



# National Association for Search and Rescue

## Becoming a Search Dog Handler

Do you have what it takes to be a search dog handler?

- A team player
- The right K9 partner
- Time – Both your own and team training
- Willingness to learn
- Understanding family
- Reliable transportation
- Physical stamina
- Mental toughness – Not all searches end well
- Love being outdoors in all weather conditions
- Finances to afford gear, travel and training
- Pass a criminal background check

Keep in mind that working a search and rescue dog requires **commitment**. Training usually takes 1.5 to 2 years, and continues for the entire operational life of the dog.

Most importantly, **dedication** to the lost or missing person for whom you will search, “**so that others may live**” is a slogan that many SAR teams use.

Visit the National Association for Search & Rescue website at:  
<http://www.nasar.org>



### 1. Find a team.

Most volunteers join an existing team, who will evaluate the dog and handler, and then help the handler and dog with their search and rescue training. If you are interested in finding a team in your area, we recommend contacting a NASAR K9 Evaluator in your state or region to ask about local resources.

Search for NASAR K9 Evaluators by state at:

<http://www.nasar.org/page/23/Instructors-and-Lead-Evaluators>

You can also do generic internet searches for canine search and rescue teams in your state or region. Many teams have internet sites which allow you to contact them for more information, as well as give you an overview of their team requirements. Contact local law enforcement, fire departments or rescue squads to find out if there are local units in your area.

### 2. Your training.

Besides training a dog, the handler must also learn many things before certification and ultimately deploying on real searches. Individual teams have different requirements for handlers, such as Crime Scene Preservation, First Aid, CPR, Canine First Aid, Lost Person Behavior, Map Reading, Compass Use, Radio Communication, and courses in the Incident Command System, just to name a few.

Visit the NASAR Bookstore ([here](#)) for some great books and other training materials such as **Search Dog Training: How to Get Started in DVD**, produced by Madde Watts, Rob Watts, and Ed Stopper.

### 3. NASAR Certification(s)

NASAR offers a variety of certifications for both search and rescue personnel and search and rescue dog handlers. An example of ground searcher certifications include NASAR's SARTECH (I, II, and III) program. NASAR also offers certifications for dog handlers in its K9 SARTECH program. These certifications meet or exceed the National Incident Management System (NIMS) typing guidelines. Certifications are available in the following disciplines:

- Area Search
- Trailing
- Land Cadaver/Human Remains Detection (Land or Water)
- Avalanche
- First Responder Disaster (Live or Cadaver/Human Remains Detection)

The NASAR site has a list of [currently scheduled evaluations](#).

For more information on K9 certifications, finding a K9 partner or training opportunities, please contact the Canine Committee Chair at:

[sardogs@nasar.org](mailto:sardogs@nasar.org)

**Thank you for your interest in Canine SAR!**

