guidelines for Mock Victims for K-9 Search Exercises**<sup>®</sup>

The most important person in a search K-9 training exercise is the mock victim or “target” the dog is tasked to locate. The target’s behavior can not only make the difference between success and failure during training, but can also leave the dog confused, at best—and unhappy and unwilling to pursue future search training, at worst.

Targets or mock victims must wish to see the dog team succeed and progress, and willingly invest their time and effort toward achieving that success.

There are a few rules and tips that should guide participating mock victims, and ensure their safety and well-being during training exercises:

**Dress appropriately.** Long pants and long-sleeved shirts (or jackets to wear over a short-sleeved shirt) are necessary for protection from tall grass, undergrowth, and briars, as well as insects. Please wear adequate footwear—tennis shoes are acceptable; boots or high-topped hiking shoes offer even better protection and ankle support in the field.

**Wear or bring skin protection.** Sunscreen may be needed; insect repellent may be applied before you go into the field. As long as it is not sprayed recklessly, in the immediate vicinity of the dogs, during application, it will not affect their noses—nor their ability to locate you. (A fabric softener sheet tucked inside waistband and socks helps to deter ticks and chiggers.)

**Bring a water bottle, a book, a blanket, handheld puzzles or games.** You may be asked to remain in your hiding place for long periods to allow a scent pool to build, duplicating a real-case scenario for the dog. WATER IS ESSENTIAL, especially during warm weather, so be sure you have your water bottle with you before going into the field. Cell phones may be carried with you, but please do not use them unless there is an emergency. Dogs have excellent hearing, and we prefer that they find you by searching for your scent, rather than the sound of your voice.

**Prepare and bring a scent article.** This item will be used when the dogs are scented to search for you, so they will know who to find. It can be any small item—fabric, plastic, paper, metal, wood—that you have carried or worn on your person for an hour or so. It can be a disposable item like a cotton ball or Kleenex or crumpled piece of paper, or it can be keys, cigarette lighter, sunglasses, hairclip, etc. Make sure that no one touches this item except you—and place it into a zip-lock bag to isolate your scent before you offer it to the K-9 handler. (If you are unable to prepare a scent article in advance, we will guide you in manufacturing one after you arrive at training.)

**Use your radio as instructed.** If you have a two-way FRS radio (or walkie-talkie), please bring it with you. If not, you will be issued one to use during training, and instructed in its use. The radio is to be used for conveying essential information between K-9 handler and mock victim—not for personal conversations between mock victims. Radio channels must remain open so that other teams may remain in communication with the base coordinator. Also, as previously noted, dogs have excellent hearing, and we prefer that they find you by searching for your scent, rather than the sound of your voice.

**Follow instructions.** It is vital that mock victims are committed to building the dog's success rather than trying to “trick” the dog during training exercises. Training exercises are always designed with a specific goal in mind—to focus on one particular aspect of the dog's behavior and performance that needs improvement. Dogs performing these exercises are being guided by a handler whose directions and instructions to the dog are based on the expectation that the subject will be where he has been instructed to be. Being “tricked” by a subject who is not where he/she has been instructed to be is not a victory for the subject and a failure for the dog—it is simply wasted training time that has achieved no progress, but instead, has confused and disheartened a K-9 who is doing his honest best to succeed at a job he loves. **PLEASE FOLLOW THE K-9 HANDLER'S INSTRUCTIONS AS EXACTLY AS POSSIBLE WHEN WORKING TO ASSIST THE DOG TEAM.**

**Ask questions!** If there is any aspect of your assignment as mock victim that you do not understand, please ask. And ask to have it repeated again until it is clear. We would much rather explain and repeat explanations in greater, clearer detail, than fail to gain any value from an exercise because of a simple misunderstanding.

**THANK YOU FOR VOLUNTEERING!!**

You are performing a valuable service that is essential to developing our dog teams to their fullest potential—and improving their skills. Someday a life may depend on those skills that your efforts have helped us to gain.