

PAW-SOME WORK: NYC EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT CONDUCTS URBAN SEARCH AND RESCUE TEAM CANINE EVALUATIONS ON STATEN ISLAND

November 17, 2021 – Last week, the New York City Emergency Management Department conducted the latest Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Urban Search and Rescue canine evaluations. Canines and their handlers are a vital part of Urban Search and Rescue teams, tasked with finding victims during challenging search and rescue missions. The evaluation is a key component of a certification process that ensures canines and handlers are properly trained and prepared to take on their new roles. During the three-day evaluation, handlers from New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Colorado arrived to New York Task Force 1's canine training facility at the Fresh Kills Landfill on Staten Island to put their furry counterparts to the test.

Canines and their handlers were tested on two makeshift piles, intended to simulate a real-life structural collapse or disaster scene. The piles consisted of reinforced concrete, structural steel, rebar, precast concrete, vehicles, and wood structures.

During the certification exam, each canine/handler team was given 20 minutes to conduct a search, one pile at a time, with a 10-minute travel and break before the next search. The handlers were unaware of the number of victims buried in the pile, so evaluators could give a blind assessment. To indicate whether they found a victim, the canine must bark at least three times, making sure to stay with the victim until the handler arrives. Once the canine indicates the presence of live human scent, the handler rewards the canine, marks the victim location with a piece of tape, and deploys the canine in search of additional victims. All 13 canine teams were successful during their evaluations and will join their local Urban Search and Rescue teams. When the Urban Search and Rescue teams are not deployed, canines work as patrol dogs helping officers sniff out narcotics or locate a missing person.

“The canine certification process is important because the skills and abilities of the handler and canine are tested and confirmed in an environment designed to replicate a real-life scenario they may encounter on a deployment. Disasters can strike at any time, so it’s imperative our team of handlers and their canines are ready at any given moment,” said **NYC Emergency Management US&R Program Director Brittany Schiliro**. “Earlier this year, three of our canine search specialists and canine teams deployed to the Surfside Building Collapse in Florida where they applied their extensive training and certification to the on-site operations.”

NYC Emergency Management sponsors the Urban Search and Rescue - New York Task Force 1 (US&R NY-TF1) team, composed of specially trained personnel from the Fire Department of New York (FDNY) and the New York City Police Department (NYPD). The FEMA US&R program originated as a response system for natural disasters. Since the program’s inception, the task forces have broadened the scope of US&R’s work. The team deployed in response to natural and manmade emergencies, including the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Following the September 11 attacks, NY-TF1 canine/handler teams



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worked for seven months, digging through mangled steel frames and concrete, searching for any trace of life. There are currently 28 FEMA US&R teams strategically located throughout the United States, ready to deploy within six hours of activation.

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