



Standard Guide for Demonstrating Obedience and Agility in Search and Rescue Dogs¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation F 1879; the number immediately following the designation indicates the year of original adoption or, in the case of revision, the year of last revision. A number in parentheses indicates the year of last reapproval. A superscript epsilon (ϵ) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reapproval.

1. Scope

1.1 This guide is intended to provide voluntary uniform guidelines for obedience and agility training for Search and Rescue (SAR) dogs throughout the United States.

1.2 This guide provides a minimum set of training goals against which SAR dog teams and organizations may voluntarily evaluate their own training programs.

1.3 This guide provides a means of documenting a minimum standard for those agencies who request SAR dog resources for SAR operations and require such documentation.

1.4 Local SAR dog handlers and parent organizations are responsible for testing and verifying that individual resources meet or exceed these guidelines.

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ASTM Standards:*

F 1633 Guide for Techniques in Land Search²

F 1848 Classification of Search and Rescue Dog Crew/Teams²

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:*

3.1.1 *agility, n*—an aspect of a dog's physical condition that characterizes the dog's dexterity and ease of movement.

3.1.2 *obedience, n*—an aspect of a dog's behavior that characterizes the dog's ability to follow instructions.

3.1.3 *off-lead, n*—a working mode for a dog where the dog and handler are not connected physically and the control of the dog is established through audible commands or visual signals.

3.1.4 *on-lead, n*—a working mode for a dog and handler attached physically by a leash and the dog may be controlled by the leash.

3.2 Definitions of terms not defined in this standard can be found in Guide F 1633 and Classification F 1848.

4. Summary of the Practice

4.1 This guide provides dog handlers, units and organizations in differing locales with the ability to understand and replicate skills and training required to meet these minimum guidelines.

4.2 The obedience skills ensure the dog is under the control of the handler sufficiently to participate in a search operation without interfering with other search resources, individuals, and dogs.

4.3 The agility skills demonstrate the team's abilities to traverse the obstacles which may be present in a search situation.

4.4 Dogs that work incidents involving natural disaster and collapsed structures require all of these basic skills, as well as special techniques, and so are designated as having additional minimum requirements.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 This guide may be used by units, handlers, and requesting agencies when evaluating dog resources or as a basis for establishing local minimum performance guidelines or standards. It is suggested, however, that units and teams not train to these guidelines, but rather train and work in conditions requiring obedience and agility skills, then use these guidelines as a uniform method of evaluating progress.

5.2 This guide does not provide a theoretical basis for how a search dog works, rather it describes the minimum results desired.

5.3 Each dog team, unit, or organization wishing to use this guide has the responsibility of managing and administering it. Units may wish to use evaluators from other units or organizations, or request assistance in obtaining qualified evaluators from organizations, such as the SAR Dog Section of the National Association of Search and Rescue (NASAR)³ or the American Kennel Club (AKC)⁴. This decision, however, rests

¹ This guide is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee F32 on Search and Rescue and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee F32.02 on Management and Operations.

Current edition approved April 10, 1998. Published June 1998.

² *Annual Book of ASTM Standards*, Vol 13.02.

³ National Association for Search and Rescue, 4500 Southgate Place, Suite 100, Chantilly, VA 20151-1714.

⁴ The American Kennel Club, 5580 Centerview Drive, Suite 200, Raleigh, NC 27606-3390.

solely with the individual team or organization. The method of evaluation also is entirely at the discretion of each user of this guide.

6. Obedience Skills

6.1 Obedience skills are recommended to ensure that the dog can be worked and transported without interference from other dogs and personnel, is under the control of the handler, can be left safely and, if necessary, be evacuated by someone other than the handler in an emergency. Both on-lead and off-lead obedience skills should be demonstrated around a group of strangers and other dogs with accompanying noise and confusion common to search and rescue operations. This demonstration might follow a fixed format, such as outlined in the AKC Canine Good Citizen⁴ test or a free format with the following elements.

6.2 Recommended On-Lead Skills:

6.2.1 On-lead obedience skills should include the ability to “heel” with stops and the ability to make right, left, and about-turns with both the handler and an alternate handler. The ability to sit, stand, and down are optional on-lead commands.

NOTE 1—The actual command used to achieve a desired action from the dog is at the discretion of the handler. Commands may be audible, visual, or both.

6.2.2 While on-lead, the handler should be able to place the dog in a vehicle with other dogs and strangers without the dog displaying aggressive behavior towards the stranger or other dogs. The dog should demonstrate the ability to remain there until released.

6.3 Recommended Off-Lead Skills:

6.3.1 Off-lead obedience skills to be demonstrated should include right, left, and about-turns, with the dog following the handler and a come directly to the handler on demand from at least 50 ft. Additionally, the dog should demonstrate the ability to stop during a come. A “heel” with stops also is recommended for dogs engaged in collapsed structure/disaster work.

6.3.2 The dog also should demonstrate that it can be left unattended for 3 min with the handler out of sight and scent. The dog may change positions but must remain within 5 ft of its original location even when distractions include other dogs and strangers moving close by. For dogs engaged in collapsed building/disaster work, it is recommended that this area be reduced to the body length of the dog. The demonstration should include a minimum of three other dogs that are within 20 ft of the demonstrating dog.

6.3.3 Dogs engaged in collapsed structure/disaster work additionally should demonstrate the ability to change their pace at the request of the handler and to be directed to more than two distinct areas, which have different elevations and are separated by at least 25 yds.

7. Agility Skills

7.1 Agility skills ensure that a dog will be controlled and confident in stressful or unusual physical surroundings, such as unstable, slippery, or uneven surfaces.

7.2 For dogs engaged in collapsed structure and disaster activities, it is recommended that additional skills be demonstrated (see 7.5), and that they have the ability to execute their movement with minimal disturbance to obstacles. These additional skills should demonstrate the dogs’ ability to work in an environment where things are unusual and where footings are loose and often move under the dogs’ weight. Dogs engaged in these activities should further demonstrate an ability to independently avoid dangerous objects and avoid causing any further injury to trapped individuals.

7.3 For safety reasons, it is recommended that spotters be available when dogs are demonstrating agility skills. The use of spotters, however, should neither enhance nor diminish dogs’ ability to demonstrate agility.

7.4 Recommended Agility Skills for All Dogs:

7.4.1 All dogs should be able to jump at least 2.5 ft up into a specified area, such as four-wheel drive pick-up truck.

7.4.2 All dogs should be able to crawl under an obstacle that is not higher than three-quarters the dog’s height.

7.4.3 All dogs should be able to climb onto and walk along a log or other narrow obstacle without jumping off. It is recommended that the log or obstacle be taller and wider than the dog.

7.4.4 All dogs should be able to walk through a culvert or small tunnel that has at least one right or left turn. Ideally, some portion of the culvert or tunnel will be of a size that requires the dog to crawl on its belly.

7.4.5 The dog should be able to long jump over a ditch, which is as wide as the height of the dog’s withers.

7.4.6 The dog should be able to swim 50 ft.

7.5 Additional Agility Skills Recommended for Dogs Engaged in Collapsed Structure/Disaster Work:

7.5.1 The dog should be able to climb a flat-runged ladder at least 6-ft long, which is set at a 45° angle.

7.5.2 The dog should be able to walk from one end of a teeter-totter (no more than 12-in. wide) to the other without jumping off.

7.5.3 The dog should be able to maneuver over 1 22-in. high log or barrel on its side after checking the other side for safety.

7.5.4 The dogs should be able to climb a ramp, or ladder, then proceed to the end of a second plank and return without jumping off. The ramps and planks should no more than 12 in. wide, at least 10 ft long, and at least 3 ft above the ground.

7.5.5 The dog should be able to climb onto and cross a slippery surface.

7.5.6 The dog should be able to climb onto and cross a wobbly surface, for example, warped plywood, which is at least 12 ft long, 12 in. wide, and 3 ft above the ground.

7.5.7 The dog should be able to climb onto and cross a nonstationary plank, (supported by two barrels on their side), which is no more than 12 ft long by 12 in. wide.

8. Keywords

8.1 agility; canine training; conditioning; obedience; obstacle course

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