



To SWGDOG Members;

18 April 2008

The Executive Board understands that there have been some concerns about the potential role that the SWGDOG “Best Practices” document will have on the law enforcement and private sector community. The Executive Board also believes there may be a misunderstanding among some members as to what is meant by “Best Practices.” Although we have verbally discussed this often, we thought that this letter might help explain what our work product is and what it is not.

First, please remember that SWGDOG is not a certification group; it is a Scientific Working Group. As such, its mandate focuses on the meld of what’s known scientifically and how to use this knowledge to augment the skills of canine handlers and supervisors within the law enforcement community and private sector. While the Executive Board anticipates that some groups will enhance their certification practices and that there may even be a specific certification design based on SWGDOG guidelines, SWGDOG is not in the business of developing/conducting certifications.

Second, it might be useful to ensure that everyone is speaking the same language so a few definitions may help.

A **standard** can be defined as an established or widely recognized model of authority or excellence, as a reference point against which other things can be evaluated, or the ideal in terms of which something can be judged (<http://dictionary.die.net>). Standards usually define or establish uniform specification or characteristics for products or services (<http://stats.oecd.org/glossary>). A **minimum standard** is defined as the lowest acceptable criteria that define or establish uniform specification or characteristics for products or services.

A **best practice** asserts that there is a technique, method, process, activity, incentive or reward that is more effective at delivering a particular outcome than any other version of these. Inherent in the best practice concept is a system of processes, checks and testing that will deliver an outcome that has fewer problems and fewer unforeseen complications. Best practices combine the attributes of most efficient and most effective ways of accomplishing a task based on proven and provable methods. In best practices documentation is essential and best practices must be documented and distributed before they can be used, cited, and improved upon, so they actually encourage continuous improvement (http://www.walden3d.com/best_practices/documentation.html). Best practices, regardless of field in which they are applied, are usually considered to have 5 components: best skills, processes, solutions, appropriate resources and the continuous improvement that results from the first 4 of these components (http://www.walden3d.com/best_practices/documentation.html). Note that best practices are not rules, laws or standards which people are required to follow (www.google.com (search: best practices definition)), but rather are those processes, practices and systems widely recognized as improving an organization’s or field’s performance and efficiency. This means you can meet a standard in the field but still not observe best practices.

These definitions are also being posted on the website and added to the terminology documents.

Given the above, the fears that small police departments or those in the private sector will be shut out from detection dog work may be over-stated. The Executive Board anticipates that a self-improving system will be identified.

- If a certification comes to exist, those who wish to be certified will doubtless do so – this is already occurring with many professional canine organizational certifications.
- If small departments are concerned that they can no longer have detection dog teams unless they are certified, they will find a way to make this occur, whether they co-operate with other small groups, form a broader network, or take advantage of existing grant opportunities.
- If legal cases begin to be overturned, there will be a vested interest on behalf of those charged with prosecuting such cases to ensure that the mechanism exists by which certification, adequate for legal standards, can occur.

That said, the key for the personnel involved in detection work will be to understand what best practices are and are not.

Finally, the more important issue of whether one is ‘certified’ to meet these guidelines is whether one actually understands and can implement the portions of the guidelines pertaining to the individual’s actual task. Simply asked, are you training and testing your canine in accordance with what the canine community knows about the science involved and to properly execute a canine deployment when called upon?

With or without best practices it is these issues on which many court decisions are now hinging.

The SWGDOG “Best Practices” document – in effect – offers anyone who reads it a roadmap for how best to accomplish training and testing of your canine so that you can be sure that the canine really knows what it is doing and you can be sure of this. Not only are the instructions sufficiently detailed to provide general guidance, but the much discussed and as yet unpublished appendices will provide specific examples and instructions whereby any motivated individual can know whether their canine is actually doing what he or she is intended to do or whether the canine just appears to be doing what he or she is asked. These appendices will also provide tabular instructions and examples that will allow anyone to implement the guidelines. If anyone wishes an example of how this would work, we’d be pleased to provide one.

In closing, the Executive Board knows that everyone is adapting to new ideas as part of this group, and we appreciate the stresses that such change causes. That said, if someone wishes to raise an issue about the guidelines or some part of them, that issue should be raised with the entire group. The hallmark of this group is its format of open – and sometimes loud – discussion. The Executive Board hopes that this letter allays some fears. We shall also discuss this issue at the next SWGDOG meeting in September 2008.

Sincerely,



Kenneth G. Furton, SWGDOG Co-Chair
furtonk@fiu.edu



Karen L. Overall, SWGDOG Co-Chair
overallk@mail.med.upenn.edu