



## AVALANCHE RESCUE CERTIFICATION

**Test:** Avalanche

**Search Capabilities:** Capable of self-sustaining and searching for 24 hours in extreme weather and terrain conditions through avalanche debris fields. Capable of searching areas of one acre in 30 minutes for multiple victims.

**Task Book:** All items in Avalanche Rescue Certification Task Book must be demonstrated for certification.

### TESTING STANDARD

TESTING PREREQUISITES:

PROOF OF SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF ONE OF THE FOLLOWING COURSES, OR AN APPROVED EQUIVALENT MUST BE PROVIDED;

- AMERICAN AVALANCHE ASSOCIATION, LEVEL I OR II
- NATIONAL SKI PATROL AVALANCHE, LEVEL I OR II
- AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR AVALANCHE RESEARCH EDUCATION, LEVEL I OR II



PRIOR TO TAKING THE AVALANCHE RESCUE CERTIFICATION, THE DOG TEAM MUST FIRST SUCCESSFULLY TAKE AND PASS A FUNDAMENTALS SKILLS ASSESSMENT (FSA). THIS IS AN ASSESSMENT OF THE DOG TEAMS READINESS TO TAKE THE CERTIFICATION TEST ONLY AND NO OPERATIONAL CERTIFICATE IS ISSUED. IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE FSA BE GIVEN DURING THE ACTUAL CERTIFICATION PROCESS, BUT MAY BE SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED WITHIN 30 DAYS PRIOR TO THE TEAM TAKING THE CERTIFICATION TEST. THE TEAM IS NOT ELIGIBLE TO TAKE THE AVALANCHE RESCUE CERTIFICATION TEST IF THEY HAVE NOT SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED THE FSA WITHIN THE DESIGNATED TIME.

**AVALANCHE FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS ASSESSMENT TEST-** THIS TEST IS DESIGNED TO IDENTIFY THE MINIMUM SKILLS NEEDED BY AN INDIVIDUAL AND THEIR CANINE PARTNER TO PERFORM AS A SAR CANINE TEAM DURING SNOW SEARCH OPERATIONS FOR A SINGLE VICTIM BURIED WITHIN A SMALL AREA AND WILL BE THE PREREQUISITE FOR HIGHER LEVEL AVALANCHE EXAMINATIONS.

1. Area of approximately 1000 sq meters (1/4 acre) in terrain the team would normally asked to search during avalanche recovery operations
2. One subject that is unknown to dog.
3. All caves/holes a minimum of eight (8) meters (~26 feet) apart and shall include:
  - a. One blank snow cave
  - b. One snow cave/hole with non-human/light human scented distractions (food/snow/ski equipment)
  - c. One snow cave with the human target buried between 1-1.5 meters (~3-5 feet)
  - d. The snow caves/holes should be made to give the optimum control of scent.
  - e. The snow caves/holes need to be constructed to prevent canine penetration.
4. Search perimeter clearly indicated.
5. The target and all distractions shall be placed approximately twenty minutes before the start of the assessment.
6. Team must successfully navigate through test area.
7. Dog must alert on subject resulting in Handler finding subject. Any called false response constitutes a failure of the test.
8. Team must find subject to pass with no falsely called indications.
9. Team has 10 minutes to complete test.



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**TYPE I AVALANCHE RESCUE CERTIFICATION- 1 ACRE SEARCHED FOR 1-2 BURIED SUBJECTS.**

1. One (1) acre in an actual or simulated (difficult terrain) avalanche site.
  - a. If simulated, avalanche sites are to be constructed with snow machines, they will be prepared a minimum of 1-2 hours in advance of testing to allow for gas fume dissipation.
  - b. The area should be well marked-up with snowmobile, ski and snowshoe tracks before starting the test.
2. There must be adequate holes prepared to allow for multiple burials at different locations in the search area.
  - a. Fresh, open holes, as well as used holes are to remain open. The test holes must be constructed with adequate air space, and large enough for free movement of the subject. The integrity of the test demands the proper construction and sealing of the holes.
  - b. The openings are to be sealed with a minimum of one meter (3 feet) of snow and packed to prevent cave-ins. This provides adequate snow for digging without breaking through into the subject's compartment. If needed, hardened structures, such as snowshoes, can be used to block holes to aid closing.
  - c. As the test progresses, additional holes can and should be dug, if necessary.
  - d. A hole may only be used for two tests. Used holes will be left open and an Examiner shall inform the candidate handler that these holes were "recoveries made earlier".
  - e. Partial burials are not allowed. If a hole in which a subject was buried must be collapsed for safety reasons, the Examiner shall disclose to the candidate handler that there is scent present.
  - f. Search perimeter clearly indicated
  - g. Search subjects and Handler is not allowed to be involved in the site preparation.
  - h. Distractions such as rescue equipment, shovels, probes and flags, debris such as skis, ski poles, clothing, snowboards or snowmobile parts and non-canine active searchers will be in the search area. This simulates the majority of the avalanche search and rescue conditions.
  - i. Neither distractions nor debris will be placed in the immediate area of a subject or placed in such a way to trick or confuse the canine's trained final response.
3. Team must be prepared to be self-sustained and to search in extreme weather and conditions for 24 hours.



- a. It is not mandatory that a candidate handler wears their 24-hour pack during this test; however it needs to be in close proximity to the test site.
  - b. Actual equipment is determined by Handlers deploying organization however the mandatory equipment that the candidate handler must have in their possession for testing includes the following;
    - i. Avalanche Transceiver (in “send” mode or “off” if site is safe)
    - ii. Collapsible Avalanche Probe
    - iii. Avalanche Shovel
    - iv. Ten (10) wands/flags with handler name
    - v. Appropriate clothing for spending a night out in the winter environment
    - vi. Skis or snowshoes, as needed
    - vii. First aid supplies and water for the Handler/K9 team
    - viii. Radio equipment used in search operations
4. Safety guidelines must be in place and a Safety Officer assigned to testing scenario.
- a. Search sites and their approaches must be at low risk for continued avalanches.
  - b. The subjects must wear a transceiver; it must be set to transmit, and they must have a working radio
  - c. Radio communications, emergency beacons, and safety personnel are mandatory whenever any subject is buried.
  - d. Radio contact will be verified prior to entry into the cave and being covered by snow.
  - e. Radio checks will be conducted every five (5) minutes, except when the canine is in close proximity.
  - f. Each subject’s location will be marked and observed by two shovelers at all times and placed in such a way as not to clue the handler/canine team to the subject’s location.
  - g. A chief shoveler will be appointed for each hole, to lead all extrications, as they will be most aware of the subject’s placement in the assigned hole.
  - h. The subjects may request extrication at any time and will be dug out immediately.



- i. The subjects must be attired and prepared to be buried for a maximum of 60-minutes, 40 minutes is ideal.
  - j. The Safety Officer or Test Coordinator may terminate the test at any time if, in their opinion, it becomes hazardous to any of the participants. The test will be halted if any participants observe that a hazardous situation exists.
5. The test will be conducted as a mock search with the Handler demonstrating appropriate scene management via delegation of duties, etc.
- a. The candidate handler will be given as much incidental information as necessary and will be expected to use all of his/her training in scent theory and avalanche searching to formulate and conduct a proper interview of the reporting party and effective and safe search plan. The Handler shall work the area as they would on an actual search. They are allowed to aerate areas of interest with their shovel, however probing is not allowed.
  - b. One to two (1-2) subjects shall be placed into snow caves/holes, buried approximately 1 meter to 2 meters (3-6 feet) in depth in the search area, in such a way as to encourage the use of air scenting. The subject(s) shall be placed as to be inaccessible and invisible to the canine team. The snow caves/holes shall be constructed in such a way as to ensure adequate air space as well as movement for the target (confined space requirements). The snow caves/holes with the subject inside, shall be sealed with a minimum of approximately 1 meter (3 feet) of compacted snow. There shall be no partial burials. Different regions have different snow conditions and construction of hole should consider local safety guidelines.
  - c. The handler is required to articulate their canine's response to scent, and to flag all locations of interest. When the handler sees the canine commit and alert/indicate to an identifiable location with digging, barking, re-find or other communication, the handler is to place two (2) flags at that location and call for a "shoveler" while continuing to search.
  - d. The candidate handler can send a dog back into any areas of interest to confirm a find before a shoveler is called at their discretion. Once a candidate handler calls for a shoveler, the location they call is considered a find. The evaluator will immediately confirm the status of the call, correct or incorrect. If the call is incorrect, the test will be terminated.
  - e. There shall be no penalty to the team if dog shows interest in any of the distractions, debris or previously occupied holes provided the candidate handler is able to get them re-focused on the search.
  - f. When the candidate handler feels the area has been searched thoroughly, they will report to the Examiners to indicate completion of the test and provide a debriefing as to methods used to search the area, areas of interest and a POD of the area whether or not all subjects were found.



- g. After maximum time allowed for the test or upon termination of the test, the Examiners will reveal location of any unfound subject(s). Dog will be allowed to work the area, but find will not be acknowledged toward the actual certification test.
  - h. Based upon the Examiner's judgment, search time will be based upon terrain, vegetation and wind/weather conditions but should not exceed 30 minutes.
6. Team demonstrates the following skills:
- a. Adequately attired for avalanche response and have mandatory equipment.
  - b. Establishes scene safety.
  - c. Performs an effective pre-deployment interview which may include the following questions;
    - i. Time of avalanche
    - ii. Number of potential subjects
    - iii. What were subjects doing at time of avalanche (snowmobile, ski, snowboard)
    - iv. Subject location at the time of the avalanche
    - v. If the scene is safe
    - vi. If avalanche watch is present
    - vii. Warning alarm for further slides
    - viii. Where the safe zone is
  - d. Demonstrate the ability to plan an efficient search, best utilizing wind, terrain, topography, and existing environmental conditions to provide efficient and effective coverage of the terrain given the time constraints of the test.
  - e. Verbalized the dog's final response prior to entering the search scene.
  - f. Demonstrate the ability to work and control the dog to effectively search the area.
  - g. Demonstrate that the handler recognizes when the dog is alerting to human scent.
  - h. Demonstrate the ability to judge sweeps of areas as to their suitability to conditions.
  - i. Demonstrate that they were aware of visual clues.
  - j. Were able to give a POD for the area searched.
  - k. Demonstrates appropriate canine care, safety and welfare.
  - l. Demonstrate that the handler behaves professionally during the test.
  - m. Dog responsive to handler's direction and control.
  - n. Dog searches independently and with focus.
  - o. Dog shows commitment to each target.
  - p. Dog demonstrates trained final response on one to two targets with no false alerts.
  - q. Dog alerts repetitively and independently of handler.
  - r. Team demonstrates that the Handler and dog have adequate agility and stamina to effectively work an avalanche search area.



- s. Team demonstrates that the Handler and dog have the ability to work effectively and find a subject with an additional person or persons accompanying the K-9 team.
- t. Was the search completed within the allowable time with all finds made?
- u. Did the dog and handler make an effective team?
- v. Did the dog demonstrate obedience through its reactions to handler commands?
- w. Was the search completed within the time limit for the evaluation?

**TYPE II AVALANCHE RESCUE CERTIFICATION- 1 ACRE SEARCHED FOR 1-2 BURIED SUBJECTS.**

All certification requirements are the same as a Type I test with the exception that the test is to be conducted in terrain that is considered moderate and not difficult or in an actual debris field (Type I requirements) as described by NIMS.

**GUIDELINES FOR THE EVALUATION:**

An area approximately one acre should be used. The site should be of an area containing avalanche debris that has been determined to be safe from possible avalanches or in terrain considered to be greater than moderate. The area should be typical of the environment in which the team will normally work.

A detailed description of the search area with maps and details of the burials, holes, distractions and environmental factors (i.e. wind) will be provided with documentation of the test. Evaluators shall map where the subjects entered into the search area, location of trail laid by subjects, wind conditions and approximate the scent cone created by subjects during the search.

The evaluators shall place one to two subjects in the search area. The subjects should be waiting outside the search area and may not participate in the set up. Distractions owned by the subjects may be used in the area

The handler will be given a scenario and a map of the search area. He/she must describe to the evaluators how the area will be searched based on terrain, wind direction, avalanche safety issues, topography, detectably and any other pertinent factors. The Handler must describe to the evaluators how the dog will alert when it detects humans scent. During the actual search, each time the handler observes the dog alerting he/she must clearly inform the evaluators as indicated in the guidelines.



The evaluations will last thirty minutes from the start of the search. Evaluators may extend the time limit as the discretion of the evaluators, should an otherwise successful test require more time to finish. The evaluators may terminate the search at any time if the unsafe conditions exist or if they have observed enough to determine that the team has/will not pass. All evaluators must agree upon a termination of a test.

During the evaluation the dogs must make a clear, unassisted find and refind (or other alert sequence or final response) on all buried subjects the search area. A false alert called by the handler is an automatic failure

At the end of the search the Handler will debrief the evaluators and will indicate areas searched on the map, areas not searched, wind characteristics, alerts, clues located, estimated Probability of Detection (P.O.D.) for the area a searched and any other pertinent information.

**Retesting-** Evaluators may decide to offer a re-test of a team that fails the certification process. Re-tests can be offered in cases where the test area or process has been compromised, significant questions arise as to the fairness of the test given wind/terrain conditions. Re-test are up to the discretion of the evaluators.

**Recertification-** The Avalanche Rescue Certification is good for 2 years from the date issued. There is a one-year grace period for recertification beyond the 2<sup>nd</sup> year. For re-certification, the FSA is not required. All other testing pre-requisites apply. Only one evaluator necessary.

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**Avalanche Certification Evaluation Score sheet**



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Handler: \_\_\_\_\_ Name of Canine: \_\_\_\_\_

Team: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator (print): \_\_\_\_\_ Evaluator (signature): \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator (print): \_\_\_\_\_ Evaluator (signature): \_\_\_\_\_

Site Type: FAS Type I Type II	Site Size (acres):			
Site description:	Temp:	Wind:	Humidity:	
# Of Subjects Placed:	# Of Subjects Found:			
Time start: Time end:	Poss.	Neg.	Comments	
Ground Rules:				
No abuse of canine				
No aggressive behavior to humans or other canines by canine				
Canine under control at all times				
	Subject 1		Subject 2	
	Poss.	Neg.	Poss.	Neg.
Canine indicates on subject with articulated response				
Handler locates subject				
Additional Skills:				
Ability to formulate and articulate an appropriate search strategy <input type="checkbox"/>				
Appropriate interview of witness or briefing with Incident Command <input type="checkbox"/>				
Handler demonstrates proper navigation skills <input type="checkbox"/>				
Appropriate debriefing to Incident Command <input type="checkbox"/>				
Provides accurate map of search area/P.O.D. / holes/location of subjects(s) <input type="checkbox"/>				