# Types of Search Dogs

There are many different ways to use dogs for search and rescue operations. Understanding these types can make the best use of search dog teams. The main types of work the dogs can do are generally categorized as airscent (or wilderness), trailing, cadaver (land and water), and disaster. Each of these types is explained in a little more detail below.

## Airscent

Airscent usually refers to search dogs that use airscenting techniques to search areas. Airscent dogs work with their nose in the air, will ignore ground scent and will follow and locate people by catching the "hot" scent of people on the wind. Airscenting techniques are very effective for covering large areas quickly and can produce high probabilities of detection if conditions are good for airscenting. They don't need a "last seen" starting point, an article to work from or a scent trail, and time is not an issue. Some airscenting dogs are also trained to scent discriminate, meaning they can be pre-scented on an article from the missing persons and can pick this person from others in the search area. Airscent dogs usually work off lead. Most are trained to find the victim, alert the handler when the victim has been found, and the return the handler to the victim. This is called a refind.
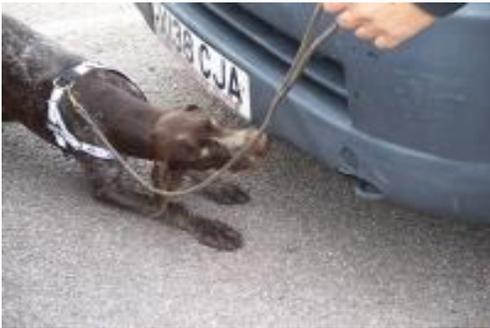
## Trailing/tracking

Trailing dogs are trained to follow a specific human scent, which may or may not approximate the path the person took because of factors affecting the dispersal of scent such as wind and temperature. To start the dog is started on the trail at the point where the victim was last seen (PLS). Trailing dogs will follow the route of scent deposited on the ground as a person moves through an area. A trained trailing dog can follow the steps of someone who passed by several days earlier, discriminate between it and another's trail, and follow it over hills and through marshland. Dogs can even trail people in cars, from the scent that blows out of the window or through the vents of the car.

## Cadaver / Human Remains Detection

Cadaver or HRD dogs are used to locate the remains of deceased victims. Cadaver dogs can locate entire bodies (including those buried or submerged), decomposed bodies, body fragments (including blood, tissues, hair, and bones), or skeletal remains; the capability of the dog is dependent upon its training.

## Disaster

Disaster work is a variation of airscent work. It combines the dog's ability to find a person with special training required to work in disaster conditions, including collapsed buildings, mudslides, earthquakes, and floods. The disaster trained dog and handler spend a lot of time training control of the dog and directional control, so that the handler can send the dog onto rubble piles to perform closer searchers. Both dog and handler undergo extra training for searching on unstable and dangerous surfaces. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has a national program for disaster trained and certified dogs.

## Avalanche Dogs

Victims that are caught in an avalanche, or even fall into a snow cave or tree well, are nearly impossible to find by the naked eye. Avalanche dogs are trained to detect human scent rising up from the snow and dig until they find the victim. Avalanche dogs cover more ground in less time than several human searchers can cover, which explains their importance.

## Water Dogs

Water dogs are trained to pick up scent in the water and alert their handler when they find that scent. Similar to picking up scent in snow, the scent rises up to the surface in the water. Cadaver dogs, also trained as water dogs, can be useful in drowning situations.