



Kern County Sheriff's Office

Policies and Procedures

TITLE: CANINE DEPLOYMENTS			NO: F-0910
APPROVED: Donny Youngblood, Sheriff-Coroner			
REFERENCE: Penal Code 835a; DPPM D-0200, D-0300, F-0100, F-0200, F-0900, F-0920, F-0930, F-1200 & P-0600, Government Code 7286 & 7286.5			
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January 26, 2026	January 26, 2026	January 26, 2026	January 26, 2026

POLICY

The purpose and scope of this policy is to establish guidelines for using canines to augment law enforcement services in the community, including but not limited to locating individuals, contraband, and apprehending criminal offenders. Sheriff's Office canine handlers are permitted to use a departmentally approved canine to apprehend a person when the handler is acting within the confines of the Guiding Principles and Canine Philosophy in DPPM F-0900.

Canine handlers shall operate in accordance with existing Sheriff's Office use of force policies, particularly the objective reasonableness use of force standard outlined in federal case law (*Graham v. Connor*). Canine handlers shall consider the totality of each event's circumstances by weighing the severity of the offense, the level of resistance posed by the subject(s), and the threat to the safety of the officers and the public.¹ In making those determinations, the facts are limited to those reasonably perceived by the canine handler when the decision(s) are made.

No canine team will be serviceable unless the handler and canine are current on all training requirements set forth by the Sheriff's Office. This includes monthly training hour requirements and annual certifications for patrol and detection outlined in DPPM F-0930.

PROCEDURE A: DEPLOYMENT FACTORS

The deployment of a canine shall be continuously re-evaluated during an incident to assess the appropriateness of its continued use. A canine handler shall keep his or her canine within visual and auditory range during deployments at all times, except when a canine clears a threshold (e.g., rounding a corner, entering a room, ascending/descending a stairwell, or entering a confined space, such as a crawl-space), or when canine deployment beyond the handler's visual and auditory range is necessary to ensure the immediate safety of others.

Canine handlers shall also be equipped with a supplemental method of aiding with the release of a bite, including, but not limited to a breaker bar (canine bite disengagement or "outing" tool), e-

¹ For further definitions, refer to DPPM F-0100 and DPPM F-0900.

collar, pinch collar, or other devices approved by the Sheriff's Office. The breaker bar, in conjunction with a verbal "out" command, is intended to be used to end a bite apprehension of a person in the field. The breaker bar is not to be used as a substitute for obedience training or the requirement of a dog to release a bite with a verbal "out" command alone. As such, the breaker bar will not be used during most training scenarios or during dog skills certification tests.

PROCEDURE B: ON-LEAD/LEASH DEPLOYMENTS

Generally, a Sheriff's Office canine should be used **on-lead/leash** to locate and/or apprehend any subject, as long it is within existing Sheriff's Office use of force policies, acting in the confines of Penal Code 835a, and the Guiding Principles of DPPM F-0100.

The following are additional circumstances for **on-lead/leash** deployments:

- Locating a non-criminal subject such as a critical missing person.
 - These searches should generally be done **muzzled**, taking into strong consideration airway restrictions for the canine and extreme temperatures.
- To assist in locating evidence, narcotics, or explosive devices as outlined in F-0920.
 - Canines will not be used to search a person for narcotics or explosive devices/materials.

PROCEDURE C: OFF-LEAD/LEASH DEPLOYMENTS

A Sheriff's Office canine may only be used **off-lead/leash** to locate and/or apprehend any subject where any of the following circumstances exist:

- Wanted for a serious or violent felony (see definitions in F-0900).
- Committed any offense, or is about to commit any offense, and there is a reasonable belief that the subject(s) is armed with a dangerous weapon based upon individualized information known to the handler.
- Warrant service where **EITHER** of the following are met:
 - Wanted for a serious or violent felony.
 - There is a reasonable belief that the subject(s) is armed with a dangerous weapon based upon individualized information known to the handler.
- When the canine handler reasonably believes the totality of the circumstances, environmental factors, or other exigent circumstances dictate that utilization of the canine on-lead/leash creates a serious threat to the handler, other deputies, or the public. Examples include but are not limited to:
 - SWAT operations (as outlined below).

PROCEDURE D: PROHIBITED CIRCUMSTANCES

Absent the presence of one or more of the conditions outlined above under on-lead/off-lead deployments, canines shall not be deployed for subjects in the following circumstances:

- The subject is wanted only for an infraction.

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- The subject is wanted for a misdemeanor crime not involving a weapon or threat to commit serious bodily harm to another.
- A stolen vehicle involving a named suspect or that is civil in nature (e.g., rental).
- Passively resisting subject(s) wanted for and/or suspected of committing non-violent and/or non-serious offenses.
- Mere flight from pursuing officers shall not serve as good cause for a canine apprehension.
- Generally, the deployment or apprehension of canines for juveniles, who appear under the age of 14, is prohibited unless the juvenile has (1) committed a violent crime (2) or threatened to commit a violent crime and has the apparent intent and present ability to do so, or (3) there is a reasonable belief that the juvenile is armed with a dangerous weapon based upon individualized information known to the handler.

PROCEDURE E: DEPLOYMENT APPROVAL

Generally, a canine handler shall obtain approval from the Canine Sergeant, an on-duty field supervisor, or an on-duty watch commander before any canine deployment. The approving supervisor shall not serve as a canine handler in the deployment.

- **Exception:** Supervisory pre-approval is not required when the canine handler reasonably believes the subject must be immediately apprehended to protect the public, deputies, or the handler, and/or when attempting to apprehend an escaping felony suspect.

PROCEDURE F: CANINE DEPLOYMENT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Prior to deploying a canine to apprehend a subject, the canine handler shall issue, or have someone else issue, three (3) loud and clear warnings that a canine will be deployed and advise the subject to surrender. These warnings shall be given in Spanish and English if the subject is reasonably believed to be a Spanish-speaking, Limited English Proficient (LEP) individual. The canine handler shall ensure the warnings are capable of being heard throughout the area of the deployment and will allow a sufficient period of time between each warning to provide a subject an opportunity to surrender.

- **Exception:** An announcement is not required if giving the warning would present an imminent threat of danger to the canine handler, other deputies on scene, or a member of the public.

These announcements also serve as a public announcement to warn people in the area of the canine's presence. These announcements should contain information including, but not limited to, identification of law enforcement presence with a Sheriff's Office canine, directions for individuals to comply, and a warning that a canine apprehension may occur, followed by a reasonable amount of time for the subject to comply and others to seek safety.

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The content and manner of the announcement shall be documented in the report or deployment record. If a canine handler deploys their canine without making an announcement, or makes less than three (3) announcements, the factors justifying this decision shall be thoroughly outlined in the incident report and evaluated during the review process.

PROCEDURE G: POST-APPREHENSION PROCEDURES

The canine handler will remove the canine from an apprehension as soon as it is safe to do so, taking into consideration the continuing threat posed by the subject and the ability of on-scene deputies to control the subject. The canine handler will remove the canine from the apprehension utilizing any Sheriff's Office approved method the handler deems efficient and appropriate for the circumstance.

If a canine apprehends any person by means of a bite, the handler or an on-scene deputy shall immediately request emergency medical services to respond to the scene when it is safe. Communications center personnel shall ensure medical aid is dispatched to the scene. Any person who is bitten by a canine will be transported to a County approved medical facility for treatment. If a subject is apprehended while assisting another law enforcement agency, the handler will ensure the agency taking custody of the subject facilitates medical aid.

Refer to DPPM F-0900 for further details on requirements related to documentation, supervisory response, and review.

PROCEDURE H: NOTIFICATION

After any canine apprehension, the canine handler will notify the Canine Section command staff and the on-duty command/ranking officer, as soon as practicable.

PROCEDURE I: SWAT INTEGRATION

When canine handlers deploy with the SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) team, they will be expected to follow the above directives and all applicable Sheriff's Office policies regarding using force.

A canine may be deployed during a SWAT operation with the approval of a SWAT Team Leader. The SWAT Commander has the authority to decline or delay the deployment of the canine as they deem necessary. The canine handler has the authority to decline the canine use whenever they determine a deployment is inappropriate. It is the canine handler's responsibility to evaluate each situation and determine whether the use of a canine is appropriate, reasonable, and policy.

Due to the unpredictable nature of SWAT operations, there may be other extraordinary situations where a canine should be utilized, which are not outlined in the canine policies. When this occurs, the canine handler will make every attempt to get approval from the SWAT Commander prior to

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the deployment of the canine. Canine use during such events requires consideration of the totality of the circumstances and compliance with the Sheriff's Office's philosophy for canine use.

Except for a lethal Category 3 use of force, any SWAT integration deployment of a canine resulting in a use of force will be documented by the handler in a use of force report and reviewed with the same procedures outlined in DPPM F-0900. This review may require input from the SWAT Team Leader(s) or SWAT Commander.

PROCEDURE J: CROWD CONTROL

The use of a canine shall be prohibited in crowd control situations, unless it is necessary in the immediate defense of life or to avoid the use of deadly force.

Canine teams shall only respond to crowd control situations at the direction of a command/ranking officer. If approved, canine deployments in crowd control situations shall be done on-lead/leash only, with a maximum of a six-foot leash, and only after serious consideration and input from the handler.

PROCEDURE K: CANINE TEAM CALL-OUTS

The Sheriff's Office Canine Unit is unable to provide on-duty 24-hour coverage due to limited staffing. When the need for a callout arises, but a canine team is not currently on-duty, the call-out of one or more canine team(s) may be required. The command/ranking officer overseeing such occurrences shall contact the Communications Center and request a canine team call-out. The Communications Center shall contact the Sheriff's Office Canine Sergeant or Canine Lieutenant to communicate the request.

The final authorization for the canine team call-out will be at the discretion of either the Canine Sergeant or Canine Lieutenant, once provided with the circumstances of the request.

PROCEDURE L: ACCIDENTAL CANINE BITE OR INJURY

In the event of an unintentional canine bite or injury, the canine handler shall:

- Request medical aid for the injured subject or deputy.
- Notify the on-duty supervisor without delay.
- Notify the Canine Unit supervisor.
- Make entry into the Use of Force Reporting System and route to the Canine Unit supervisor.
- Document the incident in an incident report.
- Take photographs of the injury and photographs of non-injured areas.

In the event of an unintentional canine bite or injury, the on-duty supervisor shall:

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- Ensure that all the canine handler's procedures have been completed.
- Identify and interview all witnesses (public). These interviews will be recorded and documented in an incident or supplemental report.
- Ensure all deputies, who are witnesses, document their involvement in an incident or supplemental report. The supervisor may opt to interview these witnesses at their discretion.
- Ensure any video evidence from the scene is gathered (e.g., surveillance cameras, cell phone footage).
- Write an internal memorandum that summarizes the incident, any issues identified, and if there are any alleged policy violations.

In the event of an unintentional canine bite or injury, the Canine Unit supervisor shall:

- Review all incident reports, supplemental reports, and Use of Force Reporting System entries.
- Review all contents related to the incident (e.g., body-worn camera footage, reports, memorandums).
- Write an internal memorandum that addresses if any changes in policies and procedures or additional training are needed.
 - This memorandum will include any alleged policy violations or unsafe practices identified.

In the event of an unintentional canine bite or injury, the Canine Unit managers shall:

- Review all incident reports, supplemental reports, and Use of Force Reporting System entries (approved only by the rank of Commander or higher).
- Review all contents related to the incident (e.g., body-worn camera footage, reports, memorandums).
- If policy violations are identified, the manager will follow DPPM D-0200 and D-0300.
- Conduct a review described in "Procedure C" in DPPM F-0900.
- After the review, the Patrol Division Commander will forward the incident to the Compliance Bureau to convene a Critical Incident Review as outlined in DPPM F-1200.

Note: If the person that is accidentally bitten or injured by the canine is a Sheriff's Office employee, then Sheriff's Office Risk Management shall be notified by a supervisor or manager, and worker's compensation paperwork shall be completed.

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