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| <b>Kent PD</b> | <b>WASPC</b> | <b>Title</b>                                    |
| <b>#15.180</b> | <b>N/A</b>   | <b>Generalist Canine (K9) Operations Policy</b> |

## I. PURPOSE

This policy establishes clear, legally compliant, operational, and ethical standards for the deployment, supervision, training, documentation, care, and evaluation of Generalist Police Canine (K9) Teams. It aligns with the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission (WSCJTC) Model Canine Policy, applicable state law—including ESHB 1054 and RCW 10.120.020—and recognized best practices for law-enforcement canine operations.

Generalist K9 Teams provide a specialized resource to locate fleeing or concealed suspects; locate evidence associated with criminal activity; and enhance officer safety during high-risk search operations. All deployments must prioritize preservation of human life, proportionality, and de-escalation. Any use of force must conform to RCW 10.120.020 and Kent PD Policy 03.10 Use of Force.

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## II. DEFINITIONS

**Apprehension:** When a suspect comes into custody as the result of a canine deployment, either through canine contact or voluntary surrender following warnings.

**Bite:** Any contact between the canine’s teeth and a human or animal, regardless of injury.

**Unintended Bite:** A bite occurring when no search/apprehension command was given or when the canine engages the incorrect individual.

**Canine Handler:** A commissioned, WSCJTC-certified officer responsible for the care, control, deployment, documentation, and welfare of a police canine.

**Canine Team:** The certified pairing of one canine and one handler. Certification applies to the team as a unit; a change in either member requires new team certification.

**Deployment:** Removing the canine from the vehicle or positioning the canine for a trained law-enforcement function.

**On-Lead / Off-Lead:** *On-Lead:* the canine is attached to and controlled by a leash. *Off-Lead:* the canine is deployed without a leash or without physical control.

**Serious Injury:** Any injury involving major lacerations, fractures, suspected internal trauma, unconsciousness, or other significant harm.

**Standby:** Having a canine out of the vehicle, on lead, prepared for rapid

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deployment if necessary. Standby does not constitute a use of force or an actual deployment; however, it requires the same documentation as a deployment.

**Totality of the Circumstances:** All facts reasonably known to the handler at the time a deployment or force decision is made.

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### **III. CERTIFICATION, RECERTIFICATION, AND TRAINING**

1. All Generalist K9 Teams must maintain current WSCJTC Patrol Canine Team certification.
  2. New handlers must complete 400 hours of training, including at least 200 hours with their assigned duty canine.
  3. Experienced handlers must complete 200 hours of team training.
  4. Required certification training includes legal standards, de-escalation, tracking/trailing, area and building search, evidence detection, obedience, history of race and policing, handler protection, and public-relations skills.
  5. K9 Teams should conduct an average of four hours per week (16 hours per month) of maintenance training to sustain operational proficiency.
  6. **Recertification:**
    - A. Canine Teams must maintain current WAC certification. Certification occurs every two years as outlined in applicable WAC standards.
    - B. Kent K9 Teams are expected to obtain and maintain WSPCA certification. Failure to achieve WSPCA certification will not prohibit deployment provided the team remains current on WAC certification. After two consecutive WSPCA certification failures, the K9 Supervisor shall evaluate the team's deployment status and document findings in the training log.
  7. The K9 Unit Supervisor shall conduct random audits of certification status and training records.
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### **IV. GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR DEPLOYMENT**

#### **A. Legal Standard**

Deployments in which force is reasonably foreseeable constitute a use of force under RCW 10.120.020. Handlers must use reasonable care, consider all available

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de-escalation options, and employ only the degree of force necessary based on the totality of the circumstances.

### **B. Conditions Making Deployment Inappropriate**

Handlers must consider environmental, tactical, and safety factors that may render deployment unsafe or unreasonable, including: crowded or unsecured environments, behavioral-health crises with no associated criminal activity, scene contamination risk, lack of containment, extended time delays, or any circumstance where deployment may unnecessarily increase risk to the public or officers.

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## **V. APPROPRIATE CANINE DEPLOYMENTS**

K9 Teams may be deployed for:

- Tracking or trailing suspects when probable cause exists
- Area or building searches
- Evidence searches
- High-risk tactical operations where canine use may reduce overall force risk
- Officer-safety support during clearing operations
- Standby deployments

Handlers must maintain verbal control and remain within an appropriate working distance during off-lead deployments.

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## **VI. STRATEGIES TO MINIMIZE CANINE BITES**

Handlers must:

- Employ de-escalation strategies whenever feasible
- Use slow-and-deliberate tactics when appropriate
- Operate within trained and certified capabilities
- Provide clear, audible warnings prior to deployment
- Maintain situational awareness and off-lead control
- Participate in annual performance evaluations

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## **VII. PROHIBITED CANINE DEPLOYMENTS**

1. Crowd control or demonstration management
  2. Situations lacking probable cause where a subject is merely fleeing
  3. Behavioral-health incidents without an imminent threat
  4. Circumstances posing unreasonable risk to uninvolved persons
  5. Missing-person or search-and-rescue calls not associated with criminal activity
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## **VIII. USE OF CANINES TO APPREHEND SUSPECTS**

1. Canines may be used for apprehension only when lesser intrusive alternatives are insufficient or unsafe.
  2. Handlers must issue a clear, loud warning and provide reasonable time for voluntary surrender. Warnings should be issued prior to deployment and periodically during the search when feasible.
  3. **Post-Use of Force Requirements:**
    - Request medical aid
    - Provide first aid when safe and within training
    - Notify a supervisor
    - Complete all required reports, including a Use of Force report
    - Photograph injuries after medical treatment when feasible
  4. Supervisors must confirm medical aid, ensure injury documentation, collect witness statements when feasible, and review the incident for policy or training considerations.
  5. Unintended bites must be reported through the K9 chain of command and will result in temporary removal from service pending review.
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## **IX. REPORTING AND DOCUMENTATION**

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Handlers must complete:

- Incident Report
- Use of Force Report
- CJTC Form 1916 (Canine Reporting), when required, submitted within 15 days
- Canine Supplemental Report
- Training and Deployment Logs
- Annual bite-to-apprehension ratio review

Serious injury or death must be reported to WSCJTC.

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## **X. DECERTIFICATION AND REMOVAL FROM SERVICE**

A team may be removed or decertified due to:

- Unlawful force or use of pain-compliance techniques
- Recurrent disobedient aggression
- Repeated unintended bites
- Separation or reassignment of handler or canine
- Request by the agency head

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## **XI. RESPONSIBILITIES AND SUPERVISION**

- The handler maintains tactical authority over the canine but is accountable to supervisory direction.
- Supervisors may limit or terminate a deployment based on safety or policy concerns.
- Supervisors may **not** order a handler to deploy a canine.
- Escort officers must follow handler instructions.
- Only the handler may interpret or describe canine behavior in reports.

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- The K9 Unit Supervisor ensures compliance, conducts audits, and oversees program integrity.

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## **XII. POLICY REVIEW**

This policy shall be reviewed annually by the K9 Chain of Command to ensure continued alignment with WSCJTC Model Policy updates and evolving best practices.

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## **XIII. CARE AND MAINTENANCE**

Handlers are responsible for the ongoing care, health, and operational readiness of their assigned canine and associated equipment. This includes:

### **1. Health and Veterinary Care**

- Ensuring the canine receives annual medical examinations, vaccinations, dental care, and any recommended preventive treatments.
- Promptly reporting any illness, injury, or medical concern to the K9 Supervisor and chain of command.
- Following all prescribed veterinary treatment plans and documenting medical issues in training or deployment logs.

### **2. Daily Care and Living Conditions**

- Providing appropriate food, hydration, grooming, exercise, and rest.
- Ensuring the canine's housing—whether at the handler's residence or another approved location—meets suitability standards, including secure fencing or a dedicated dog run sufficient to ensure safety and welfare.
- Maintaining climate-controlled conditions when the canine is housed or transported in department vehicles.

### **3. Equipment Maintenance**

- Inspecting leashes, collars, harnesses, muzzles, tracking gear, and vehicle safety systems regularly for wear, damage, or malfunction.

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- Replacing or repairing equipment promptly and reporting unsafe or deficient equipment to the K9 Supervisor.

#### 4. **Documentation**

- Recording all significant health issues, veterinary visits, and equipment replacements in the canine's training or maintenance log.
- Notifying the chain of command of any condition that may affect the canine's ability to safely perform its duties.

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