

# SHERIFF OF GARFIELD COUNTY

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### GARFIELD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

### POLICY / PROCEDURE

### PATROL

**SUBJECT: CANINE (K-9) UNIT**

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** January 01, 2024

**POLICY:**

The Garfield County Sheriff's Office K-9 program shall adhere to a specific chain of command within the K-9 Unit. Minimum eligibility criteria, specific responsibilities and training standards shall be fully understood and adhered to by all Deputies assigned to the unit. Deployment criteria will be based on the capabilities of both the K-9 and the K-9 Unit Handler. K-9 Unit Handlers will be fairly compensated for all additional time required.

**PURPOSE:**

The Garfield County Sheriff's Office K-9 Unit enhances the Department's enforcement duties through the use of properly trained canine components. By maintaining a state of high visibility and utilizing the canine's specialized skills, the unit serves as an effective way to safeguard the community and its deputies. This policy is intended to outline the procedures, safeguards, and reasons involved in the tactical deployment and use of trained police K-9 units.

**METHOD:**

**Unit organization:** The organizational structure of a successful K-9 unit is very similar to that of a normal Patrol Division. However, there are several additional individuals that are necessary to train and maintain a K9. Due to the specialized nature of many K-9 activities, the line of responsibility for deployment and training will differ from that of a regular Patrol Deputy with normal responsibilities.

**Command Structure:**

- **Patrol Commander:** Responsible for overseeing the various aspects of the entire unit.
- **K-9 Unit Sergeant:** Responsible for the day to day activities of the unit, responsible for collecting any reports generated by the handlers concerning deployment, training, etc. May also function as a handler or trainer in addition to his/her supervisory duties.
- **K-9 Unit Handler:** Responsible for the day-to-day care, training, maintenance of the K-9. Responsible for preparing any and all paperwork associated with the K-9, to include but not limited to training logs, call out reports, etc.

- **K-9 Unit Trainer:** Responsible for overseeing the care, maintenance, and training of the K-9 units. Must have extensive experience with training K-9's in all the various disciplines that make a complete unit. This person is approved by the Undersheriff. May or may not be a handler nor does this person have to be a Law Enforcement Officer.
- **K-9 Unit Decoy:** Answers directly to the trainer and handlers. This person can be a private individual provided a liability waiver has been provided to the Sheriff. This person is generally a prospective K-9 handler gaining experience and working towards the goal of one day being a handler.

**Handler Selection:** The proper selection of a K-9 Handler is critical to having a successful K-9 program. Consideration should be given to several criteria including motivation and work ethic.

**Minimum Criteria:**

- Minimum of three (3) years of law enforcement experience.
- A rank of Patrol Deputy II or higher.
- Must have received at least a "3" rating on his/her last performance evaluation.
- No substantiated use of force complaints.
- Must not be the subject of any current internal investigations.
- Must have a residence that is suitable for housing a K-9.
- If married, must have the approval of the spouse in writing.
- May serve in a specialized unit with approval from the Sheriff or designee.
- Must have attended 80 percent of K-9 trainings over the last 6 months.
- Must have assisted with 50 percent of K-9 unit demonstrations in the last 6 months.
- Must have attended a Decoy School or be approved to attend Decoy School prior to testing.

**Physical Criteria:**

- A 3 mile hike/march in duty equipment or call out/tracking gear, (water, first aid, primary duty weapon, etc), with the dog on line, with a time limit of 55 minutes.
- Holding a 60 pound weight at waist level for 45 seconds.
- Getting a 60 pound weight over a 6' fence, followed by the handler, twice.

The physical requirements will be demonstrated by the K-9 Handler at least once a year, or anytime the K-9 Unit Sergeant requires. An applicant will be disqualified from testing if unable to complete the physical portion of the testing. They will be eligible to test for future positions. If the K-9 Handler fails to pass the required yearly or on-demand physical fitness requirements, the handler will have 90 days to train and re-take the test. Failure to pass the test a second time will result in removal from the K-9 Handler assignment for an additional 30 days or until such time the handler can demonstrate the physical requirements. Failure to pass the required physical fitness test after the 30 days will result in removal from the K-9 Handler assignment.

**Canine Unit Deployments:** The K-9 Unit is designed to support all patrol functions and can be deployed in a variety of situations. The K-9 Handler has the burden of determining the balance of effectiveness and liability of the K-9 in any given situation. This burden also mandates a higher degree of authority for the handler in determining if a K-9 should be deployed. The K-9 will only be deployed in situations for which it is trained and certified in. When an on-scene supervisor disagrees with a handler's tactical assessment, the K-9 Unit Sergeant will be notified. Where time does not permit such notification, the on scene supervisor may direct the handler not to deploy the K-9, however will not order the deployment of the K-9 unless under extreme circumstance, where the danger to the K-9 is outweighed by a threat to life for law enforcement or civilians.

**Deployment Criteria:**

- Nature of the offense.
- Safety of officers and the public.
- Safety of the K-9.
- Whether the suspect poses an immediate threat to the safety of others.
- Whether the suspect is actively resisting arrest or attempting to evade arrest.

**Deployment Situations (including, but not limited to):**

- **Building searches:** Locating suspects in buildings or related structures where a search by officers would be time consuming or create unnecessary risk.
- **Open area searches:** Locating suspects believed to be hidden in a specified open area.
- **Suspect apprehension/detention:** Assisting in the arrest or prevention of the escape of serious or violent offenders.
- **Evidence location:** Locating evidence in a specified open area.
- **Contraband detection:** Detecting and locating contraband secreted in a specific area.
- **Tracking:** Tracking of missing persons or suspects.
- **Tactical operations:** High-risk incidents that require a K-9 component utilized in conjunction with a tactical team deployment.
- **Special assignments:** Any assignment approved by the Sheriff or his designee that may require the unit's special capabilities.

**K-9 Bites and Injuries:** In the event a K-9 bites or injures an individual, the K-9 Handler shall:

- Obtain medical treatment for the person as soon as practical.
- Notify a supervisor and summon to the scene if appropriate.
- Complete all necessary reports documenting the incident.

**Property Damage by a K-9:** In the event a K-9 causes property damage, the K-9 Handler shall:

- Notify a supervisor.
- If possible, take color photographs of the damaged property.
- Attempt to determine monetary value of the damage.
- Complete all necessary reports documenting the incident.

**K-9 Unit Handler Responsibilities:**

- The handler shall be responsible for the daily care, feeding, grooming, training, and medical attention necessary for the health and readiness of the K-9.
- The handler shall be responsible for completing all departmental reporting requirements on self-initiated calls for service and any supplemental reports required generated by assisting other Deputies or other Agencies.
- The handler will not participate in any outside clubs or competitions without prior approval from the Sheriff or his designee.
- The K-9 will not be used for any off duty employment unless authorized by the Sheriff or his designee.
- The K-9 handler shall adhere to any additional responsibilities required by the K-9 Unit Sergeant as is necessary.

**Deputy Responsibilities:** When Patrol or Detention Deputies request the assistance of a K-9 unit the following guidelines will be followed:

- Requests for a law enforcement K-9 deployment will be made only after due consideration has been given to the nature of the offense, safety of officers, and safety of the general public.

- Arrests made or evidence located as a result of a request for K-9 assistance shall be considered to have been accomplished by the requesting Deputy. Reports, suspects, and evidence obtained through canine assistance will be processed by normal departmental procedures by the requesting Deputy.
- Personnel shall not interact with a K-9 without the handler being present.
- Personnel shall never tease or harass a K-9.
- Personnel shall never feed the K-9 without the handler's permission.
- Personnel shall not give commands to a K-9 unless instructed to do so by the handler or as part of regular training.
- Personnel shall not attempt to take custody of a suspect in the presence of an unleashed K-9, until instructed it is safe to do so by the handler.

**K-9 Qualification / Training:** K-9 Unit Handlers are required to keep themselves and their K-9 at a skill level that is acceptable for law enforcement operations. To remain in service, handlers and their K-9's must successfully pass a recognized police K-9 certification test. This test will be completed at least once a year and must be administered by a certified law enforcement K-9 trainer. In addition, handlers and K-9's should attend a minimum of 15 hours of K-9 related training per month. All certifications and training must be documented and submitted through the Agency approved documentation software. Failure to maintain annual certification or the required monthly training time will result in the suspension of K-9 duties. The suspension will remain in effect until such time the qualification and or training requirements are met. Any remedial training will be documented. Any unit that fails to pass a recognized law enforcement K-9 certification three times in a row will be evaluated by the K-9 Unit Sergeant. A determination / recommendation will be made to the Undersheriff as to whether the K-9 and/or handler should be terminated from K-9 duties.

**Compensation:** Recognizing that the position of K-9 Unit Handler requires additional time investment in the program, the K-9 Unit Handler shall be compensated in accordance with FLSA guidelines.

- When on duty, the K-9 Unit Handler will be provided one hour of their shift time for routine maintenance and care.
- When off duty, the K-9 Unit Handler should not exceed one-half hour of time for routine maintenance and care.
- All additional time such as routine maintenance and care, training, call-outs, unanticipated overtime, etc, shall be noted on the K-9 Handler's regular time sheet and paid in accordance with the Garfield County Sheriff's Office wages and compensation plan.

### **Ownership and Assignment of K-9's:**

- County owned K-9's shall be the property of the County, with any transfer of ownership subject to County policy and approvals.
- In the event of a K-9 Unit Handler being reassigned, terminated, or otherwise unavailable to act as a handler, the K-9 shall be reassigned or reallocated by the Sheriff.
- A K-9 Unit Handler may apply to take personal possession of a County owned K-9 where the K-9 is retired from duty or relieved due to injury.
- A K-9 handler may apply to take personal possession of a County owned K-9 if the handler is transferred, promoted, or retires and the decision is made not to retain the k-9 for another handler.
- Only K-9's deemed to have a temperament suitable for civilian life will be transferred to handlers for personal possession. Recommendations from the K-9 unit Sergeant, Trainer and Undersheriff will be reviewed, with the final decision being the Sheriff's as to whether the K-9 will be retained for use, transferred to the handler for retirement, or euthanasia.
- A handler wishing to take ownership of a patrol trained K-9 must complete and sign the Retirement Contract and complete the K-9 retirement training.
- K-9's that are owned by members of the Sheriff's Office may be contracted for use by the County. Such arrangements shall require the handler to perform all K-9 functions in accordance with this policy. A written contract with the County shall be executed specifying liabilities, responsibilities, and compensations. The contract shall be approved through the office of the County Attorney.

**Explosives/Narcotics Training:** Any K-9 Unit Handler that is engaged in training with illegal drugs or explosives shall adhere to the following:

- A log shall be maintained of any drugs or explosives in the custody of the handler which shall specify weight, type, and origin of the drugs or explosives, the date it came into the custody of the handler, and the date and location it was released to the agency of origin or destroyed per the agency of origin's direction.
- A log shall be maintained of all trainings involving drugs or explosives to include date, time, location, type of training and type of drug or explosive used.
- Records shall be kept of any loss or depletion of amounts of drugs or explosives through training.
- All drugs and explosives shall be maintained securely with access for the handler only.
- All training with drugs and explosives shall be conducted away from the general public with security of the drugs or explosives as a priority.
- All drugs and explosives shall be available for inspection by the K-9 Unit Sergeant on demand.