

The Critical Role of Scent Articles in Bloodhound Deployments

In the realm of search and rescue operations, the success of a Bloodhound team in locating missing persons or tracking down offenders is heavily reliant on the integrity of the scent articles provided. The art of "scent discrimination" allows Bloodhounds to follow the unique scent trail of a specific individual, guiding the team towards the missing person or suspect. However, this process can only be effective if the scent articles are properly collected and handled, free from contamination.

Understanding Scent Articles

A scent article can be any item that has been in direct contact with the individual being searched for. Desirable scent articles include worn clothing, personal items like wallets or keys, and even sterile gauze pads used in situations where the crime scene must remain undisturbed. In contrast, certain items, such as footwear treated with odor-masking agents or clothing mixed with that of other household members, are often undesirable due to the potential for contamination.

The fundamental importance of a well-chosen scent article cannot be overstated. It forms the basis of the training that Bloodhounds undergo, allowing them to recognize and follow scent trails effectively. A poorly selected or contaminated scent article can lead to missed opportunities and unsuccessful deployments.

The Team's Responsibility

When the Bloodhound team arrives on the scene, it is imperative that they operate cohesively rather than as individuals. This collaboration begins with the selection of a Scent Collector (SC), appointed by the Team Officer in Charge (OIC). The SC's role is to gather scent articles for the dogs deployed in a specific case, ensuring that they follow established protocols to avoid contamination.

Each scent article must be collected using latex gloves and appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), with the SC working alongside only one other person. This could be a team member not involved with the dogs, a family member of the missing person, or a law enforcement officer. Each item must be meticulously bagged, labeled, and logged with the time of collection, ensuring the chain of custody is maintained.

Critical Considerations in Article Collection

The collection of scent articles requires careful consideration. It is vital to ascertain who was present with the missing person at the time they were last seen. The SC must also avoid any items handed to them by family members or law enforcement, as these may carry unwanted scents or contaminants. Ideally, the Bloodhound team should collect their own scent articles to ensure the best possible quality.

Criteria for Selecting Scent Articles

A well-defined six-selection criteria can assist in choosing an effective scent article:

1. **Viability:** Ensure the item contains a viable scent.
2. **Relationship:** Understand the connection between the item and the missing person.
3. **Ownership:** Confirm that the item belongs to the missing individual.
4. **Use:** Verify that the individual regularly used or wore the item.
5. **Contamination:** Check if another person has handled the item since the individual was last seen.
6. **Cleanliness:** Ensure the item has not been laundered or mixed with other clothing.

The "point last seen" may also serve as a viable scent article. In such cases, it is crucial to protect that area from foot traffic until the Bloodhound team can arrive to conduct their search.

Securing the Scene

Protecting the scene of the incident is paramount. Law enforcement must prevent unnecessary contamination, keeping officers and spectators away from critical areas. Running vehicles should not be parked near the point last seen, as exhaust can disrupt the scent trail crucial to the Bloodhound's tracking abilities.

In scenarios where scent articles are unavailable, the Bloodhound team can still assist by focusing on the point last seen, allowing the handler to cast a search in that vicinity.

Vehicle Bailouts and Proper Handling

Vehicles present unique opportunities for scent collection, as they contain concentrated scents from their occupants. By utilizing sterile gauze pads, handlers can absorb scent from various surfaces within the vehicle, similar to collecting scent articles. It is essential to ensure that these pads are stored and handled properly to preserve their integrity.

Once a scent article is secured, it must be logged and marked for the respective dog team, maintaining the chain of custody throughout the process. Handlers must be vigilant in ensuring that scent articles remain uncontaminated, following strict protocols for their collection and storage.

The Importance of Training and Documentation

The effectiveness of Bloodhound teams is bolstered by ongoing training that emphasizes the importance of scent articles. Handlers must familiarize themselves with various scenarios, utilizing both soft and hard scent articles, while constantly refining their techniques.

Documentation is essential. Maintaining a training log that records each deployment, the scent articles used, and the outcomes is invaluable for improving future operations and providing testimony in court.

In conclusion, the success of Bloodhound deployments hinges not only on the dogs' exceptional tracking abilities but also on the meticulous handling of scent articles. By adhering to established protocols and prioritizing the integrity of the scent collection process, search and rescue teams can significantly enhance their chances of locating missing persons or apprehending offenders, making every deployment a potential success.