

Hunter's HRD Training



Many dogs are trained in multiple types of search and rescue. I not only work as an Air Scent Dog, but I am also trained as a HRD Dog. HRD means Human Remains Detection - and yes, I search for people's remains and the dead. Why? It is important for families to have closure and finding a loved one is very important. In fires, tornadoes, floods or other disasters, sometimes people die. They need to be found so the families can have a proper funeral. Since the dead cannot call to us, we need to search in a different way. That's where my job as a HRD Dog is important.

The HRD search is different for me. My handler Bob and I wear a green vest instead of orange. When I start the search, I'm told to "Find" instead of "Search." This command tells me I'm working HRD. I smell for human remains instead - the scent is very different.

During an HRD Search, Hunter's alert is to lie down when human remains are found.



HRD searches can sometimes be more dangerous than a regular search. We may climb through burned buildings, rubble from collapsed structures or even search flooded areas.



My training was very important. HRD Dogs first learn to recognize the scent of human remains. Sometimes a human bone or cremated ashes are used. These remains are properly donated and handled. For training and control, remains are placed in a tube with a vent to allow the scent to be present. I first had to put my nose to the tube of remains to learn the scent. Each time I was rewarded. After knowing the scent, the tube was hidden among several different items like pipes, flower pots, cinder blocks, bricks and other items. I had to find the remains and then give my alert by lying down next to that item. I got a treat each time I was right.

There are many animals in the woods, and most die there. Bones of mice, squirrels, deer and even fried chicken were used in my training so I could learn the difference between human remains and animal remains. Later in my training, the human remains tubes were hidden outside at our training facility. Sometimes it was under old tires, in wood piles, old buildings and even in a cardboard box underground. Once I had a training session where there were no human remains - just like in a real search when nothing is found.

Does it bother me to look for human remains? Yes, if I do it a lot. Bob makes sure I do HRD training for only a month or so. Then we go back to Air Scent training, which is very exciting. Bob knows dogs can get depressed looking for just the dead.

One last thing - sometimes we are called Cadaver Dogs. We don't really like that and it's not really the right name. A cadaver is a dead body. We look for not only bodies, but also for the remains of people, like human ashes in a terrible fire or bones of buried people. Plus, being also trained as an Air Scent Dog, if I'm searching for human remains and I get the scent of a live person, I give my bark alert and we change the search. We can always find human remains after we take care of the living. After all, human remains don't go anywhere.

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