

# Urban Search and Rescue South Africa (USAR SA) first K9 Search and Rescue Handler's Team certified

By Morné Mommsen, Midvaal Fire and Rescue Service



Presenting the team from left (back row) Tony Stacey, Ekurhuleni, USAR team leader and K9 handler; Chris Morris, GPG, ALS paramedic and K9 handler; Morné Mommsen, Midvaal, K9 coordinator and team leader; Mervyn van Ginkel, City of Tshwane, USAR team leader and K9 handler and in front Rachel Martin, City of Johannesburg, USAR tech and K9 handler.

**T**he Urban Search and Rescue South Africa (USAR SA) first K9 Search and Rescue Handler's Team qualified as K9 handlers on 11 February 2022, a 12-week intense course presented by Genesis K9 Group.

The team was certified in the following different K9 disciplines from care for a service dog, handle a trained service dog to deter crime, supervision of kennel practice, handle a patrol dog to assist in apprehension of a suspect, handle a trained sniffer dog in the detection of a substance (narcotics, explosives, arson), utilise a tracker dog to follow a human scent trail (live scent, human remains detection (HRD), biological human matter, search and rescue). In addition, the team also completed the following training: evaluate the use of equipment

and accessories for socialising and conditioning of service dogs, conditioning a service dog in obedience and maintain training standards of a trained service dog.

Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) together with the Provincial Disaster Management Centre (PDMC) made this



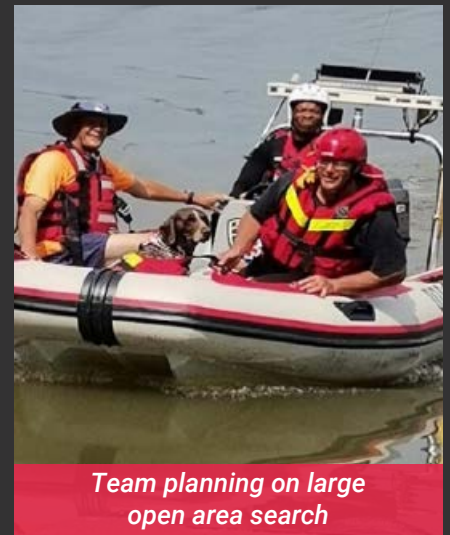
USAR SA team graduation with role players



## Urban Search and Rescue (USAR)



**Wilderness search and rescue planning for missing person and dam search for missing person**



**Team planning on large open area search**

- course possible and funded this training course.

The course started with Genesis K9 Group on 2 November 2021, Genesis K9 Group is an accredited SASSETA and PSIRA registered service provider in Dog Handling (DH 1-5, Tracking) and further modules and training. Both the directors Thys Kleyn and Andre le Roux of Genesis K9 served within the South African Police/ Military Service and work aboard in Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia and other area as K9 explosive handlers and instructors in the different K9 disciplines. Their staff is all very professional, well presented and

highly qualified within the field of narcotics, explosives, arson, tracking, man trailing, search and rescue and so much more.

The team started with the basic course (DH1). This module focused on different dog breeds, kennel and kennel areas, dog handling equipment and maintenance of such, how to inspect the dog and care taking of the dogs based on diseases and other medical conditions. The team also had the opportunity to learn from the staff of Onderstepoort Veterinary Services on how to sedate dogs, how to take blood samples and so much more. During this module

we came up with a new way of expressing any problem by referring to a “ticky ticky flea fly” problem. In addition to this module the focus was on applying safety precaution when working with a service dog in any given situation.

The second module (DH2) focused on how to handle a trained service dog to deter crime. But the most important aspect of this module was the “Animal Protection Act No 71 of 1962 and the Performing Animal Protection (PAPA) Act 24 of 1935 (Amendment Act 4 of 2016), which postulated the “Restriction on exhibition and training of performing animals and the use of dogs for safeguarding and any other functions”. This act does not exempt any service or person, meaning that anyone who wishes to use a dog for work-related purposes, must have a PAPA License. There are also very clear stipulated penalties postulated within this Act if a service or individual does not comply with this Act.

The third module (DH3) placed focus on how to handle a patrol dog to assist in searching for and apprehension of a suspect. Many will now wonder why does USAR SA focus on the security dog environment. Based on the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) standards, INSARAG states that a K9 team need to meet the country of origin, in this case



**Genesis K9 Trophy from USAR SA K9 Team made by Chief Hannes Steyn, Midvaal Fire and Rescue Service**

South Africa, minimum K9 handler qualifications and DH 1 to 5 and Tracking are the minimum approved national/international dog handlers training for South Africa. This is a minimum 12-week full-time course.

The module “utilising a search and rescue dog in structured scenario to locate missing persons and evidence” is currently under development by professionals within the industry ie fire department, SAPS and SETA and based on International Search and Rescue Dog Organisation (IRO), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards as per INSARAG guidelines and recommendation for search and rescue K9 services.

The fourth module (DH4) was all about “Supervised kennel practice”, a very important module teaching us on how to plan the infrastructure of kennel practice, management of resources, how to supervise personnel and administration systems together with understanding dog behaviour and how to deal with this.

From the following module, ‘Utilise a trained sniffer dog to assist in the detection of substances’ (Dh5) and ‘Utilise a tracker dog to follow a human scent trail’, Genesis K9 made use of Retired Captain Paul Rheeder from the South African Police (SAPS) K9 Unit. Rheeder have more than 30-years K9 search and rescue experience and is well known within the K9 search and rescue environment.

Rheeder’s knowledge with regards to swift water, rope rescue, K9 search and rescue and other related fields, are phenomenal and was really welcomed within the course.

The focused shifted and was based on narcotics, explosives, arson, biological human matter, live victim search, human remain detection in areas such as buildings, vehicles, open area search, wilderness search,

mountain search, swift water, and dam search.

Most of these substances we used within the different scenarios are artificial scent articles that are approved globally by all leading K9 industries.

These scent articles mimic the real product and therefore, allowing for the acclimation process on the dogs that need to be carefully and gradually introduced to prevent potentially traumatic experiences by the dog(s). Dogs react to new things like people do but they can be far more sensitive. Too much sensory input may lead a dog to shut down and result in the dog to become fearful of places or things.

The Genesis K9 Group skilfully introduced DH 5 and Tracking based on the different substances to the team’s training programme and included the search and rescue and body recovery scenarios as per International K9 Search and Rescue recommendations.

All members of the team are qualified USAR technicians and have more than 20 year plus work experience in the emergency services environment. Thus, they only needed to add the K9 components to the field of knowledge each technician already consist of.

After many weeks of really hard work and dedication, the team qualified and graduated on 11 February 2022 as K9 handlers for USAR SA.

The K9 USAR team would like to express thanks to CoGTA, PDMC, Genesis K9 Group and Retired Captain Paul Rheeder, SAPS SAR K9 instructor. The USAR K9 team presented Genesis K9 Group with a gift to show the team’s appreciation for everything Genesis K9 has done for the team over the 12 weeks.

This is a great privilege to represent the Urban Search and Rescue South Africa (USAR SA) Team and the different emergency services within Gauteng as a Qualified K9 team.

In anticipation, the team hopes to see the newly planned K9 partners in due time. These dogs, together with each handler, will be certified based on IRO and FEMA Standards to comply with INSARAG and South Africa Performing Animal Protection Amendment Act 4 of 2016 (PAPA Act).

### In closing

“Dogs have amazing abilities and can be used in many different ways to benefit mankind”. We need to build the much-needed K9 search



The team qualified as K9 handlers after the 12-week intense course presented by Genesis K9 Group





USAR SA K9 Search and Rescue Handler's Team

and rescue emergency industry by focusing on the correct way of doing thing. There are no shortcuts, only hard work and dedication to achieve this.

Institutes must focus on the minimum requirements for South Africa as K9 handlers. Therefore, implementing and enforcing the PAPA Act requirements and safeguarding all working dogs as recommended by the Act, irrelevant of the industry.

There is a vast difference between 'man trailing/tracking' dogs

vs search and rescue certified dogs. Man trailing/tracking is searching for a missing person/item with the use of a dog and NOT 'search and rescue'. Search and rescue by law is a municipal function under the appointed fire chief having jurisdiction and not a voluntary service or any other services responsibility. Without disrespecting any institutes or individuals based on the above statement, the recommendation will be to read the Fire Brigade Services' Act, The White Paper for Fire Services and the relevant Governing Municipal Systems Act's. 🔥