

PROTOCOLS FOR ESTABLISHING DOUBLE-BLIND EXERCISES FOR K9 TEAM CERTIFICATIONS

Double-blind testing, a scientific research method, minimizes bias and increases the reliability of outcomes. By incorporating double-blind exercises in Odor Recognition Tests and Certifications for law enforcement detection K9 teams, we enhance the validity and reliability of those exercises and maximize the objectivity of the certification process.

Definition

SWGDOG defines a double-blind (DB) exercise by two modalities:

- Scientific usage – A DB exercise occurs when the subject and the observer/evaluator do not know which treatments and/or manipulations are given to which subjects.
- Operational usage – In the evaluation of a K9, the assessor and the handler do not know the location of the target odor or whether the target odor is present. In effect, the search is a blank or null search.

Administering the Double-Blind Process

Personnel

These DB exercises require certifying officials and site monitors.

Certifying Official

One certifying official (CO) can oversee and administer two different sites. For expediency, it is suggested to have two site monitors, one for the vehicle site and one for the container/luggage site.

Duties of the CO:

- Planning and implementing DB exercises.
- Assigning duties to the Site Monitor (SM).
- Supervising logistics of each DB site
 - Setting up the site.
 - Procurement and placement of training aids.
 - Maintaining records of placement of training aids.
 - Using a certified detection team for screening.

- Scheduling teams for exercises.
- Distributing and collecting certification sheets and envelopes these duties may be assigned to the SM as directed by the CO.
- Removing training aids when exercises are completed.

Site Monitor

Duties of the Site Monitor (SM):

- Receives assignments from the CO.
- Monitor the site checkpoint.
- Ensures the integrity of exercise locations.
- Limits access to nonparticipants.

Site Selection

Site selection for a DB exercise does not have to be complicated. The site should allow multiple applications by detection dog teams. The flow of each team starting and finishing the exercise should be smooth and prevent contact with other teams working simultaneously.

For law enforcement canine teams, the certification process can be overwhelming because annual certifications usually occur at annual conferences or training sessions with many canine teams. With proper planning and logistics, a DB exercise can be fair and impartial in these environments, can minimize bias and contamination, and handle many detection teams in one day.

Select a site that has controlled access, compartments, or doors, where possible, an environmentally controlled space is important. Selecting a site that is commonly used by the detection canine team during their daily duties would give the appearance of a realistic field application versus a more clinical laboratory site.

Areas such as large empty warehouse spaces, parking facilities, storage facilities, and empty office facilities have been utilized with success and at minimal expense. Task-specific exercises will determine the type of sites required – that is, vehicles in enclosed warehouse spaces, luggage, or container searches inside empty office spaces.

A site should have a control point where the SM controls the ingress and egress of each team. Ideally, exercise sites should prevent interference by anyone not associated with the testing – that is, no public or cleaning and/or maintenance staff.

Specifically, each site will have the following:

- **Staging area:** Teams awaiting their exercise time wait and/or give their dogs water and/or bathroom breaks, etc. in a designated area. A staging area should be near the DB exercise site.

The site should avoid contact between participants, as the area might be used by teams waiting to redo an exercise.

- **SM checkpoint:** This location is critical to maintain the integrity of the DB exercise. This location requires the SM to register each team according to an assigned start time. The SM is placed to prevent people other than those participating in the DB exercise from accessing exercise sites.
- **Certification sheets:** The SM presents certification worksheets to a canine team.
- **Random number generator (RNG):** Randomness is essential in a DB exercise to minimize bias. The CO uses RNG results to determine the exercise location (A or B), the number of training hides to be used, and where the hides will be placed. For the rest of this document, the abbreviation RNG will be used to identify results from RNG generator software.
- **Signage:** Large, readable signs should be posted in easily viewable areas to alert that police K9 training is being conducted, and to identify building assignments (location A or B). Placards numbered 1 through 4 are placed on the windshields of vehicles to provide clear identification for the K9 team. Placards or other identifiers are used on containers and/or luggage for the same purpose.
- **Confidential viewing area:** When DB exercises are to be observed without interference, it is strongly suggested to assign a separate viewing area for those officials. The officials' presence must not be visible to or noticeable by K9 teams, so the teams are not influenced. Ideally, remote viewing by video feed would be employed.

Setting Up a Vehicle Site

The CO is the only person who has knowledge of the number of training hides to be used, if any, and where the hides will be placed. during the DB exercise. Each handler will be advised in a briefing that the exercise where their canine is to be deployed "may or may not contain a contraband odor."

The SM controls which teams have access to and must not be able to view the actual canine application. The SM is responsible for site security.

Two identical facilities in which to park vehicles are used in the exercise. Large, empty warehouse spaces in which four vehicles can be parked are ideal. If warehouses are not available, you can use large open spaces where vehicles are parked but not viewable by other K9 teams.

Each search location is identified by a letter A or B. Using RNG results, sites are determined by even number (A) or odd number (B) before a K9 team conducts an application.

Where logistically possible:

- The vehicles should be parked in similar or identical configurations.
- The vehicles should be identically spaced.

- The vehicles are of similar or identical make and model.
- The vehicles are easily identified by number, such as placards with numbers 1, 2, 3, or 4 on the windshield.
- Use only the exteriors of vehicles.
- Utilize one hide per vehicle as defined by RNG result.
- All dog teams should not have had access to or previously visited the DB exercise site.
- The training aids should be set a minimum of 30 minutes before the first application.
- A certified detection dog team will be used to clear the vehicles before placement of training aids and after training aids have been hidden.

Providing a Random Process

RNG results are used onsite by the CO to determine how many training hides are placed, which location will be used for an application, and which area of a vehicle and which container/luggage will contain a training hide.

Vehicles

Four vehicles used for site A and four vehicles are used for site B. The vehicles are assigned a training hide by RNG result using numbers 1 through 4. For example, if RNG results in a 2, then two vehicles will contain training hides.

The location where the training aid is placed is similarly determined by RNG results. A vehicle is divided into four sections. The training hide is hidden so that it is not accessible or visible to the canine and handler.

To ensure the integrity of exercises, a nonparticipating certified detection dog team screens the exercise before and after training hides are set.

This process is repeated for the vehicles in the second location.

Luggage

Six to ten pieces of luggage are used in each room. RNG results onsite BY WHOM determines how many pieces of luggage will contain a training hide. For example, if RNG results or dice roll results in a 2, then two pieces of luggage will contain a training hide. From zero to two training aids are to be hidden, based on association guidelines and/or the discretion of the certifying official. Additional RNG results identify which luggage and/or containers will contain training hides.

All training hides must be placed so that they are not accessible or visible to the canine and the handler.

To ensure the integrity of exercises, a nonparticipating certified detection dog team screens the exercise before and after training hides are set.

This process is repeated for the luggage in the second location.

To ensure fairness and impartiality:

- A certifying official (CO) will generate RNG results before the canine team enters the exercise location to determine whether the team inspects the A location or the B location.
- Each team is notified that they have seven minutes to conduct the application.
- Each K9 team performs the canine application with no other persons present or visible.
- Upon completing the exercise each K9 handler records the results of the exercise on the certification sheet, places the sheet in the supplied envelope, and hands the envelope to the CO.
- Upon leaving the exercise site, the K9 handler who worked the exercise will have no contact with other K9 teams participating in the exercise,

Process for Placing Training Aids on Vehicles

Vehicles are assigned numbers 1 through 4 in sequence by the CO. Vehicle numbers are displayed prominently on the windshields of the vehicles.

The CO generates RNG results to determine how many training hides will be placed, but not more than one hide per vehicle.

The CO generates a second RNG results to determine which vehicle(s) will receive the training hide. A third RNG results determine where on the vehicle the training hide will be placed. Quadrants are assigned beginning at the left front headlight and counted clockwise.

This process is repeated for vehicles in location B.

Process for Placing Training Aids on Luggage

Each piece of luggage is assigned a number from 1 through 6 by the CO, with the numbers displayed prominently on the luggage or on a nearby placard.

The CO generates RNG results to determine how many training hides will be placed (from none to two depending on the certification guidelines). A second RNG results determine which luggage will receive a training hide.

Double-Blind Vehicle Protocols Checklist

Before the Vehicle Exercise

- Arrange for two identical or near-identical exercise sites designated as Location A and Location B.
- Park vehicles in a straight line or simple formation. The same arrangement should be used at both locations.
- Allow enough space for K9 teams to work around vehicles (6-foot minimum distance suggested)
- Safety check
- K9 teams briefing and/or staging area determined.
- A designated checkpoint will be assigned and staffed by an SM. The checkpoint should be close enough so that the SM can manage the K9 teams participating in the exercises.
- Print out certification sheets, amounts and locations sheets. Assign control number if necessary.
- Hand certification sheet to handler. These sheets are to be held by handlers throughout the certification exercises.
- Identify confidential viewing areas for certifying officials if necessary.

Preparing Vehicles

- Number each vehicle with a visible sign on the windshield.
- Use a noncompeting certified detection dog team to clear each vehicle.
- Use RNG to determine the number of hides, from 0 to 2.
- Use RNG to determine which vehicle(s) will contain a training hide, from 1 to 4.
- Use RNG to determine which quadrant of a vehicle will contain a training hide.

- Place the hide(s). The training hides should be set a minimum of 30 minutes before searches begin.
- Use a noncompeting certified detection dog team to determine whether odor is present.
- Repeat each task at the B location after completing all tasks at the A location.

During the Exercise

- SM confirms that the site is free of people before each K9 team conducts the application. No one is allowed in the exercise area while an exercise is in progress. The SM is responsible for security.
- Before an application begins, the CO generates RNG results to determine which exercise location will be used. An even number indicates Location A, and an odd number indicates Location B.
- The handler records the results of the search on the supplied certification sheet, places the certification sheet in the supplied envelope, and hands the envelope to the CO upon completion of the exercise.
- SM refrains from communicating with each K9 team.
- When the K9 team has completed the exercise, they will continue to the other exercise locations and complete those exercises before returning for retest if necessary.

After the Vehicle Exercise

- CO determines whether each K9 team has passed the exercise.
- If a team fails a DB exercise, the CO determines whether the team has been successful in other components (such as the single-blind components). The CO will allow a retest at the opposite DB site in the exercise venue that same day. The CO will schedule the retest sequence with the K9 team, so that the retest will minimally impact the ongoing DB exercises.
- If a team was unable to pass the complete set of certification exercises, the CO will counsel the handler on training remedies and advise the handler to reschedule the certification.

- At the end of the certification day, the CO reviews and completes all documents from the certification exercises and forwards those documents to the association secretary in a timely manner.

Double Blind Container/Luggage Protocols Checklist

Before the Container/Luggage Exercise

- Arrange for two identical or near-identical exercise sites designated as Location A and Location B.
- Safety check
- K9 teams briefing and/or staging area determined.
- Monitor check point and/or monitor briefed by certifying official.
- Print hard copies of double-blind certification sheets, amounts and locations sheets. Assign control number if necessary.
- Hand certification sheets and envelope to handler.
- Identify confidential viewing areas for officials as needed.

Preparing Containers/Luggage

- Place luggage and/or containers in a simple formation in both locations.
- Space each container and/or luggage three to four feet apart. Allow space for canines to individually inspect each item.
- Number each item clearly by a placard or sign.
- Use a noncompeting certified detection dog team to clear each item.

- Use RNG to determine the number of hides, from 0 to 2.
- Use RNG to determine which containers and/or luggage will contain a training hide, from 1 to 6.
- Place the hide(s). The training hides should be placed a minimum of 30 minutes before searches begin.
- Use a noncompeting certified detection dog team to determine whether odor is present.
- Repeat each task at the B location after completing all tasks at the A location.

During the Exercise

- SM confirms that the site is free of people before each K9 team conducts the application. No one is allowed in the exercise area while the exercise is in progress. SM is responsible for security.
- Before an application begins, the CO uses RNG to determine which exercise location will be used. An even number indicates Location A, and an odd number indicates Location B.
- The handler records the results of the search on the supplied certification sheet, places the certification sheet in the supplied envelope, and hands the envelope to the CO.
- The SM refrains from communicating with each K9 team.
- When the K9 team has completed the exercise, they will continue to the other exercise locations and complete those exercises before returning for retest if necessary.

After the Containers/Luggage Exercise

- The CO determines whether each K9 team has passed the exercise. K9 teams are informed of their results after all components of the certification process are completed.
- If a team fails a DB exercise, the CO determines whether the team has been successful with other components (such as the single-blind components). If so, the CO will allow a retest at the unused DB site the same day. The CO schedules the retest with the K9 team, with the goal to cause minimal impact to ongoing exercises.

- ❑ If a K9 team is unable to pass the certification the CO will counsel the handler on training remedies and advise the handler to reschedule the certification.
- ❑ The CO reviews, completes all documents from exercises, and forwards those documents to the association secretary in a timely manner.

