



AVALANCHE CANINE SEARCH SPECIALIST

The Avalanche Canine Search Specialist Certification Exam (CE) is designed to identify the minimum knowledge, skills, and experience needed by an individual and their canine partner to work effectively during avalanche search operations. This certification recognizes the need for further training to acquire the knowledge, skills, and experience needed to become a fully competent canine handler in a wide variety of land search operations.

FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS ASSESSMENT

The AERIE Avalanche CSS Fundamental Skills Assessment (FSA) is designed to identify the minimum skills needed by canine team during search operations. This assessment must be completed prior to attempting other AERIE Avalanche CSS examinations.

Purpose

The Avalanche Canine Search Specialist FSA 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 AERIE canine search specialist examinations. No certificate will be issued for this assessment.

Avalanche Canine Search Specialist FSA

An odor recognition assessment consists of a single search and shall be set-up according to the following parameters:

- A separate area containing a minimum of three snow caves/holes will be set up in an area of approximately 1000 square meters (¼ acre/0.1 hectare). The area shall be clearly marked, with the caves/holes a minimum of eight (8) meters (~26 feet) apart.
- The snow caves/holes should be made to give the optimum control of scent.
- The snow caves/holes need to be constructed to prevent canine penetration
- and shall include:
 - One blank snow cave
 - One snow cave/hole with non-human/light human scented distractions (food/snow/ski equipment)
 - One snow cave with the human target buried between 1-1.5 meters (~3-5 feet)
- The target and all distractions shall be placed approximately twenty minutes before the start of the assessment.
- The team shall have ten minutes to complete the exercise
- Any false response constitutes a failure.

Testing Criteria for the Avalanche CSS FSA

Handler Skills

- Is the handler adequately attired and equipped?
- Did the handler develop the appropriate strategy based on information acquired?



- Did the handler articulate the dog's alerts/indications prior to entering the field?
- Did the handler interpret the dog's alert/indication in the field?
- Did the handler articulate the dog's final response?
- Does the handler demonstrate good navigation field skills?
- Was the handler able to justify their search tactics?
- Is the handler in tune with their dog's needs?

Dog Skills

- Did the dog stay focused on the search?
- Is the dog easily refocused after being distracted?
- Is the dog willing to leave its handler to follow up scent?
- Does the dog search independently and effectively?
- Did the dog make a self-directed find on the subject?
- Did the dog alert/indicate to the handler that it had found the subject?
- Did the dog demonstrate its final response and direct the handler to the subject?

Team Skills

- Did the dog and handler make an effective team?
- Did the dog demonstrate obedience through its reactions to handler commands?
- Was the search completed within the time limit for the evaluation?



AVALANCHE CANINE SEARCH SPECIALIST CERTIFICATION EXAMINATION

Prerequisites: AERIE Avalanche Canine Search Specialist FSA or a certification by a nationally recognized organization that meets or exceeds the criteria of the FSA.

There will be a Chief Examiner for this test who will over-see all aspects of the set-up and testing.

Before the candidate can test to these standards, proof of successful completion of one of the following 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

This certification meets or exceeds industry standards and the criteria of FEMA 508-8 Typed Resource Definitions – Search and Rescue Resources 11/14/2005

Test site preparation

- Test will be set up in an actual or simulated avalanche site approximately 1 acre (0.4 hectare) in size. 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. The area should be well marked-up with snowmobile, ski and snowshoe tracks before starting the test.
- There must be adequate holes prepared to allow for multiple burials at different locations in the search area.
 - Fresh, open holes, as well as used holes are to remain open. Several false or mock holes should be dug and covered. 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.
 - 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.
 - As the test progresses, additional holes can and should be dug, if necessary.
 - 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".
 - 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.



- Handler is not allowed to be involved in the site preparation.

Distractions

- 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.
- 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.

Equipment Requirements

- It is not mandatory that a candidate handler wear their 24 hour pack during this test; however it needs to be in close proximity to the test site.
- Mandatory equipment that the candidate handler must have in their possession for testing includes the following;
 - Avalanche Transceiver (in "send" mode or "off" if site is safe)
 - Collapsible Avalanche Probe
 - Avalanche Shovel
 - Ten (10) wands/flags with handler name
 - Appropriate clothing for spending a night out in the winter environment
 - Skis or snowshoes, as needed.
 - First aid supplies and water for the Handler/K9 team

Safety

- Safety is of paramount importance.
- The subjects must wear a transceiver; it must be set to transmit, and they must have a working radio
- Radio communications, emergency beacons, and safety personnel are mandatory whenever any subject is buried.
- Radio contact will be verified prior to entry into the cave and being covered by snow.
- Radio checks will be conducted every five (5) minutes, except when the canine is in close proximity
- 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. 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
- The subjects may request extrication at any time and will be dug out immediately.



- The subjects must be attired and prepared to be buried for a maximum of 60-minutes.
- The Test Coordinator or Examiner may terminate the test at any time if, in their opinion, it becomes hazardous to any of the participants.

Testing

- The test will be conducted as a mock search with the Handler demonstrating appropriate scene management via delegation of duties, etc.
- 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.
- One to two (1-2) subjects will be buried in snow caves between 1-2 meters (~3-6 feet) feet in depth. Scent will be allowed to rise for a minimum of 20 minutes after burial and before the team is allowed on the testing site.
- 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.
- 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.
- Candidate handler calling a false hole or dog unwilling to be called off of a false hole will constitute an automatic failure. 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Based upon the Examiner's judgment, search time will be based upon terrain, vegetation and wind/weather conditions but should not exceed 30 minutes.



Testing Criteria for the Avalanche CSS FSA

Handler Skills

- Demonstrates that they are adequately attired for avalanche response and have mandatory equipment.
- Establishes scene safety.
- Performs an effective pre-deployment interview which may include the following questions;
 - Time of avalanche
 - Number of potential subjects
 - What were subjects doing at time of avalanche (snowmobile, ski, snowboard)
 - Subject location at the time of the avalanche
 - If the scene is safe
 - If avalanche watch is present
 - Warning alarm for further slides
 - Where the safe zone is
- 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.
- Verbalized the dog's final response prior to entering the search scene.
- Demonstrate the ability to work and control the dog to effectively search the area.
- Demonstrate that the handler recognizes when the dog is alerting to human scent.
- Demonstrate the ability to judge sweeps of areas as to their suitability to conditions.
- Demonstrate that they were aware of visual clues.
- Were able to give a POD for the area searched.
- Demonstrates appropriate canine care, safety and welfare.
- Demonstrate that the handler behaves professionally during the test.

Dog Skills

- Responsive to handler's direction and control.
- Searches independently and with focus.
- Shows commitment to each target.
- Trained final response on one to two targets with no false alerts.
- Dog alerts repetitively and independently of handler.

Team Skills

- Demonstrate that the Handler and dog have adequate agility and stamina to effectively work an avalanche search area.
- Demonstrate 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.
- Was the search completed within the allowable time with all finds made?

Team Skills

- Did the dog and handler make an effective team?
- Did the dog demonstrate obedience through its reactions to handler commands?
- Was the search completed within the time limit for the evaluation?