POLICY AND PROCEDURE NO. 401

Canine Unit Guidelines

Massachusetts Police Accreditation Standards:
41.1.4

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1. PURPOSE:

To establish and define the role of the Worcester Police Department Canine Unit, establish guidelines for activation and utilization of canine resources.

2. POLICY:

The Worcester Police Canine Unit shall:

When requested and approved, assist members from the Worcester Police Department and those from other municipal, state and federal agencies.

3. GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES:

The purpose of this policy is to establish responsibilities and procedures pertaining to the use, deployment, training, and care of the Worcester Police Canine Unit.

The primary mission of the Canine Unit is to provide trained canine teams to assist in the prevention and detection of crime, the tracking of missing persons and persons sought by the police, the search for articles to be used for evidence and the search of areas and buildings in which a suspect is being sought. All members of the department shall cooperate and assist the Canine Unit in achieving these objectives.

Members of the Canine Unit shall participate in assisting in patrol function activities in a highly visible fashion. The Canine Unit shall make itself available to assist on all calls for which the canine is trained.

4. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

The Canine Unit shall be assigned to Special Operations.

A Police Official shall be assigned as the Canine Unit Supervisor and shall report to the Captain of Special Operations through the chain of command.

WPD shall utilize a qualified trainer who can provide certified canine training. The Canine Unit Supervisor shall be responsible for the day-to-day supervision of the unit. The Canine Unit Supervisor or designee shall keep all daily activity logs and training records. The Canine Unit Supervisor or designee shall ensure that each canine team receives a minimum of 16 hours of in-service training per month absent extenuating circumstances, and additional training as the Canine Unit Supervisor directs.

The Canine Unit Supervisor or designee shall be responsible for training requirements by the Worcester Police Canine Unit and shall ensure that Department canines receive training and certification along the requirements of the United States Police Canine Association (USPCA), the North American Police Work Dog Association (NAPWDA), the Boston Police Canine Academy, and or other recognized and reputable canine association agency prior to deployment. MPAC 41.1.4 [d]

The Canine Unit Supervisor or designee shall be the canine liaison between the Department and outside law enforcement agencies when outside canines are needed for planned operations. In the event of an emergency any police official may request outside canines as needed.

The Canine Unit Supervisor or designee shall track canine deployments and canine apprehensions. They shall calculate and track canine bite ratios monthly to assess its canine unit and individual canine teams. WPD shall require the review of the performance of any handler whose bite ratio exceeds 20 percent during a six-month period, or the entire unit if the unit's bite ratio exceeds that threshold.

5. HANDLERS:

Handler selection shall comport with Policy 55 Specialized Units.

Potential handlers shall have a single-family dwelling with a yard suitable to provide safe care and protection of the canine. The Canine Unit Supervisor shall inspect a potential handler's dwelling before the canine is issued.

Officers assigned to the canine unit, in addition to complying with the policy and procedures of WPD, have the added responsibility of kenneling, handling and caring for a trained police work dog. All new handlers shall be supplied with the following equipment: MPAC 41.1.4 [f]

• Kennel

• Kennel flooring

• Doghouse

• New Handler Kit

All handlers should be aware of all criminal, and civil, actions which could result from carelessness in the event their dog bites an innocent person while off duty.

All handlers shall ensure that the general health, hygiene, and care of their assigned canine is maintained. Should circumstances change, the Canine Unit Supervisor should be notified as soon as possible.

Each canine resides with its handler, who is responsible for its care. The Canine Unit Supervisor or designee arranges veterinary care, including twenty-four-hour emergency veterinary care, and arranges care for a canine whose handler is unavailable. MPAC 41.1.4 [e]

All handlers shall receive 4 hours of overtime pay per week, per dog, to defray the expenses of canine care outside of normal hours.

Worcester Police Canines are the property of the City of Worcester.

6. DEPLOYMENT OF A CANINE:

Use within the City of Worcester

Requests for the immediate utilization of canine service in accordance with the guidelines of this policy may be made by a police official or, in the absence of a police official, by any officer at the scene of an incident.

Such a request shall be made through the communications dispatcher. Upon arrival, the canine handler shall be responsible for determining whether the circumstances justify the use of a canine and for determining its utilization. MPAC 41.1.4 [a]

Special Situations

Whenever a canine is used in a special situation, the trained qualified canine handler has the right and obligation to decline orders to deploy the canine in an improper, illegal or in an excessively dangerous manner.

Use of a WPD canine outside the City of Worcester

All requests for canine assistance outside the City of Worcester shall be made in accordance with Policy 807 Mutual Aid.

All WPD canines, except for the Friendly Find Search and Rescue canines and during an explosive ordnance device search, shall be equipped with an e-collar. It consists of a special collar equipped with batteries, electric contact points, and a radio receiver tuned to the handler's handheld transmitter. E-collars allow police canines to be trained off leash and at a distance.

All WPD canine handlers shall also be equipped with a break stick. A break stick is a tool used to safely release a dog's grip during a bite-and-hold situation.

7. DEPLOYMENT AND USE OF FORCE IN CANINE OPERATIONS:

All deployments shall be consistent with constitutional standards, DOJ guidance, and department policy.

Announcements

The following announcements should be given prior to deploying the canine for a search of a suspect, except when it poses an officer safety issue:

1. Your identity as a police officer

2. A warning to come out

3. Your intention to use a police work dog should the suspect refuse to come out

All subsequent reports shall include all warnings issued by a handler prior to the deployment of said canine.

Inside of structures, announcements shall be given each time the handler changes floors. When feasible, announcements shall be given in 3 prevalent languages of the City of Worcester.

Authorized Deployments

Canines may be deployed when: MPAC 41.1.4 [c]

• The suspect is believed to have committed or is committing a violent felony (e.g. Homicide, armed robbery, aggravated assault, sexual assault).

• The suspect is committing or has committed serious misdemeanors where their actions pose immediate risk to officers or the public.

• A suspect is concealing themselves in a structure, vehicle, or area where they may ambush officers or escape.

• For searches and tracking (area, building, article, evidence, or scent), when such deployment increases safety and efficiency.

Lead Requirement

All canine searches shall be conducted on-lead.

A handler may conduct an off-lead search or track only when they can articulate specific safety or environmental reasons, such as:

• The suspect is reasonably believed to be armed and poses a threat of death or serious bodily harm.

• Environmental obstacles prevent safe on-lead deployment (e.g., confined spaces, structural hazards, terrain).

Restrictions

Canines shall not be used for minor offenses when the subject poses no threat.

Canines shall not be used for crowd control at protests or demonstrations. MPAC 41.1.4 [b]

Use of Force Considerations

A canine deployment that results in contact between the canine and a person, whether or not a bite occurs, is a use of force as defined in Policy 400 Use of Force. A canine deployment that does not result in contact, including the display of the canine, an announcement or warning, or a release of the canine that ends without contact, is not a use of force. MPAC 41.1.4 [g]

The handler shall be able to articulate the necessity, reasonableness, and proportionality of the deployment.

Handlers shall issue a verbal warning prior to deployment, when feasible.

Once a bite occurs, the handler shall remove the canine as soon as it is safe to do so.

8. REPORTING USE OF FORCE INCIDENTS:

A canine use of force, as defined in Section 7, shall be reported and reviewed in accordance with Sections IV.N and IV.O of Policy 400 Use of Force.

A canine deployment that does not result in contact shall be documented in the incident report and recorded as a deployment under Section 4.

9. INJURIES:

In the event of a canine apprehension or injury of an individual(s) the canine handler shall:

• Request Emergency Medical Services as soon as practicable when a person sustains a canine bite. If the person requires additional medical attention, transport them to a medical facility for treatment.

• Notify the Canine Unit Supervisor or Special Operations Supervisor and summon them to the scene.

• The on-scene Supervisor shall request CSU to be notified and request color photographs be taken of the affected area(s) as well as photographs of the location of the apprehension.

• Complete all necessary reports documenting the incident.

In the event of an apprehension resulting in injury the Canine Unit Supervisor upon being summoned to the scene shall also follow up at the hospital to interview the suspect. In circumstances where the Canine Unit Supervisor is unavailable or directly involved in the incident, as defined in Policy 400 Use of Force, a supervisor not directly involved shall respond and review the use of force incident. The review shall be documented and memorialized in the RMS. Miranda warning should be given prior to the questioning of the suspect, and the questioning should be done on department issued Body Worn Camera.

10. SPECIAL EVENTS REGARDING EXPLOSIVE DETECTION DOG USE:

A significant event or large venue event, occurrence, contest, activity, or meeting which requires dedication of first responder resources to maintain the safety of the public while protecting property and infrastructure.

Types of Special Event

• Sporting Events

• Run/Walk Fund Raisers

• Parades

• Protests

• Holiday Celebrations

• Religious Ceremonies

• Political Events

• Events in attendance of 5000 or more people

Considerations for canine manning and deployment

• Responsibility for the event — municipal, state, or federal

• Operational plan

• Duration/relief needed

• Size geographic footprint of event

• Maps/orientation/division of work

- Staging area/public safety compound needed
- Radios/communications/interoperable with other agencies/texting group
- Civilian Support Teams
- Explosive detection canine (Additional)
- Known threats/intel (sharable)
- Training for assigned police officers
- Civilian training in advance — train them to act

Responsibilities

The Canine Unit Supervisor or designee shall complete an Operational Plan with the above information and submit it to the Event OIC in a timely fashion.

The Canine Unit Supervisor or designee shall act as the Department Liaison to outside law enforcement agencies regarding the manning and deployment of Explosive Detection Canines. It is recognized that the Massachusetts State Police Bomb Squad is the primary Explosive Ordnance Disposal Unit for the City of Worcester. The Canine Unit Supervisor or designee shall liaise with the MSP Bomb Squad to promote a professional relationship. To promote proficiency, the Worcester Police explosive detection canines may assist MSP Bomb Squad when feasible. When the MSP Bomb Squad is operational in the City of Worcester, the Canine Unit Supervisor or designee shall assist with any communication to/from City assets. In the event the Canine Unit Supervisor or designee is not available the operations official shall assume these duties.

11. DEPARTMENT CANINE VEHICLES:

A. Department vehicles that are issued to canine handlers shall be equipped with heat detection systems and window tinting.

B. Canine handlers shall be issued department vehicles. Said vehicles shall be authorized for use in conjunction with the deployment, training, safe handling, care, health, maintenance, and feeding of the canine.

Per:

Paul B. Saucier
Chief of Police

Revisions:

November 6, 2026–

Replaced the statement that every canine deployment is a use of force, and the level 4 bite classification, with a contact definition: contact with a person is a use of force; a display, warning, or release without contact is not. Replaced the use of force reporting procedures with a reference to Policy 400 Use of Force. Replaced the 24-hour monthly training average with a 16-hour monthly minimum. Added non-contact deployment documentation, canine residence with the handler, and veterinary care, including twenty-four-hour emergency care, and care when the handler is unavailable. Added that a designee may carry out the Canine Unit Supervisor's administrative duties. Removed the sample warning, sample interview questions, and a case citation.

May 2025–

Section 4 "Qualified trainer" sentence and Supervisory tracking canine deployments and apprehensions paragraph. Section 5 Handlers, list and paragraphs to include the bullets. Section 6 Deployment of Canine. Section 7 Guidelines on the use of force in a canine deployment. Section 8 Reporting use of force incidents and supervisory role. Section 9 Injuries. Section 10 Special Event. Chief's name change to Paul B. Saucier.

February 18, 2022–

Section 8 Reporting of Use of Force Incidents revised to be in accordance with Policy NO. 400. Section 7 Crowd Control (Restrictions) revised. Section 9 K-9 Apprehensions and Injuries added. Section 5 Handler Selection added.

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