


FAIRFAX COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT  GENERAL ORDER	SUBJECT: CANINE OPERATIONS		NUMBER: 531
	EFFECTIVE DATE: August 11, 2022	REVIEW: August 2025	
RESPONSIBLE ENTITY: OPERATIONS SUPPORT BUREAU			<input type="checkbox"/> New Directive <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Replaces: 530.1 <input type="checkbox"/> Revised:
ACCREDITATION STANDARDS	CALEA: 41.1.5	VLEPSC: OPR. 01.09, OPR.05.01	

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this General Order is to establish guidelines and procedures for use and deployment of Police Canine Teams assigned to the Canine Section.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Fairfax County Police Department (FCPD) to use Canine Teams to mitigate risk and support police operations in the detection and prevention of crime. Police Service Dogs (PSD) possess superior senses of smell, hearing, and physical capabilities and should be considered when searching for items of evidence, missing or fleeing individuals, or controlled substances. The utilization of a PSD requires strict adherence to both Department policy and procedures that channel and control both their use of force potential and specialized capabilities into lawful crime prevention and control activities. Certain canines are highly trained in the detection of controlled substances, and though the use of these canines during police investigations is permitted, such usage shall abide by current law and FCPD procedures. Canine Handlers or the Canine Section supervisor shall have exclusive control over the use of PSDs, subject to the review of the SOD Commander.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. Bloodhound: Police dog that is trained to track a specific person via scent discrimination. Bloodhounds are not trained to apprehend, and are only used to track individuals who are not believed to have committed a criminal infractions, but at the Canine Handler’s discretion may be called upon for use in cases that are criminal in nature when a track is beyond the capability of a patrol dog.
- B. Canine Handler: Sworn police officer who has successfully completed a basic canine school and is assigned to work with a specific police service dog.
- C. Canine Team: Team consisting of a Canine Handler and police service dog.

- D. Drug Detection Dog: Dog that has been trained to identify certain controlled substances by smell.
- E. Gun Dog: Dog that has been trained to identify the odor created from the discharge of a firearm and can search for both firearms and spent shell casings.
- F. Patrol Dog: Police dog that has been trained to track and locate individuals, property, and evidence. Patrol dogs are trained to search buildings and large areas. Patrol dogs are also trained to apprehend and bite, which must be factored in prior to deployment both on and off-lead.
- G. Police Service Dog (PSD): Any canine owned and operated by the FCPD.

IV. GENERAL PROCEDURES

- A. **Training Requirements**: Canine Teams shall attend and successfully complete Basic Canine School as instructed by FCPD canine trainers. Attendance in a local jurisdiction's canine school may be permitted with approval of the SOD Commander whenever FCPD canine trainers are unavailable. Upon graduation, all Canine Teams shall successfully complete a field training program, and subsequently complete all formal training and recertification requirements as needed. All canine training shall be documented and retained in the Canine Section's current records management system (RMS).
 - 1. **Training Narcotics**: The Canine Section may utilize controlled substances for training aids in accordance with both Federal law and the Code of Virginia. A designated member of the Canine Section shall keep and maintain a license issued by the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and Virginia Pharmaceutical Board to obtain controlled substances used for training from either the DEA Training Division or via court order in accordance with the [Code of Virginia](#). All training controlled substances shall be stored in accordance with [FCPD General Order 612](#), Property and Evidence.
- B. **Canine Availability**: Canine staffing shall be available to supplement patrol operations at all times based upon staffing and operational needs and requirements as determined by the Special Operations Division (SOD) Commander. Daily Canine Unit lineups, which designate on-call SWAT Canine Team members, Bloodhound Handler, and supervisors, shall be forwarded daily by the daywork Canine Team to the Department of Public Safety Communications (DPSC), the Police Liaison Commander (PLC), the acting Duty Officer, Canine Section, and OSB Administrative Assistant.

- C. **Care and Custody of Police Service Dogs:** Canine Handlers shall maintain and be solely responsible for the control and care of their assigned PSD at all times, both on and off-duty. PSDs should generally not be taken into public places except as necessary to accomplish a police mission or as approved by the on-duty Canine Supervisor.
1. **Police Vehicles:** Police vehicles utilized by canine handlers shall be equipped with modified passenger compartments intended for the confined transport of their PSD unless otherwise exempted by the Chief of Police or their designee. Community members shall never be allowed access to the passenger compartment of any vehicle occupied by a PSD, and passenger compartment windows may not be left down in such a manner as to allow the PSD to potentially escape or bite any individual in close proximity to the vehicle. PSDs should not be left unattended in police vehicles for extended periods of time by Canine Handlers and shall never be left alone in unsecured vehicles absent exigent circumstances. During periods of extreme weather, PSDs shall never be left alone inside of inoperative vehicles.
 2. **Home Care:** Canines shall be housed and maintained in a secured, sanitary, and frequently cleaned kennel at the residence of the Canine Handler. Canine Handlers shall either rent or own their residences, which shall be equipped with a secured backyard and fenced in such a manner as to provide an additional barrier that prevents the canine from leaving the property and keeps the general public away from the canine kennel. Canine Handlers, knowing the capabilities of their PSD, shall ensure that the fencing surrounding their property is constructed sufficiently enough to prevent their assigned PSD from escaping the property. If temporarily unable to care for their canine, a Canine Handler may arrange for kenneling in either a facility approved by the Canine Supervisor or with another Canine Handler. Canine Handlers shall also be responsible for the well-being of their assigned PSD and keep them fed, watered, and properly groomed. Canine Section supervisors shall perform random annual inspections of Canine Handler residences to ensure compliance with these provisions and document their findings.
 3. **Emergency Care:** A list of veterinary clinics approved for emergency care of PSDs by the SOD Commander shall be maintained with the OSB Administrative Assistant, kept with the Canine Section, and may be utilized during emergency situations as needed for the immediate care of a PSD.
- D. **Interactions Between Patrol Officers and Canine Teams:** Employees shall not approach, pet, tease, or attempt to play with a police canine without the Canine Handler's express approval. Whenever a PSD is present, other individuals

should avoid physical contact with the Canine Handler as the dog may perceive that contact as a threat to their Handler and respond accordingly.

1. **Tracking:** Officers shall not follow Canine Teams on tracks unless specifically directed to do so by the Canine Handler.
2. **Confrontations:** As patrol dogs are specifically trained to apprehend fleeing suspects or individuals who attempt to attack the Handler or dog, where any officer is confronted by a police canine, the officer should remain still as sudden movement(s) may cause the dog to respond by biting and holding.
3. **Emergency Interventions:** Only the Canine Handler shall call off a patrol dog whenever given the command to apprehend. Should the Handler become incapacitated and incapable of controlling the dog, another officer at the scene shall take appropriate action to ensure the overall safety of nearby individuals and other officers. **The use of deadly force against a patrol dog shall only be considered as a last resort in order to prevent imminent risk of serious bodily harm or death to any individual.**

V. OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES

- A. **Canine Teams and Handlers:** Canine Teams will not be dispatched as primary officers to calls for service, except as backup officers as needed, or in ongoing emergencies where a patrol officer is not immediately available. Canine Teams will assist as needed with arrest situations, but will not take physical custody of, nor transport, any arrested person.
- B. **Deployment Criteria:** Officers shall be mindful, prior to requesting canine deployment, that patrol canines are trained to bite and hold, which is considered a less-lethal use of force. The decision to deploy shall be at the discretion of the Canine Handler or Canine Section supervisor based upon their assessment of the situation and known capabilities of the dog, as well as their training, experience, and understanding of Department policies and applicable law.
- C. **Deployments:** Canine deployments, where the primary intent is to locate and apprehend individuals, are limited to the following circumstances:
 1. **Violent Felonies:** To include, but not be limited to, Robbery, Malicious Wounding, Assault by Mob, Homicide, Kidnapping, Abduction, Carjacking, and Felony Sexual Assaults.
 2. **Felonies:** Felony offenses that do not constitute violent felonies shall be assessed upon the known facts and circumstances by the Handler prior to

deployment. Whenever making the determination to deploy, Handlers should have a suspect description and consider the following factors:

- a. Whether the suspect has or is currently evading capture, or purposefully concealing themselves from law enforcement and their continued flight presents a danger to the community and/or officers.
- b. Whether the suspect is currently known or believed to be armed.
- c. The nature of the non-violent felony offense (i.e burglary of an occupied home or flight from stolen vehicle as opposed to felony shoplifting or fraud offenses).
- d. Whether the suspect is known or believed to have committed a series of similar offenses (ex: multiple commercial burglaries in one night).
- e. Whether the suspect is known or believed to be under the influence of controlled substances or alcohol.
- f. If the suspect's identity is known and any history of violence.

3. **Misdemeanor Crimes of Violence Where Failure to Apprehend the Suspect Presents a Clear Danger to the General Public:** To include, but not be limited to, sexual battery, brandishing of a firearm, and some domestic violence cases.

Note: Knowledge of a suspect's identity or known juvenile status shall be factored into a Canine Handler's decision to deploy, but shall not prohibit the Handler from deploying where the suspect presents a danger to the public.

- D. **Other Deployments:** At the discretion of the Canine Handler or the Canine Section supervisor, patrol dogs may assist with the following police functions:

1. **Building Searches:** Patrol dogs may be requested to assist with building or residence searches, particularly where the structure has been burglarized or is suspected of housing a wanted felon. The mere fact that a building or residence is found open or unsecured without evidence of an associated crime will generally not merit a patrol dog search. Canine Handlers upon request, shall respond, assess all circumstances and dimensions of the structure to be searched, and determine whether existing factors (ex: evidence of a burglary in progress, interior motion detected), merit a patrol dog searching the premises.

- a. **Perimeter Security:** Prior to initiating a building search, assisting officers shall secure the perimeter of the building to ensure no individuals are allowed to enter into the search area. Absent exigent circumstances or at the request of the Canine Handler, no officer shall enter into a building upon requesting canine assistance or where a canine search has commenced.
 - b. **Separated Officers:** Officers assisting a search team who become separated from the main group shall advise other members, to specifically include the Canine Handler, of their location in a timely manner to reduce the chances of an unintentional dog bite.
 - c. **Security of Removed Individuals:** Individuals removed from a building shall be secured in a police vehicle or moved away from the area in order to avoid the potential of a patrol dog exiting the building and seeking to apprehend that person.
 - d. **Drug Searches:** Where drug detection dogs are used in buildings or structures, officers shall ensure that all individuals remaining on the premises are removed or placed in one room prior to the canine search commencing. Plain view controlled substances shall be secured prior to the search, and the areas to be searched shall be at the discretion of the Canine Handler.
2. **Tracking Criminal Suspects:** Officers who request canine assistance to track a fleeing criminal suspect shall be prepared to brief the responding Canine Handler of the nature of the crime. Additionally, officers should inform the responding Canine Handler of (1) the exact last known location where the suspect was observed, (2) the direction of travel, (3) the time lapse, (4) a physical description of the suspect, and (5) the presence of any uninvolved pedestrian traffic in the area prior to the Canine Team's arrival.
- a. **Public Safety Personnel:** Where other officers and/or Fire Department personnel have entered into the area the fleeing suspect was last observed, those individuals should remain on scene so the patrol dog may eliminate their scent prior to attempting their track of the suspect. If they are unable to remain, the briefing officer should relay that information to the Canine Handler.
 - b. **Cover Officer:** At least one patrol officer should accompany the Canine Team as cover on their track. Where a second Canine Handler is present, the use of a patrol officer as cover shall be at the Handlers' discretion.

- c. **Back Tracking:** Patrol dogs are not trained to reverse track from a location where an individual was stopped back to the initial incident scene (“back track”) and shall not be used for such purposes.
3. **Article Searches:** Patrol dogs may be used to search an area for items recently handled by an individual, or to search for issued or personal equipment lost by officers during a foot pursuit.
4. **Controlled Substances Detection:** Patrol dogs are cross-trained in controlled substance detection and can alert on cocaine, crack cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin and MDMA, but not prescription medications. Patrol dogs shall not be used to search individuals or objects on an individual’s body (ex: backpack) for controlled substances, nor may they be used to conduct drug sniffs in occupied motor vehicles or residences. Officers who request patrol dogs for controlled substance detection purposes shall ensure an appropriate number of cover officers are available to watch any individual while the sniff is being conducted.
 - a. **Officer Responsibilities:** Officers who request patrol dog assistance for controlled substance detection purposes on traffic stops shall be prepared to provide all pertinent information to the responding Canine Handler, including the legal basis for the stop, current authority to detain, and what observation(s) led the officer to believe that there may be controlled substances in the vehicle.
 - b. **Other Jurisdiction Requests:** Any request for drug detection dogs by another law enforcement agency shall be directed through the acting Duty Officer for either approval or denial.
5. **Firearms:** Patrol dogs trained in gun detection (“gun dogs”) may be called to search for discarded firearms and/or spent shell casings. These dogs are able to locate these items even after any residual human odor has dissipated. Gun dogs should not be generally used to develop probable cause to search vehicles, bags, or any other areas where an individual would otherwise have a lawful expectation of privacy. Officers must possess lawful authority to be present in the area where a gun dog would be deployed to search.
6. **Warrant Services:** For criminal charges that meet the aforementioned listed felony and misdemeanor offenses in Section V, Subsection B.
7. **Other Investigations:** At the discretion of the Canine Handler, patrol dogs may also be deployed for the following police investigations:

- a. Felony hit and run accidents with bodily injuries to any individual other than the fleeing driver themselves.
 - b. Individuals held under emergency custody orders (ECO) who present a danger to others (ex: presently armed with a weapon).
 - c. Serial criminal offenses with the approval of the SOD Commander.
 - d. Stolen firearms that present a clear and articulable danger to the public.
- E. **Off-Lead Searches and Apprehensions:** At the direction of the Canine Handler, and for criminal offenses that meet deployment criteria or may result in apprehension, a patrol dog may be released to search and/or apprehend a fleeing or secreted individual in a building, structure, or large open area. Prior to releasing a patrol dog off-lead, the deploying Handler shall, if possible (1), ensure the search team and any assisting officers are briefed of their expectations, (2) **audibly** make announcement and provide instructions, and (3) **audibly** warn of the potential that the individual may be bitten by a patrol dog. The warning shall be required whenever feasible, unless the deploying Handler reasonably believes officer safety may be compromised by providing such a warning.
1. **Announcement:** The announcement should state the authority, provide instruction, and a warning if the announcement is not heeded. An example of a standard announcement would be: *“Fairfax County Police Canine. Come out with your hands up. If you do not come out, a police dog will be released, and you may be bitten.”* The wording and location of the announcement, or where exigent circumstances that preclude an announcement being made exist, shall be documented in the Canine Handler’s supplemental report in the current RMS. Whenever reasonable, and where it is known under the circumstances that an offender speaks a language other than English, all reasonable efforts shall be made to audibly communicate the announcement in the person’s known dialect. The announcement should only be dispensed of in those extreme circumstances where there is reasonable belief that an officer or public safety issue would either be created or compounded with an announcement.
 2. **Clearly Audible:** Whenever possible, the announcement(s) should be made at an audible level that can be heard by perimeter units. After the announcement is made, the Handler shall allow for sufficient time for the individual(s) to exit the premises and surrender. Whenever possible, a second announcement should be made prior to entry by the search team. Where a structure contains multiple levels, the Canine Handler should repeat

the announcement whenever a new floor or area is reached where the initial announcement may not have been heard.

- F. **Traffic Stops:** Requests for patrol dog assistance for drug sniffs by officers on a traffic stop shall be made in a timely manner. Depending upon the time of day, weather, and traffic conditions along with other invariable factors, the Canine Handler will provide the requesting officer an estimated response time. Requesting officers may not purposefully extend the duration of traffic stops for any reason, to include waiting for a Canine Handler to respond, [unless the officer has reasonable, articulable suspicion that criminal activity is afoot beyond that of the traffic violation\(s\) for which the motorist was originally stopped.](#)
- G. **Bloodhound Requests:** Bloodhounds may be utilized to locate individuals when time constraints are beyond the capabilities of a patrol canine, or where the missing individual has not committed a crime. Bloodhounds are primarily deployed to locate missing individuals (juveniles or adults), individuals who are known to be a danger to themselves, or to locate paths of travel hours or days after a crime has occurred for investigatory purposes.
1. **Supervisor Responsibilities:** Upon request, and where a bloodhound is approved to respond to a call for service, requesting supervisors should be prepared to provide the following information to the responding Handler or Canine Section supervisor:
 - a. Length of time the individual has been missing.
 - b. All efforts already undertaken to locate the individual.
 - c. Weather and environmental conditions.
 - d. Age and known health of the individual.
 - e. The mental capacity of the individual.
 - f. Availability of a scent article.
 - g. Clothing the individual was last seen or known to be wearing.
 - h. What location the individual was last observed in.
 - i. Previous elopements and locations where they were found.
 - j. Any means of accessing or utilizing transportation.
 - k. If suicidal, whether the individual is believed to be armed.
 2. **Tracking Criminal Offenders:** Bloodhounds may assist with tracking criminal offenders where circumstances exceed the capabilities of a patrol dog. If there is the potential for apprehension, the bloodhound Handler shall be accompanied by at least one cover patrol officer.
 3. **Article Searches:** Bloodhounds are not trained to search for articles or evidence left after the occurrence of a crime and require scent articles to be

made available to track. Bloodhound Handlers should identify crime scenes and collect scent articles themselves to eliminate scent cross-contamination. Where this is not possible, all individuals who have touched or handled the scent article should remain on scene to have their scent eliminated by the bloodhound.

4. **Call-Outs:** Supervisors may request assistance from working bloodhounds when they are available. Call-out requests for bloodhounds shall be directed to the on-call Canine Section supervisor. Other agency requests for a bloodhound shall be routed through the on-call Canine Section supervisor regardless of whether a bloodhound is in service or not. Non-adjointing jurisdictions or out-of-state bloodhound requests shall require approval from the SOD Commander.

H. **Documentation:** Requests for assistance of a Canine Team and deployment by the Handler shall be documented by the requesting officer in an incident module in the current RMS. Responding Handlers shall document their response, any actions taken, and results of deployment in a supplement in the current RMS.

1. **Use of Force:** Where dog bites occurs, there is visible evidence of a police canine bite, or any individual complains of injury as the result of a patrol dog apprehension, the incident shall be promptly investigated by a Canine Section supervisor and documented in the Department's current Internal Affairs Bureau RMS in accordance with [FCPD General Order 301](#), Internal Investigations, and [FCPD General Order 540](#), Use of Force. Any individual who has been bitten, appears to be bitten, or complains of injury shall be offered prompt access to medical attention. Where the Canine Section supervisor is unavailable, the incident will be documented by an on-duty patrol officer and forwarded to the Canine Section supervisor. Should a force incident involve a Canine Section supervisor's dog, the investigation shall be conducted as directed by the SOD Commander or acting Duty Officer.

VI. LEGAL REFERENCES

- A. [Rodriguez v. United States](#), 575 U.S. 348 (2015).

General Order 531 becomes effective on the above date and rescinds all previous rules and regulations pertaining to the subject.

ISSUED BY:

APPROVED BY:



Chief of Police



County Executive