

Principles for Standards for Police Service Dogs

The goal of the Provincial Standards for police service dogs is to have effective and accountable police service dog units, which minimize bites and injuries, without hindering the appropriate use of police service dogs to further public safety.

- **Police dogs are important policing tools and can be used for a variety of tasks.** They can be used for: searching and locating suspects; apprehending suspects; searching for evidence; protecting the handler; searching for missing people; controlling crowds; searching for drugs or explosives; and community relations and other demonstration events.
- **Police dogs are also intermediate weapons; police dogs bite.** One of the tasks of police dogs is to apprehend suspects by biting. Police dogs can bite either on command, or automatically in certain situations commensurate with their training, or sometimes even accidentally. The potential for a dog bite is inherent in every deployment, although not every deployment will result in a bite.
- **A police dog bite can cause injury.** Sometimes the injury can be substantial and serious.
- **The use of a dog, as with all other force options, must be proportional to the level of risk posed to the officer, the suspect and the community as a whole.** The need to locate or apprehend someone must always be balanced with the potential for a police dog bite and its likely resulting injury.
- **Police dog bites must be minimized as much as reasonably possible and must be proportional to the risk posed to the handler and to others.** Minimizing bites can take the form of determining not to deploy a dog at all if the circumstances are not serious enough (e.g. shoplifting, by-law offences), to adjusting handling techniques to limit the possibility of a bite (e.g., shortening leash; keeping visual contact; and recalling the dog) and removing the dog off a bite as soon as possible.
- **Police dogs must be well trained.** They require high levels of initial training, and continuous maintenance of their performance. Dogs must be able to perform at an appropriate level throughout the year, not just at annual testing. Training a dog to release the bite promptly on command is extremely important; this includes the ability to release the bite even if the person may still be struggling due to fear or pain.
- **Police dogs must always be under control of their handler, and the handler is always responsible for the behaviour of their dog.** This includes reasonably anticipating situations

where the dog may bite, even if unprovoked, and taking all reasonable actions to prevent such behaviour or circumstances (e.g., keeping distance; keeping dog on short leash; and visual contact). It is also acknowledged that, sometimes, despite appropriate training and handling, dogs may not perform perfectly every time.

- **There must be accountability for the use of police dogs.** This accountability includes deploying dogs only when appropriate and with care, providing prompt treatment if a bite occurs, detailed reporting and review of all bites, as well as maintaining data of the performance of individual dog-handler teams, as well as dog squads overall.