

1/31/97

Dog Standards Meeting Notes

Attendance: Bob Koester (BRMRG), Ken Chiacchia (AMRG), Frank Jargowsky (BRMRG), Martin Young (SMRG), Mark Eggeman (TSAR), Hart Rossman (PVRG), Keith Conover (AMRG), Heather Houlahan (AMRG), someone else whose name I didn't get . . .

Called to order at 1010 by Chair Bob Koester

Those present introduced themselves and said a little about their interests and why they were here.

At Bob's request, Heather briefly reviewed what's going on nationally with dog standards. She mentioned the "Performance Guidelines" that NASAR put on its Web page, and their current work toward national standards. She noted that many teams simply adopt ARDA (American Rescue Dog Association) standards, which basically say "only German Shepherds need apply." Some standards are too specific about things that don't really relate to performance. Example: standard says that there is only one permissible signal for a dog to indicate a find. We need to avoid this. Also need to ensure safety – some dogs that are "SAR Dogs" may be dangerous.

Frank reviewed the ASRC Dog Standards passed at the last Board of Directors meeting.

Bob reviewed the ASRC Training Standards philosophy – the CQ→FTM→FTL→IS→IC progression (Keith noted that there was a long "discussion" many years ago that maybe an IS didn't need to be an FTL – but this was quashed. Thus we were along the Marine model rather than the Army model, i.e., "everyone carries a rifle.") But then we developed some "branches" off of this tree. At the FTM level, one can branch off to become a Field Team Signcutter (FTS), and at the FTL level – one can become a Rescue Specialist, or whatever Greg Fuller will call his FTL-level signcutter qualification.) He noted that dog team leaders **have to** function as FTLs, as they generally are off by themselves. Bob noted there was a strong desire to by the BOD, expressed in past retreats, to keep dog standards as close to this existing tree as possible. We discussed that dog handlers often, in real life, participate in semitechnical evacuations. Bob also reinforced that these will be *minimum* standards, not perfect standards.

Bob noted that there is no standard for the dog component of the dog team – just because the human component of the dog team is CQ doesn't mean the dog is safe or appropriate to participate in dog training. We need a standard for DTQ ("dog training qualified") to determine which dogs can participate safely in training.

Two different factions for standards: endpoint standards (performance standards "be able to do XXX") vs. completion standards (e.g., "complete an XX-hour class on the following topics.") This comes up regularly in ASRC BOD meetings – and performance standards always win with about an 80% majority. Keith mentioned that this fits in well, for example, with the new EMT and paramedic programs that he helped write.

It was noted that the Virginia standards require VA FTM (which is slightly less than the ASRC FTM) but that most teams, based on their own training and requirements, add in pretty much everything in the FTL standards except for semi-technical evacuation. Some argued that adding semi-tech would be too big of a burden on a dog handler – that it would take too long to get an FTL and by that time, the dog, that otherwise might be of use in the field. There was a lot of discussion on this point – requiring FTL vs. requiring just some of the FTL performance standards for dog teams.

Keith pointed out that, since ASRC members have to pass through FTM en route to FTL: if we require FTL for qualification as a Dog Team – then we will likely end up having some people who have met all requirements for the "dog" portion of the Dog Team requirements except for FTL. Will we "field-promote" these "almost dog teams" and use them if we need them?

There was more discussion, and the final outcome was that all will post their different suggestions for ways to resolve the "Dog Team-FTL" question to the asrc-training email list, for discussion prior to the February Board of Directors meeting.

We discussed the role of the Group Training Officer, someone at the Group level knowledgeable and approved by the Board of Directors to test and certify members to the various training levels up to FTL. It was pointed out that most GTOs are not competent to test dog teams. Therefore, we will need a Dog Training Coordinator within at least some groups to test dog teams. The DTC, the consensus was, should be under the Group Training Officer's administrative supervision.

One problem is with dogs trained with *schutzhund*, that is, trained to bite – even though some may argue that such dogs are so well-trained that they are very unlikely to bite. The problem is that, if someone claims to be bitten by such a dog, regardless of the merits of the claim, it would be very difficult to defend this in court (unofficial opinion from Larry Jacobsen, a lawyer who is executive director of NASAR).

Requirements for dogs should include:

Age

Type

Health (may need letters from a vet)

Proper Inoculations

License

Appropriate behavior to dogs and people

Basic Obedience

Need to also have some sort of a basic safety test, where the dog is exposed to a situation that makes the dog agitated and making sure it doesn't show aggressive behavior.

Another requirement will be logs of training.

We also discussed the possibility of “senior dog handler” or “Level II” dog handler as a higher level of training, also of developing “subspecialty” dog qualification – water, cadaver, etc.

[no notes from the latter half of the meeting, where we discussed practical testing.]

Keith reviewed the very successful ASTM process for developing standards, and compared it with the problems with contention and disrespect recently experienced by NASAR, the Wilderness Medical Society, and other organizations that have tried to develop independent standards. The word “standard” is used by the ASTM only an adjective, not as a noun. For example, ASTM has “standard guides” “standard practices” and “standard tests.” He described the basic tenets of the ASTM full-consensus standards-development process—inclusion (anyone who wants to can participate), balance (need to have), considering all comments and ruling on them in the minutes (persuasive, nonpersuasive). He suggested that we consider as many of these elements as possible in our work on standards. Keith will obtain copies of relevant materials and distribute them to the ASRC Groups and officers.