

SPOKANE COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT 8

Standard Operating Procedures

20.05.01 THERAPY DOG PROGRAM



Adopted: 07/29/22
Reviewed: 00/00/00
Revised: 00/00/00

Approved: *Jan J. Pahl*

Purpose: To explain the purpose and procedures of the Therapy Dog Program and to provide a framework for training, deployment, use, and responsibilities associated with the program.

References: District SOP 10.05.04, Chaplaincy Program

Procedure:

1. Definitions:

- a) Therapy Dog– A fully trained service animal raised to reduce stress.
- b) Owner/Handler – District 8 Chaplain Aaron McNally
- c) Program Manager – Fire Chief or designee

2. Ownership.

- a) The Therapy Dog is the property of Chaplain Aaron McNally.
- b) The Therapy Dog Program is a resource of the District Chaplaincy Program and shall operate in that capacity.

3. Intent.

- a) Clinical evidence has shown that the presence of a Therapy Dog in a given environment can reduce anxiety, stress, and blood pressure for first responders and citizens experiencing mental and emotional trauma. The goal is to provide comfort and emotional support to all individuals that the Therapy Dog comes in contact; both within the District and civilian visitors.
- b) The Therapy Dog is a District resource working under the direction of the Fire Chief or designee through the owner/handler. On an available basis, as determined by the owner/handler and the District, the Therapy Dog may support other local fire agencies.
- c) The Therapy Dog may be taken to public events or outreach opportunities where the District is an active participant with prior approval from the Fire Chief or designee.
- d) The Therapy Dog will live with the owner/handler and work an on-call schedule with the intention of providing a therapeutic outlet for the personnel in the District from the stresses and traumas experienced while on-duty.

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4. Training.

- a) The Therapy Dog and handler will receive basic obedience training within the first six (6) months of ownership from an accredited training company approved by the Fire Chief or designee.
- b) An advanced obedience course will be taken by the Therapy Dog and handler within the first twelve (12) months of ownership from an accredited training company approved by the Fire Chief or designee.
- c) Therapy Dog training and Certification will begin once the Therapy Dog and handler have passed the obedience courses. Therapy Dog Training shall meet the National K9 Therapy Standards and be preapproved by the Fire Chief or designee.
- d) All course registration and certification fees associated with these courses will be paid by the District.
- e) The owner/handler will maintain original copies of all applicable certifications and provide copies of the certifications to the Training Division to keep on file for the Therapy Dog.

5. Supplies.

- a) The owner/handler shall be responsible for the cost of feeding and shelter of their Therapy Dog.
- b) Initial costs of a kennel and other miscellaneous equipment deemed necessary to care for the Therapy Dog shall be covered by the District and replaced on a fair wear/tear basis.
- c) Professional grooming of the Therapy Dog shall occur so that the Therapy Dog is response ready and represents the District in a professional manner. Costs associated for grooming will vary based on the type of dog selected for the program. Reasonable costs for grooming, as determined at the sole discretion of the District, shall be covered by the District.
- d) The District agrees to provide liability coverage for the Therapy Dog while acting in its official capacity.

6. Veterinary Care.

- a) The District shall be responsible for reasonable veterinarian treatment for the Therapy Dog injured while being used in performance of their duties through no fault of the handler.
- b) Vaccinations, annual wellness exams, and health insurance for the Therapy Dog will be covered by the District.

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- c) Annual Health Insurance will be provided by the District, not to exceed \$400 per year.

7. General Expectations.

- a) The Therapy Dog will remain in the care, custody, and control of the owner/handler while in District facilities and when responding to requests for service.
- b) The Therapy Dog is not allowed on any fire apparatus unless approved and accompanied by the owner/handler.
- c) The Therapy Dog is allowed to ride in District owned vehicles provided that the Therapy Dog is safely restrained and accompanied by the owner/handler.
- d) The Therapy Dog is not permitted on furniture in the fire stations.

8. Response Procedure.

- a) On scene requests for the Therapy Dog shall follow the Chaplaincy Program SOP 10.05.04 (7) response procedure.
 - i. The decision to respond for requests for service rests with the owner/handler and shall be made in the best interest of the owner/handler and the Therapy Dog.
- b) Any District member may request support from the Chaplain Program, inclusive of the Therapy Dog, in non-emergent situations by following the process outlined in SOP 10.05.04 (7) (d).

Program Evaluation.

- 1. Evaluation of the program occurs at least annually, and changes will be made as needed.