

# All About Search and Rescue Dogs



Hi! I'm Hunter. I'm a Search and Rescue Dog - SAR Dog for short. My job is to find people who are lost - that's not easy to do.

It takes a lot of special training to be a SAR Dog. Not just any dog can join in the search. We have to train with our handlers for a long time. Sometimes it can take almost two years of training before we can join in a search and rescue. I started my training when I was just 8 weeks old.

For starters, every SAR Dog has to be a Canine Good Citizen. That means we have to be obedient at all times and must get along with other dogs, handlers and people we meet like in the picture - Uffda is making a new friend.



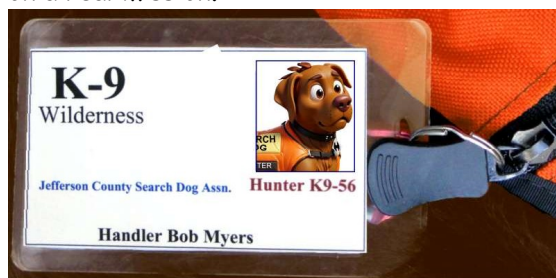
We even have to be good to other critters! That's just a part of it. There's much more to search and rescue than just being friendly.

SAR Dogs must stay in good shape to climb, run and jump. I was taught how to retrieve things for my handler, even in water. I had to learn how to stay in cars and vans for a long time with people and other dogs. Most of all, I learned to search properly using my nose and how to alert my handler when I picked up a scent.

There is special search and rescue training, too. As you can see in the pictures, SAR Dogs learn skills like climbing uneven surfaces, balancing, not being afraid of high places, following our handler's directions through obstacles and learning how to be carried in case we get injured on a search. We never know where we will have to go during a search, so we have to be prepared for any challenge.



Our training is a lot of work. Bob - he's my owner and handler - and I spent a lot of time training together, even at home. We're taught the skills we need to learn. As we work together we quickly become a team. We learn our commands, practice our search skills and become as one in our work. We learn to read each other's signals so we can communicate as a team. When a dog and the handler follow their training and always do the right things, they can be good enough to be trusted going on a real mission.



Finally, after lots of hard work and training with the team, I learned my skills and became an official SAR Dog. With the help of my handler, I earned an official team badge. JCSDA calls it an accountability tag. I had what it takes to become a SAR Dog and now I'm part of the Search and Rescue Team.

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What breeds can be SAR Dogs? Not every dog can do it. We need to be able to climb stairs and ladders. We have to be comfortable in the water. SAR Dogs must be able to safely walk around in the woods, even over fallen trees and logs.



Sometimes we have to climb on what's left of damaged homes. Because of what we need to do, smaller dogs just aren't right for the job of search and rescue.



Bloodhounds, Newfoundlands, Labrador Retrievers, German Shepherds, Australian Shepherds, Rottweilers and mixed breeds make great SAR Dogs. Other breeds like Border Collies, Boxers, Corgis, Dobermans, Golden Retrievers, Labradoodles (that's a Labrador and a Poodle mix), Malinois, Schnauzers, Tervuren, Australian Cattle Dogs and even Poodles can do great work, too! Dogs with traits for sporting, working and herding are the top picks. Of course our temperament - that's the way we act - is more important than our breed.

You might be wondering, "What kind of dog is Hunter?" I'm a Bulldog and Chocolate Labrador Retriever Mix! I've got lots of spirit and energy to do my job and that's really important, but just like my handler Bob, I also have to be calm in stressful and changing situations. We SAR Dogs also have to be agile, adaptable and can't be afraid of loud noises.

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Just like people, we SAR Dogs have different skills. Some of us dogs are best at just one thing, while other dogs are good at several things.

Sometimes our skills depend on our breed, but the skill all of us canines have is our sharp sense of smell. That's what makes us dogs so very important to the Search and Rescue Team.

I first trained as an **Air Scent Dog**. You can see me sniffing the air in this picture. Lots of people think we sniff the ground to find people, but Air Scent Dogs smell the air for a human scent. Here's our secret on how we do it.



Kind of like the way dogs shed hair, people shed skin cells. The bigger cells fall to the ground and the smaller particles float in the air. Even though a microscope is needed to see these cells, but dogs can smell them. Our noses can smell up to 10,000 times better than humans!

When looking for a lost person I follow the scent of any human, not just a particular person. That's why Air Scent Dogs work best in large parks or private lands that are closed off and have no other people around. The best times and conditions for our searches are early mornings or late afternoons on cool, cloudy days when there is a light wind.

Of course, some dogs do sniff the ground. They are **Trailing Dogs**, sometimes also called **Tracking Dogs**. They need to smell something belonging to that person, like a shirt, socks or a hat. When they know the scent, they hunt for that smell. They use their nose to find the exact scent, much like you would use your eyes to find a red crayon in a box of different color crayons. And they work at a fast pace, following the scent of the lost person and once they pick up that trail, they just keep on going.

Trailing Dogs give both negative and positive responses along the scent trail. Negative responses tell the handler the scent isn't as strong or it is gone. Positive responses mean the dog found the trail and is working it.



Another search and rescue canine skill is the **Water Search Dog**, like Uffda. She's a bloodhound. Looking for drowning victims, Water Search Dogs work along the shore and in boats to locate the scent as it rises through the water.

On this mission, Uffda is at the front of the boat, leans closer and closer to the water and then slaps and bites at the surface when a person underwater is found. Uffda's handler, Paul, then drops a marker into the water and the boat returns to shore. Divers return to where the marker is to locate the drowned victim.

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I'm also trained as a **Human Remains Detection Dog** or **HRD Dog**. Sometimes we are called a **Cadaver Dog**. For this task I find those no longer alive and people's remains. Some people die in disasters like when tornadoes cause buildings to collapse. Sometimes fires take lives. Families want to know what happened to their loved ones and the skills of these dogs can help find them. HRD Dogs are trained to detect the body's scent rising from the soil, the same way dogs find where they buried a bone.

We HRD Dogs can find very small parts or trace amounts of blood. We can work above or even below ground.

Frequently, we are called upon to help after disasters like tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes or wildfires to detect human remains through concrete or underground. HRD Dogs and their handlers worked long hours searching for victims of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Louisiana.

The final skilled canine is the **Avalanche Dog**. We don't have any of these dogs in Kentucky, but in areas where skiing is a big sport, these dogs are important. They search for people who are trapped under the snow. Avalanche Dogs can find someone under as much as 15 feet of snow.

- 🐾 Learn about SAR Dogs
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**Hunter's Search Dogs Kids Area**

**kids.jcsda.com**



I hope you enjoyed reading all about Search and Rescue Dogs and learned about the important training and work we do.

If you want to know more about me and my team, visit our website at **JCSDA.com** and look around. We also have a **Kids Area** - you'll find me there - with this story, pictures and activities all about us SAR Dogs and the team.

I hope you'll visit me soon at  
**kids.jcsda.com**  
~ Hunter ~