

Odor Recognition Test (ORT)

The ability of a canine to recognize explosives odors is the foundation for any explosives detection canine program. It is essential the canine be able to demonstrate its ability to recognize explosives odors and retain their memory. Canines must further be able to learn new explosive odors and compounds as they are developed and introduced. The Odor Recognition Test is intended to be used as a standardized method for assessing a canine's ability to recognize explosives odors. This test also provides extinction and distracter testing with the addition of six cans containing items that may be used during explosive training. It is not a real world test and does not indicate proficiency in operational environments. The cans are used as a vehicle to hold the explosive odor much like cement blocks, boxes and even scented towels. Any or all of these items may be used to present explosive odor during early training.

This is a departure from the usual testing that you have completed in the past so questions on how to successfully present the cans to your canine are many. Even though your canine might be a trained and certified explosive dog, it may not automatically search the cans during the ORT. You have to present it just like you did in beginning training when you exposed your dog to new surroundings and searches. A training location that is conducive to learning is essential. It could be indoors or outdoors, spacious, quiet, climate controlled if inside and with a clean floor surface that is not a distraction to the canine. You present the can and if it has the explosive odor and the desired behavior change by the dog, you reward.



You must indicate to the judge that you believe the can is Hot or the Source, the key here is getting an affirmative from the judge before rewarding.

As I mentioned you have to make good presentations to the can preferably while walking backwards as shown in the pictures. This technique allows



you to adjust your pace, keep the dog from pushing past and watch the dogs sniff on the can. As the canine searches the presented can you move to the next can with a new presentation. Make sure the canine is at the can before you go to the next one. You can see in the pictures a proper presentation with little room for the dog to push past. Try to always keep your dog on the same side of the cans as you are, but if the dog tries to get by you simply make a circular move and bring them back onto task. Notice in the photos I have modeled the cans on 2x6 boards, set in a six-sided circle, an easy way to set up practice.

Vapor pressure is a term used to describe odor leaving an explosive. It is important to know not all vapor pressures are equal, it is necessary to make sure the canine goes as deep as possible into the can. There may be a difference in your dog's threshold under your current training and the amounts used for the test. If you think your canine hasn't checked the can deep enough make a circular move and present the can again. Requiring the dog to do it correctly not only with cans but in real life searches ensures success.

Should your presentation fail to get the canine's nose into the can deep enough, you may make an adjustment to your hand by putting it deeper into the can. This will ensure the canine sniffs are deeper. Once in awhile the combination of your hand and their head at the can opening blocks the dog from traveling deep enough. You can give the illusion that you are putting your hand into the can by presenting along the back as illustrated.



I would suggest the first time the dog puts its head into the can there is a familiar odor like Double Base Smokeless Powder inside. As the dog puts its head inside to sniff you tell the dog to sit right away. Resist the urge to let the dog smell the can and walk away. This will become counterproductive to training. Having the first can hot and telling the dog to sit and rewarding will teach the dog that searching the cans are now a productive area setting the dog up for success. Once the dog has had success they realize that sniffing the can when presented will bring the reward when explosive odor is found. As you and your canine partner begin to master the ORT in practice, the tendency is to pickup speed. Resist, as this can lead the dog to miss odors or at minimum cause the dog to skim the tops of the can.

What do you do when your canine has a change of behavior and gives a final response on a distracter or empty can? You will only know this in practice as you should have the odors marked on the ground. A suggestion is to simply present the next can and hold the presentation till the dog moves to it.

Now I know some of you will give the dog a no and tell them to search again. It is up to you, but let me explain my suggestion. If you tell the dog no you are making the decision for the dog and when doing real life searches you won't know if the sit is false. By going to the next can with your presentation the dog is learning there will be no reward and it becomes their decision to leave, a lesson well learned.



We have all seen a canine searching for odor and on finding the source will look up at the handler to see what they are doing. This is usually the result of some cueing by the handler in practice. If the dog has a change of behavior without a sit, prolonged eye to eye contact with the dog will result in the dog false responding. If there is no behavior change or final response present the next can and move on.

There are several reasons a canine may not give a positive response to an odor when presented. Contamination and no prior exposure to the odor are two of the most encountered issues.

Many Law Enforcement agencies have explosive canines but not all have access to the variety of explosives that are possible. I would always recommend having a practice circle at the certification to expose canines to various explosive odors available. This could be done near the actual test allowing those not testing to warm their dogs up. Caution should be exercised when choosing the odors to be used during the test. Outdated and contaminated odors should not be used. Avoid the cross-contamination of one explosives sample with the prevalent odor of another. This situation can occur when different explosives have been stored together for any amount of time in a common bunker without individual containment. The handler may have a false sense the canine is training on several distinct odors, while in fact; the canine is only training on one or two odors.

When setting up the Odor Recognition Test extreme care must be given not to contaminate the blank and distracter cans with explosive odor. Each sample (explosive or distraction) will be placed in a clean, unused container, with a perforated top. All perforated sample containers must be identical. Each perforated container will be placed in a larger external container. All external containers must be identical. External containers do not have to be sealed or have lids. All containers will be absent of external markings. It is recommended that you wear gloves when putting all cans together with the plywood so no human odor is present. It is a good idea to designate one or more persons to handle only explosive odors and one or more for the rest (distracter and blank).



As I previously mentioned each test will have distracters that you can use in your training records as items that have been extinguished. Extinguished is a term used in court to show your canine only alerts to the odor and not things that are used in training. It would be advisable for each test to post the odors and distracters used at the end.

Diagrams and patterns for the ORT may be obtained at the USPCA web site. www.uspcak9.com.