

Best Practice: Canine (K-9) Unit



Category:	Guards and Police
Location First Observed:	Port of La Haina, Dominican Republic
Date First Observed:	November, 2004

Description: The Port maintains a K-9 unit (dogs and handlers) that roves between three facilities in the port, conducting targeted and random patrols and inspections. The dogs are trained to detect narcotics and persons (stowaways). The K-9 unit patrols in an unmarked black van.

Discussion: K-9 units can provide several benefits to a port facility. Dogs and handlers that have been properly trained can be highly effective at detecting explosives, hiding persons, narcotics, or other substances. Certain breeds of dogs can also be used to protect their handler, or to chase a fleeing intruder. Dogs trained to protect and chase can be further trained to “circle and bark” when they’ve captured their quarry, or to “bite and hold” their quarry. Additionally, facilities that close during certain hours can use guard dogs inside the facility to help protect it against intruders. Due to their size, loud bark and reputation, certain breeds of dogs can also be a highly effective deterrent to crime. A K-9 trained dog can typically be trained to effectively perform just two types of work, so if a port desires to have a dog trained to detect narcotics, explosives, persons, and to perform a patrol function; they will need to purchase and train at least two different dogs. “Sniffer” dogs can only be expected to sniff effectively a few hours per day so additional dogs may need to be purchased if large amounts of property needs to be checked.

Potential Down-side: Patrol dogs or guard dogs are trained to confront violators, however in certain circumstances this can also lead to a violator or innocent person being bitten or otherwise mauled. Biting can also occur when a patrol or guard dog is not well trained, is startled, or in other situations. In certain nations, states, or cities, statutory or common law may result in significant criminal or civil liability to facilities if a patrol or guard dog bites or injures a violator or innocent person. For this reason it is very important that patrol dogs are properly trained, certified, and supervised.

Conclusion: When they receive the proper training and certification, and are properly managed, a K-9 unit can significantly enhance the effectiveness of facility security. Ports with a history of smuggling or stowaways would probably benefit most from employing a K-9 unit. K-9 units are shown to enhance security both by detecting crime or controlled substances/persons, and their deterrent effect on crime.

Cost: Purchase: \$0-5,000 per dog. Initial Training and Certification: \$5,000-20,000 per K-9 team. Ongoing training: \$0-5000/ year per K-9 team. Maintenance: \$1,000-2,000/ year per dog. Handler: \$20-50,000 per year. Multiple facilities can cost-share a single K-9 unit.

