

Minnesota K9 Search Specialists



**MINNESOTA K9
SEARCH SPECIALISTS**

Handler and Canine Guide

January 2025

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline canine search team status for Minnesota K9 Search Specialists (MNK9SS) canine teams as they join the team, initiate training, and complete certification. This document identifies expectations of teams for their continued affiliation with MNK9SS and it also identifies roles and responsibilities of handlers, the MNK9SS Canine Coordinator/President and the Vice President/Secretary within the program.

Process

All canine team categorization, assessments, and testing will be conducted by the MNK9SS Canine Coordinator/President. Re-categorization of teams will be determined when significant changes in capabilities occur.

New Canine Handler Application Process

Anyone that wishes to become a Canine Search Specialist (canine handler) for MNK9SS must be capable of meeting the general and specific position requirements as defined in the FEMA US&R Canine Search Specialist position description at the time they initiate the application process with MNK9SS.

The following are requirements that will help ensure your success as a canine handler with MNK9SS:

- Live within 2 hours of Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Must be physically fit
- Available to attend training at least twice per month (as well as meet the requirement to attend 75% of Task Force training)
- Basic understanding of canine training
- Capable of leaving home for 2 weeks at a time in case of deployment
- Capable of dealing with the mental stress of a disaster environment
- Be a team player
- Be available to travel for trainings
- Capable of working in confined spaces
- Have no fear of heights
- Equally capable of working in large groups and independently
- Capable of following directions
- Adaptable and capable of reacting to and working in a dynamic environment
- Understand and work well within a chain of command structure
- Have a strong initiative
- Possess public relation skills
- Not be a member of another canine search organization
- Capable of receiving constructive feedback

The following are steps to follow to initiate training with the MNK9SS Canine Team:

- Fill out and submit an Initial Handler Application

- The Canine Coordinator/President will maintain a list of interested potential handlers.
- MNK9SS supports 10 rostered canine team positions (6 Live Find and 4 HRD). When the Canine Coordinator/President anticipates possible future openings on the canine team, selected handlers will receive invitations via email or phone call, inviting them to attend training.
- Canine handlers must attend a FEMA Canine Search Specialist school (or equivalency).
- The Canine Coordinator/President's assessment and consensus of a potential search canine will be final.
- If the current canine team roster is full, applicants with FSA level canines will be put on a wait list for when a rostered position opens up on the canine team. FSA level canines will not be supported for CE opportunities until a position opens on the canine roster.

Canine Team Training and Certification Levels

Certified Canine Search Team (CE)

A disaster search canine team who has achieved certification through the FEMA Canine Search Specialist Certification Process (CSSCP) to the Certification Evaluation (CE) level and maintains the CE Level Certification with their canine.

Deployable

A canine search specialist team who has passed an official CE and MNK9SS requirements will be considered “deployable” for local, in-state, or mutual aid response. The “Deployable” status of all canine teams will be confirmed by the MNK9SS Canine Coordinator/President prior to being activated.

Developing Handler/Canine Team

A canine search specialist candidate who has completed Canine Search Specialist training and has initiated training with MNK9SS canine teams and who is actively training an approved canine for US&R work and is pursuing minimum MNK9SS and FEMA requirements. The canine and handler's progress will be documented and lack of progress may result in termination from the program.

MNK9SS Canine Participation

It is important that handlers are working with canines that exhibit the ability and capability to do US&R work and are capable of reaching FSA and CE level certification. Canines in training are informally assessed on a continual basis by the MNK9SS Canine Coordinator/President during training activities. The Canine Coordinator/President will work with handlers and canines to reach FSA and CE level certification. The Canine Coordinator/President shall discuss canine development or ability deficiencies that may limit the progress of the canine to reach FSA or CE level with the handler.

If/when, the result of a canine performance deficiencies or repeated failure of FSA or CE level testing it is determined that the canine does not have the ability to reach FSA or CE level certification, the handler will be informed that the canine is not suitable for US&R work.

MNK9SS will recommend that the handler seek or accept another canine and can assist with acquiring another canine, if desired.

MNK9SS Canine Team Training

MNK9SS handlers, except support members, are expected to participate in meetings, training, and organizational activities. Members are expected to participate at a minimum of **50% of training activities** and at a minimum of **75% aggregate participation for all meetings, training, and activities**. Members are also **required to attend 75% of all task force-led training**. Handlers should attend scheduled weekly training sessions whenever possible to build, enhance, and maintain their skills. MNK9SS provides eligible handler/canine teams with access to training opportunities. Any outside training opportunities, including local seminars with external instructors or multi-day intensive training requiring travel, must be approved by the MNK9SS Canine Coordinator/President.

Deployment

MNK9SS will only deploy canine search specialist teams who have met the following criteria:

- CE level teams ONLY
- In the absence or due to shortage of FEMA CE level teams, teams that have passed a valid FSA, have met all MNK9SS and FEMA training requirements and are awaiting an opportunity to test or retest for certification will be considered. The Canine Coordinator/President will ensure that the teams with the highest level of training, qualifications and preparation receive the highest priority.

When possible, MNK9SS will deploy with 2 canine teams with experienced handlers. If 2 experienced handlers are not available, the Canine Coordinator/President will select appropriate canine teams for deployments. FSA level canines will only be considered when MNK9SS is short of CE level teams. FSA and CE level teams must be current on all training logs, required training classes, and health physical and canines in order to be eligible for deployment.

Teams certified to FSA Level and CE Level will be eligible to be issued a full complement of MNK9SS personal gear/Task Force PPE. Essential items needed for training will be permitted to be issued to the handler. Remaining personal gear items will be stored at Empire Transportation (Rosemount) and maintained in a state of readiness for deployment. Non-CE or non-FSA level teams shall not be deployed or issued gear other than limited personal safety gear and protective clothing.

Human Remains

Since FEMA's current mission is to locate live, trapped victims, handlers training for US&R operations are discouraged from engaging in human remains training with their live victim dog. You may begin an HRD canine following certification of a current Live Find dog and/or dependent on MNK9SS canine needs.

If current canine team handlers have second canines they wish to train for HRD work, deployment as an HRD resource for in-state or mutual aid will require handlers to meet the deployable status requirements.

Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) Level

In order to be endorsed by MNK9SS to participate in a FEMA Certification Evaluation (CE), a team must successfully complete an FSA conducted in accordance with FEMA guidelines and administered by a minimum of two (2) FEMA-approved evaluators, or 1 FEMA-approved evaluator and a designee of the Canine Coordinator/President's choosing. Canine teams that wish to participate in an FSA shall require the endorsement of the MNK9SS Canine Coordinator/President. FSA may be an "in house" test or may involve travel and be conducted on equipment and rubble where the team does not regularly train. The FSA shall be conducted and validated in accordance with MNK9SS and/or FEMA guidelines for FSA qualification. Canine teams that are not able to pass an FSA after 3 attempts will be reviewed by the MNK9SS Canine Coordinator/President to evaluate the suitability of the team to perform the work.

Certification Evaluation (CE) Level

Teams wishing to enter the CE process for the first time or re-certify to the CE level must successfully complete an FSA and maintain FSA level training and skills prior to the scheduled CE test date. Teams seeking participation in the CE process must receive approval and endorsement from the MNK9SS Canine Coordinator/President. Canine teams that fail to pass the CE process after 3 attempts will be evaluated by the MNK9SS Canine Coordinator/President to determine the suitability of the team to perform the work.

Once certified to CE level, handlers must pursue a wilderness certification with their canines.

Physical Requirements for Canine Handlers

In general, US&R deployment involves long days of often stressful events; and in the case of a canine handler, accessing and traversing rubble and/or collapsed or damaged structures. Therefore, canine handlers should demonstrate:

- 1.) No obvious medical problems
- 2.) Physical endurance
- 3.) Mental Stability
- 4.) Ability to traverse rubble
- 5.) Ability to be a buried victim
- 6.) Ability to crawl through a tunnel
- 7.) Ability to climb a ladder

Canine Airline Travel

MNK9SS will provide FSA and CE level canine search specialists, and Developing Canine/Handler Teams approved by the Canine Coordinator/President, with a Travel Letter to an air carrier requesting that the canine handler be permitted to allow their canine travel in the passenger cabin of the aircraft. This letter will be made available for those canine search

specialists, who are traveling on official business (en route to, or from, deployment, FEMA or MNK9SS sponsored training or other authorized travel). This letter is to provide for a formal request and is not absolute assurance that a canine will be permitted to travel in the aircraft passenger cabin. Handlers should contact the airline prior to travel to determine any restrictions that may apply. Handlers should always be prepared and have an airline suitable kennel available with them in the event that the airline refuses to permit the canine in the passenger cabin. Under no circumstances will canine search specialists misrepresent themselves as a member of the task force when traveling on non-task force business by requesting this privilege from the airline.

Safety and Responsibility during Training

All personnel involved with the MNK9SS canine program are responsible for their safety and the safety of others and canines during training activities. All personnel should wear appropriate personal safety equipment as indicated by the training activity being conducted. All training exercises should be evaluated for safety prior to execution. Personnel should be physically fit to conduct training and should not push themselves beyond their capability. Developing Handlers and volunteer helpers are not considered MNK9SS members and therefore are not provided access to supplemental insurance for injuries that may be incurred during training. Costs incurred for injuries to any personnel during non-sanctioned training will be the responsibility of the individual.

Changes in Status

Any canine search specialist who is unable to maintain themselves or a canine in a deployable status may be reclassified to an appropriate level. This may necessitate the return of MNK9SS/task force equipment issued.

Membership Procedure

Potential applications must be a US citizen, hold a valid driver's license and have no felony convictions.

**Background checks will be conducted*

Submit an application attached to the Handler and Canine Guide.

Potential applications do not need to meet all position training requirements to submit an application for MNK9SS membership, but should list experience and/or training in an attached résumé that provides an appropriate scope of knowledge for the position.

The applicant shall attach copies of training certificates or professional licenses to the application when submitted.

Upon return of the completed application with required résumé MNK9SS shall:

- Review the application, training qualifications, and résumé
- Determine if the application and résumé meets minimum scope of knowledge guidelines and include the applicant in a pool of eligible personnel.
- Upon an opening the Board will select eligible personnel to participate in a brief interview.

Due to limited position openings in most cases, not all applicants will be selected to participate with the MNK9SS. Applicants who are accepted will be notified.

Upon acceptance to MNK9SS, the applicant:

- Shall submit to a health physical
- Shall be eligible to receive MNK9SS issued personal equipment
- Task force issued gear may not be issued until the member meets all requirements for deployment
- Shall participate in required training as scheduled to be eligible for deployment

Initial Membership Application

Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime Phone: _____ **Evening Phone:** _____

Please explain why you are interested in becoming a canine handler with MNK9SS:

Please list any pertinent training experiences (training dogs, training in first aid, hazardous materials, etc.)

Have you ever been a member of a SAR team or any other similar type of team? If yes, please explain:

***Please attach a list of three references**

***As of 2025, membership dues are \$100.00**

Thank you for completing this application indicating your interest in becoming a MNK9SS canine handler. We will review the information above and contact you regarding your ability to be a handler with our team. Please understand that submission of this application does not guarantee you will be accepted as a handler with MNK9SS.