



# URBAN SEARCH & RESCUE CANINE UNIT

INFORMATION & APPLICATION PACK

VOLUNTEER CANINE  
HANDLER



**DFES**  
Department of Fire &  
Emergency Services

**URBAN  
SEARCH & RESCUE  
CANINE UNIT**

## **INFORMATION & APPLICATION PACK VOLUNTEER CANINE HANDLER**



**PLEASE READ ALL INFORMATION IN THIS DOCUMENT PRIOR TO SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION.**

If you have any queries regarding this process or the Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Canine Unit in general, please contact the Canine Liaison Officer, Lisa Spatcher, on [lisa.spatcher@dfes.wa.gov.au](mailto:lisa.spatcher@dfes.wa.gov.au) or 0408 946 582.

### **INFORMATION PACK CONTAINS:**

1. What we do
2. What we look for
3. The application & membership process

### **APPLICATION PACK CONTAINS:**

- A: Introductory statement
- B: Application
- C: Canine details form
- D: Declaration

*Check [dfes.wa.gov.au/k9](https://dfes.wa.gov.au/k9) for key recruitment dates. Late and incomplete entries will not be accepted.*



## WHAT WE DO

Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Canine teams are skilled in the efficient and speedy location of trapped live victims due to building collapse. The canines are trained to work independently of their dog handler on unstable surfaces, in potentially dangerous situations, to find and indicate on the strongest source of live human scent, even if the unseen victim is metres below the ground. Canine teams are an essential element of a USAR Task Force, particularly in the critical period after an incident has first occurred.

USAR canines are trained to find live casualties in a wide variety of circumstances including collapsed structures and empty buildings, as well as vehicular accidents such as train or plane crashes. As a part of the team, handlers and canines become familiar with rubble piles, aircraft, working at heights, crowd work, marine travel and various other scenarios. Qualified canines can progress to become Disabled Access Dogs (DAD) permitted on public transport and airlines.

The Unit's equipment cache and training is located at a purpose-built USAR training facility at the Western Australia Fire and Emergency Services Academy in Forrestfield. To become an operational Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) volunteer USAR Canine Handler you will be assessed according to the internationally-recognised Australian USAR Canine Capability Best Practice Guideline. The guideline is divided into three assessment levels; Foundation Skills (FSA), Basic and Advanced. Teams are assessed on:

- Aggression testing – canine and human
- Obedience – heelwork, down stay, direction and control and emergency stop
- Welfare check – handler to check canine's physical condition under vet observation
- Bark alert – focused bark indicating live human scent
- Agility – various obstacles such as ladders, tunnels and planks
- Rubble piles – searches to find concealed casualties.



## WHAT WE LOOK FOR

A well-trained dog, or an owner with dog training experience are not requirements to join the Unit – the focus is on potential when recruiting new team members.

The biggest determinant in producing a successful USAR dog is commitment. Training a USAR dog is not a weekend activity, it is a lifestyle. Handlers will need to build training into their daily and weekly routines. Training does not need to be extensive; it can be as simple as getting the canine to sit and wait before eating.

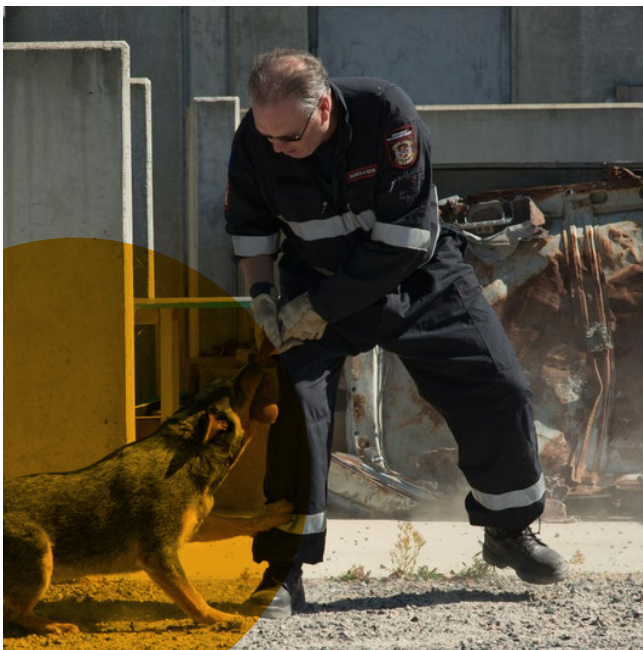
Weekly attendance at training is expected, although some allowances are made for work and other external commitments if advised in advance. The absolute minimum of sessions which must be attended regardless of other commitments is 50 per cent. If attendance drops below this level, team membership may be revoked at any stage.

USAR canine training is demanding, expensive and technical. Successful applicants are expected to maintain their skills, availability and commitment to the DFES USAR Task Force in the medium to long term. Applicants must be able to meet deployment requirements for exercises and incidents at short notice. Operational deployments may require extended periods of around seven days away from their family, living in camp-like conditions. Therefore, only applicants willing to maintain such a commitment should apply, after discussing these requirements with their work and family.

### To be considered for the role of Canine Handler, you must:

- **Reside within the wider Perth metropolitan area (or approximately a one hour drive from Forrestfield)**

A general guide is that applicants must reside within the area bounded by Yanchep to the north, Northam to the east, and Pinjarra to the south. This is due to the operational requirement to be available for deployment from the unit base in the metropolitan area.



- **Have flexible work and family commitments.**

Applicants should discuss the commitment requirements with their work and family before applying.

- **Be available for the weekly Sunday morning training sessions**

These are usually held in Forrestfield but alternative training sites are sometimes used.

- **Have moderate physical fitness**

You will need to be capable of a two to five kilometre walk with a weighted 10-kilo backpack, be able to climb a ladder, and be agile enough to safely navigate an unstable rubble pile.

- **Not have a phobia of confined spaces or heights**

- **Be willing to obtain a police (compulsory) and medical (if required) clearance**

- **Be willing to deploy once operational**

This includes both exercises and to disaster sites intra and interstate, including living in camp-like conditions as required. Ideally, Handlers will also be willing to be deployed internationally, however this is a personal choice and will not affect your application.

- **Understand that being a Canine Handler is not just about training your dog**

There are support tasks that will need to be completed both during weekly training sessions and if operational. These can include assisting with set up and pack away of equipment, maintaining all gear in good condition and writing reports and training plans.

- **Be willing to bear all costs of owning and housing your dog**

This includes any external training (such as socialisation and basic obedience) required by your dog as these are not covered by USAR training.

- **Have, or be prepared to get, a dog suitable for USAR training.**

Dogs are not owned or supplied by DFES and the handler will maintain responsibility for the dog throughout its life.

**To be a USAR dog, they must:**

- **Be under four years old**

The preferred age is 12 – 24 months, but dogs between two and four years will be accepted if highly suitable or partially trained (e.g. previous agility or obedience certification). Puppies will be accepted if suitable and invited to team training for familiarisation, but formal probation will not start until the puppy is 12 months of age.

- **Have a high play/prey drive**

USAR looks for dogs that love toys and playing games, as toys are a primary method of rewarding them for search. A dog that displays this criteria to a high extent is the one that will keep playing tug-of-war for hours, or constantly brings you a ball to throw. When engaged, they will ignore distractions such as food or unknown noises to search out their toy and bring it back for another game. This is a key indicator used to determine if a dog is suitable for USAR training.

- **Be agile and confident**

Dogs must be capable of traversing an unstable rubble pile safely and have the confidence to do so.

- **Be non-aggressive**

Dogs must not be aggressive or overly reactive to humans or other dogs. It is expected that handlers will appropriately socialise and train their dogs on expected behaviours outside of USAR training.

- **Be healthy.**

Dogs must be fit, healthy, and capable of completing the work required for USAR. Searches can be physically demanding as they involve jumping and movement over unstable surfaces. If a dog displays any physical issues during the initial assessment, a clearance from a veterinarian may be required before offering probationary membership.

## THE APPLICATION & MEMBERSHIP PROCESS



The below information outlines the expected process a Canine Handler applicant will undertake in order to become an operational member of the USAR Canine Unit WA unit.

### **01. Submit an online application when advertised**

Application must include:

- a. Cover letter
- b. Application form
- c. Canine details form
- d. Declaration

Applications that do not contain all requested information may not be considered.

### **02. Attend an Open Day**

Suitable candidates will be contacted with an offer to attend the next USAR Canine Unit Open Day, along with their dog. The Open Day will comprise of:

- a. A demonstration of a live search
- b. An example of the training required for a USAR dog
- c. An opportunity for applicants to try the training exercises
- d. An assessment of the dog
- e. An interview with the applicant

If the applicant is unable to attend the Open Day on the advertised day, they can be added to a waitlist for vacant positions or invited to the next Open Day (held every six – 12 months). The invitation may depend on the age of the dog.

### **03. Receive an offer of probationary membership**

Successful applicants will be offered probationary membership in the team. The probationary period is designed to allow the new team members to trial the Unit and training and determine if it is right for them and their dog.

In order to pass probation, the following activities will need to be completed within the probationary period (six months plus the introductory period):

- a. An introductory period of six sessions where the new handler will attend without their dog;
- b. An attendance rate of 75 per cent or better at weekly training sessions (some consideration may be made for work and other commitments);
- c. Maintain a daily training regime at home with their dog;

- d. Completion of a handler fit-for-task physical assessment;
- e. Adherence to all team rules (such as no canine aggression and safety requirements);
- f. Become familiar with the Australian USAR Canine Capability Best Practice Guidelines; and
- g. Completion of Progress Checks 1 and 2.

This probationary period can be completed faster than the specified six months, but it must last for a minimum of three months once the introductory period has been completed. Probation can be extended under some circumstances at the absolute discretion of the Canine Liaison Officer and Head Trainer. As a commitment to ongoing training is crucial to succeed, handlers who do not meet attendance rates or daily training requirements will not be offered a place within the team.

#### **04. Become a full team member**

Once probation is complete, handlers will be offered a full team membership. Full team members are eligible to attend promotional events and external training opportunities as a representative of USAR Canine Unit WA, and are issued with standard gear for themselves and their dog. Full team members are expected to:

- a. Complete Progress Checks 3 – 6 within 18 months of attaining full team membership;
- b. Pass the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) after completion of Progress Check 6;
- c. Maintain adherence to all team rules;
- d. Have an attendance rate of 60 per cent or better (50 per cent is an absolute minimum attendance rate which can be negotiated with the CLO);
- e. Maintain a daily training regime at home with their dog;
- f. Complete the four-day USAR Canine Search Team Course;
- g. Attend monthly team meetings; and
- h. Assist with team tasks on occasion (e.g. taking photos or video, stocktake, maintenance of team equipment, assist with recruitment or promotional work).

#### **05. Become an operational USAR canine team.**

Once a team has passed the Foundation Skills Assessment, they will become operational within West Australia. A full kit will be issued to Canine Handlers and their dogs. Operational Handlers are expected to:

- a. Maintain FSA-level skills in themselves and their dogs;
- b. Work towards attaining Basic Assessment-level skills within two years of passing the FSA;
- c. Maintain attendance rates at weekly training sessions;
- d. Maintain a daily training regime at home with their dog;
- e. Maintain adherence to all team rules;
- f. Attend monthly team meetings;
- g. Assist with team tasks on occasion; and
- h. Mentor new team members.

Training a USAR dog is a big commitment in time and effort, and requires ongoing upkeep throughout the operational duration of your dog. However, it is an immensely rewarding experience that benefits the community while working with man's best friend.





# URBAN SEARCH & RESCUE CANINE UNIT

APPLICATION FORM

VOLUNTEER CANINE  
HANDLER



GOVERNMENT OF  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

DFES

Department of Fire &  
Emergency Services



## **A: INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT**

Please use this space to write a brief statement (approximately one page) introducing yourself and your dog (if you currently have one), including:

- why you would like to join the USAR Canine Unit WA unit;
- what experience (if any) you have with dog training;
- what attributes you feel you would bring to the team; and
- why you feel your dog would be a good candidate for USAR training.

If preferred, this section may be left blank and a separate cover letter attached.

### **INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT**

## **B: CANINE HANDLER DETAILS**

### **CANINE HANDLER INFORMATION**

<b>Applicant Name</b>	
<b>Residential Address</b>	
<b>Work Phone</b>	
<b>Mobile Phone</b>	
<b>Home Phone</b>	
<b>Email</b>	
<b>Occupation</b>	
<b>Where did you hear about us?</b>	
<b>Do you have any skills, qualifications and/or experience that could be relevant to USAR Canine Unit WA?</b>	
<b>Do you have any injuries or medical conditions that may impact your ability to meet fitness requirements as outlined in the Information Pack?</b>	

## C: CANINE DETAILS

If you are applying with a dog you currently own, please fill in the details below. If you are applying as a Canine Handler but do not yet own a dog, please tick 'I do not yet own a dog' below and move to the Declaration.

I do not yet own a dog

### GENERAL DETAILS

<b>Name</b>		
<b>Date of Birth</b>		
(if unknown, put estimated age in years and months)		
<b>Breed</b>		
<b>Home Phone</b>		
<b>Why would your dog be suitable for USAR work?</b>		
Details		
<b>Is your dog registered with your local council</b>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Council:		
If not, why not?		
<b>Has your dog been involved in an aggression incident previously (either as the attacker or attacked)?</b>		
Details:		

## TRAINING

What previous training has your dog completed? (e.g. puppy training, obedience, tracking)

Details

Is your dog currently participating in any other form of training?  
(e.g. obedience, agility, tracking, noseworks)

Details

## MEDICAL

Is your dog de-sexed?

YES

NO

If not, why not?

Will the dog be used for breeding in future?

YES

NO

Details

Is your dog vaccinated?

YES

NO

Is yes, which vaccinations are up-to-date?

If not why not?

Is your dog on any medication?

YES

NO

Details:

<b>Has your dog previously been injured and/or required surgery?</b>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Details		
<b>Does your dog have any health issues that may affect their ability to work? (e.g. hip dysplasia, heart issues, blindness)</b>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Details		
<b>Are you willing and able to supply veterinary records upon request?</b>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Name and address of vet:		

## D: DECLARATION

**By signing below, you declare that:**

- You have read the 'USAR Canine Unit WA – Information Pack – Canine Handler'
- You reside within the wider Perth metropolitan area (including Yanchep, Northam and Pinjarra)
- You have discussed the commitment and team requirements with your family and work
- You are available for Sunday morning training sessions
- You understand daily training at home is expected in addition to weekly training sessions with the team
- You meet the fitness requirements outlined in the Canine Handler Information Pack

**Or**

You do not meet the requirements and have declared any relevant medical concerns in section B.

- Your dog is not aggressive or reactionary
- Your dog is not on the restricted breeds list as per the Western Australian Dog Act 1976 or required to wear a muzzle in public places
- Your dog does not have any known conditions that may impact their ability to complete USAR training or cause injury to themselves
- You own and have legal responsibility for the dog you are applying with

**Or**

You do not yet have a dog but will be the owner of one soon and have legal responsibility for it.

And

That you have completed all sections of this form:

A: Introductory statement

(or separate cover letter attached)

B: Canine Handler Application

C: Canine details form

D: Declaration

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_