

THE BILL BLACKWOOD  
LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE OF TEXAS

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A POLICE CANINE TRAINING  
POLICY FOR THE SNYDER POLICE DEPARTMENT

A Policy Research Project  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Professional Designation  
Graduate, Management Institute

by

Trevlyn D. Pitner

Snyder Police Department  
Snyder, Texas  
March 1998

## **ABSTRACT**

The implementation of a police canine training policy for the Snyder Police Department is very relevant to today's policing. Having a policy will provide guidance and standards for the police canine team and department to follow. This in turn will give direction and help in reducing the chance for civil liability. Implementing a canine policy will also make the team a more productive and efficient unit.

The purpose of research for this project is to gain information and resources to assist in implementing policy. It will also allow us to look at the history of police canine units and where we should be in the future in regards to policy. Of course, one of the modern day issues dealing with the need for training is that of civil liability, and this will be discussed. Issues involving the importance of in-service training, the frequency of the training, and documentation are explored. The policies of four agencies will be reviewed and compared on their training methods.

In modern day policing, the police canine unit may be one of our best crime prevention tools. We have an obligation and need to do our part in making the most of our resources and to utilize the tools we have to their utmost capabilities. The issues discussed in this research project should assist us in beginning that process of implementing a police canine training policy for the Snyder Police Department.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section	Page
Abstract	
Introduction .....	1
Historical, Legal, or Theoretical Context .....	2
Review of Literature or Practice .....	4
Discussion of Relevant Issues .....	7
Conclusion/Recommendations .....	10
Bibliography	

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of research for this project is to gain information and resources to assist in implementing a Police Canine Training Policy for the Snyder Police Department.

There are four primary issues that will be addressed in this project that relate to policing. The first issue to be discussed will be that of current and future training needs of the canine team. Second, the training methods to be used by the canine team will be explored and explained. Next, testing methods and the frequency of testing will be discussed. And last, the documentation issues of the canine training and testing will be defined. This project is important to policing because it will provide the needed guidance and standards for the Police canine team to continue into the twenty-first century.

The intended audience of this project is the Snyder Police Department's Chief of Police, Staff Supervisors, and Special Services Supervisor. This project will also be available for review by the Snyder City Council, City Manager, and Mayor if requested by such.

The sources of information and methods to be used are as follows:

- \* Books
- \* Journals
- \* Other Law Enforcement Agency Policies

- \* U.S. Government Documents
- \* Case Law

The intended outcome of this project is to receive approval from the Chief of Police to implement a Police Canine Training Policy. By implementing this policy, the department would gain a more proficient Canine Unit which in turn would help reduce civil liability and improve overall efficiency within.

### **Historical, Legal, or Theoretical Context**

Although the use of police dogs may be traced as far back as the reign of Pyrrhus, King of Epirus (195-171 BC), modern use of such animals dates only to the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The use of canines for law enforcement and security purposes is a relatively new concept. This is especially true of the formulation of consistently valid training and employment techniques (Grimmer, 1995, 4). The first known and recognized canine program in the USA was developed by the New York City Police Department in 1907. Along with many other cities of different sizes, New York's program was abandoned shortly after World War II. Most of the failed programs were the result of the shortage of competent trainers and the requirement for constant in-service training (Grimmer, 1995, 4). Even with these problems, most departments still believed that police canines were effective in crime fighting. Following the Korean War,

state of the art developments in canine behavior and training occurred rapidly. This, coupled with a spiraling crime rate, rekindled interest in police working dogs, especially in jurisdictions where on the street crimes were reaching epidemic proportions. In 1957, Baltimore organized and trained a highly effective canine unit. Its success in combating certain types of crime prompted numerous cities to follow Baltimore's example (Grimmer, 1995, 5). To continue this trend of effective canine units for police work, training for the canine team should be a very vital part of an agencies overall plan, as with all other areas of police work.

Like human police officers, police dogs undergo extensive training before they practice their trade (Wexler 99). This training should also continue throughout the working life of the canine. Failing to have and allow proper training could and probably will result in the breakdown of the canine unit. A canine unit is quite an investment from the department, city, and citizens and once committed to, is much too important to just be pushed aside when it comes to canine training. Unless stated otherwise, the expression "canine training" should be understood to mean training a law enforcement officer and a dog to function as a team in order to perform law enforcement functions (Washington, 1993, 1).

Of course, one of the modern day issues dealing with the need

for training is that of civil liability. A failure to acknowledge the need for mandatory standards of training and written policies and procedures for police working dogs will undoubtedly lead to an increased civil liability and eventually, the loss of the police working dog programs in law enforcement (Davey 9). In one case (Ford v. Breiler) the Court held that the supervisor and administrator can be held personally liable for failure to direct by not establishing written policy regarding the requirements of officers under his command (Davey 11). One of the most important decisions that has been handed down from the Supreme Court is one from (City of Canton v. Harris). The Court made clear that inadequate police training may serve as the basis for municipal liability under 42 U.S.C. Section 1983 (Westmoreland 2). The liability risks can be minimized by a department by providing the adequate training needed to perform the job effectively and proficiently. The canine unit, however, must be operated in accordance with carefully developed policies and procedures (Barbour 49).

#### **Review of Literature or Practice**

A solid training program is an important factor in developing and maintaining a K-9 detection team. Training must be conducted on a regular, frequent basis, using a variety of realistic situations (Ross 53). Currently, the Snyder Police Department canine teams train frequently, however, training is

sporadic and is not conducted on a planned, regular basis. This is primarily due to not having set out guidelines and requirements. We have a current need to immediately establish a training policy, and to ensure that it will be one that will also carry us into the future.

In respect to canine training, this project focuses on an existing canine unit and its continued maintenance. No matter how smart or how good a canine unit is upon graduating from school, unless an inservice training program is also initiated, a proficient unit will lose its proficiency (Hess 29). Research varies only slightly with this subject, with all agreeing that inservice training or maintenance is a must. According to the president of the American Society of Canine Trainers, Chris R. Aycock, maintenance is the key to making sure that the handler produces and always strives to increase the dog's performance (Aycock 72).

Lieutenant Carl Ross of the Albuquerque Police Department, New Mexico, believes that drug detection training should be conducted on at least two levels. The first involves the regular practice given to the dog by the handler. If not on a daily basis, this should be done weekly, at minimum. The second level of training should be conducted on a squad or team basis. This should be held routinely, preferably monthly or quarterly (Ross 53).



Looking at the Sherman Police Department Policy and Procedure manual, they require the canine handler to maintain the required certifications and standards of proficiency for their assigned canine. Sherman also sets out some required guidelines, including training a minimum of eight hours monthly in addition to a minimum of 15 to 20 minutes daily as their work load permits (2). The next three departments looked at have more vague guidelines. The Houston Police Department Standard Operating Procedures state that in-service training will be set up and conducted by the HPD Canine Training Detail and no other training will be permitted (1). There are not any other guidelines or written policy concerning this that could be found. The Harris County Sheriff's Department Policy Manual only says that each canine deputy will receive scheduled training days as required to maintain competency and certification (4). And the last policy looked at was the Irving Police Department Policy Manual, which states that canine handlers will strictly adhere to maintenance training schedules (12). Again, these last three policies looked at were very vague and the departments did not have any other written procedures for the training.

By looking at some of the research findings and actual existing policies, it appears that we know what we need to do as far as implementing policies and guidelines, but we're not quite there yet. Some of this could be related to communication, or

better stated, lack of. Too often there is no real communication between the members of the canine unit and the administration (Eden 79). The canine handler should keep the administration informed of what is going on within the unit and relay to them any changes that need to be made. An example would be to inform administration of any new case law that could affect the unit or the department. And just the same, the administration should stay current on what the canine unit is doing and how they are doing. This would include monitoring the unit's proficiency and maybe even getting out and riding with the handlers from their department. It would be a valuable insight into the section and shows a genuine interest in the canine unit (Eden 80).

#### **Discussion of Relevant Issues**

In today's society, the police are being held to higher and higher standards and are being recognized as professionals. We need to do our part to maintain those standards and continue to earn the recognition as professionals. One way we can do this is to set high standards for ourselves. Good operation procedures, guidelines, and policies will keep us going in that direction.

One way to monitor how we are doing and meeting our standards is by testing. Most agencies adhere to the annual testing and recertification for their canine units. Dogs and their handlers are certified as a team, usually for one year, and are required to attend some type of workshop and recertification (Suthard

52). The Texas K-9 Police Association for Certifications and Standards is one association that performs annual certifications. They require the team to be a paid member of the association and meet certain requirements such as the dog having been trained humanely, having a valid health certificate from a veterinarian, and meeting basic obedience requirements (3). The department or agency can certify their own canine unit, however, having an outside testing source could be of great help in court. The willingness of courts to use a relaxed legal standard for police canines depends in part on the reliability of results and testing. Actions of a police canine that comply with other requirements are generally upheld if the dog has received specific training and has a proven record of accurate drug detection (Perkins 2).

One other key issue is that of documentation. All of the items we have been discussing mean very little without proper documentation. A timely, accurate record of all phases of training should be maintained, so that a canine's progress may be pinpointed at all times (Washington, 1991, 42). This record should follow the canine throughout its career. A log should be kept by the handler. Each time a training session is completed, the handler should record it (Aycock 72). The courts rely heavily on a dog's strong documented case history of reliability along with a handler's expertise (Benson 81).

The process of setting up policies and procedures for a canine unit brings with it some constraints but also opens up many new opportunities for both the canine team and the agency. By having a policy in place, the handler and supervisor may have to spend a little more time with paperwork, or in other words documentation. Having set required times for training will also probably cause some interruptions in the normal schedule at first, but these minor problems should soon pass and the new opportunities will take over.

By having guidelines or policies to follow will make the canine unit more confident and in turn be more productive. The handler will know what is expected of the unit and what can be expected of the department. The department will see a more reliable, efficient, and dedicated unit. A happy and energized canine unit can allow the administration to rest easily, knowing the purchase was worth the cost.

This brings us to the next topic dealing with cost versus benefits. The cost to operate a canine unit can vary greatly depending on size of agency, number of handlers/dogs, type of operation, and specific use of dogs. If resources permit, however, the dogs are a valuable asset in today's complex society, where every tool is needed to protect our communities (Suthard 52). Generally, the community accepts the canine unit favorably and supports its purpose. The good that comes

from the public relations the unit performs from doing programs and demonstrations in the community and schools is very difficult to put a price on. An energized, highly motivated canine unit can be one of your best crime prevention tools.

A good narcotic detection canine team can more than pay for the cost of their training, maintenance, and feeding, many times with the detection of a single seizure of narcotics. The average cost of purchasing, training, and maintaining a K-9 is approximately \$6,000 the first year. A small seizure of marijuana or some other illegal substance will have a street value many times more (Benson 81). We shouldn't look at the possible monetary gains, though, you can't put a price on the end result if the narcotics would have reached their destination, it might be our kids.

### **Conclusion/Recommendations**

The purpose for this research project has been to gain information and knowledge to better assist the Snyder Police Department in implementing a Police Canine Training Policy. This project has been relevant for the department because we currently have a canine unit but do not have a policy guiding or regulating it. The applicability of this project will be direct, the topic discussed is immediately needed.

The main issue that has been examined in this project is the need for implementing a canine policy. The canine unit needs

standards and guidelines to follow, for the present and future. We have policies for almost every other aspect or service of law enforcement and what we do on a daily basis, but not for the canine unit.

In modern day policing, the police canine unit may be one of our best crime deterrents. We have an obligation and need to do our part in making the most of our resources and to utilize the tools we have to their utmost capabilities. One way of accomplishing this mission is to set out our goals and objectives and adhere to them. This can only be done if we implement good policies and procedures for our departments and ourselves. There is a need to provide a professional support to all citizens and officers involved in the fight against crime (Kingshott 149).

The recommendations that have been made in this research project should help give some direction in starting the policy implementation process. Once the process has begun, more issues will present themselves and can be developed. When the Police Canine Training Policy for the Snyder Police Department is completed and implemented, the canine unit will operate more efficiently and the risk of civil liability will be reduced.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aycock, Chris R. "Establishing a K9 Team." Law and Order Nov. 1997: 71-73.
- Barbour, Gary. "Managing Police Canine Operations." Police Chief May 1988: 49-52.
- Benson, Carol C. "K-9 Sniffers." Law and Order Aug. 1991: 78-81.
- Davey, David A. "A Report With Recommendation Concerning State Approved Certification And Mandatory Standards Of Training For Police Working Dogs." (LEMIT/GMI: Aug. 1992) 9-11.
- Department of the Air Force. Military Working Dog Owner's Manual (Lackland Air Force Base, Texas: June 1991) 42.
- Department of the Treasury. Law Enforcement Canine Training (Washington, D.C.: GPO, July 1993) 1.
- Eden, Bob. "K-9 Administration." Law an Order June 1990: 79-82.
- Grimmer, Bill. "Police Narcotic Detector Dog Program." Tarrant County Junior College, Ft. Worth, Texas Course of Study 1995: 4-5.
- Harris County Sheriff's Department. Canine Unit Policy and Procedures. Houston 1997: 4.
- Hess, Russ. "Trainer's Corner." Canine Courier June 1991: 28-29.
- Houston Police Department. Canine Training Detail Standard Operating Procedures. Houston 1987: 1.
- Irving Police Department. Canine Unit Policy and Procedures. Irving 1990: 12.
- Kingshott, Brian F. "The Future of the Police Dog Section - Two Years From Now." Police Journal April 1997: 149.
- Perkins, Djuna E. "The Nose Knows: Using Trained Dogs to Detect Drugs." (Maine: Quinlan, 1995) 1-2.
- Ross, Carl. "K-9 Narcotics Detection Training." Police Chief May 1988: 53-54.

Sherman Police Department. Canine Unit Policy and Procedure.  
Sherman 1997: 2.

Suthard, R.L. "Law Enforcement's Best Friends." Police Chief  
Jan. 1991: 50-52.

Texas K-9 Police Association for Certifications and Standards.  
Certifications Manual Jan. 1997: 3.

Westmoreland, Robert. "Legal Aspects." Police Emergency Driving  
1994: 1-4

Wexler, Sanford. "Training K-9's." Law and Order July 1997:  
99-102