

**Oklahoma Veterinary Medical Association
Oklahoma Task Force 1— Urban Search and Rescue**

**Basic Canine Service Animal Decontamination Procedures
For Hospitals**

Canine Decontamination Basics

1. Communication

- Discuss with the canines' owner what procedures are going to be done.
- Find out the basics about the canine (name, age, any current medication, any current medical condition, vaccination status, current veterinarian).
- Inquire about the canines' general attitude and willingness to be handled (aggressiveness) especially by unknown individuals.
- How much the canine accepts bathing.
- Contact persons to care for the canine (in case the owner is required to stay at the hospital).

2. Material Basics

- In general, the canine will be decontaminated with the same appropriate decontamination agent utilized on the human victims.
- If possible, consult Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) or the latest Emergency Response Guidebook (ERG) put out by the U.S. Department of Transportation for the suspected HAZMAT.
- High volume, low pressure water augmented by soap is the recommendation for physical removal of the HAZMAT:
 - Rinse-wash-rinse cycle 3 times for maximum benefit
 - Lukewarm water and standard household dish soap (Dawn®, Palmolive®)
 - CAUTION: some HAZMATs become reactive when exposed to water Check pages 344-348 of the ERG for a partial listing
 - The soap's high pH begins to neutralize many chemical agents and dissolve petroleum agents
 - Thick caked on contamination may be broken down with mechanics' hand wash products, mineral oil, or scraped off with a putty knife. Use scissors with caution so as not to lacerate the canine. Clippers will not work for long
 - If an oil based HAZMAT has contaminated the canine, use mineral oil to help break up and dissolve agent before washing is initiated
- Eye and ear protection from further contamination first, then from the decon solutions (high pH soap, diluted bleach, military decon kits).

- Petroleum-based eye ointment may absorb some agents and worsen corneal damage; they should not be used until decontamination of the eyes with copious amounts of ophthalmic saline solution has been performed
 - Using neutral pH shampoo is an option, however these are not as effective as the higher pH soaps in neutralizing many chemical agents
- Moist towelettes may be used to wipe the facial area (eyes, nose, mouth, and in the ears) where washing is difficult and problematic with many canines.
 - Non-alcohol based (baby wipes) suggested around mucous membrane sites
- Alternate decontamination agents for chemicals that women if exposed to water.
 - Baking soda or flour applied, then brushed or combed out
 - Physical removal alone by brushing or combing off
- Special care and attention should be directed to making sure the paws have been adequately decontaminated. The deep-crevassed pad edges can trap particles. Surgical scrub-brushes should be utilized to help in the cleaning of the paws.
- Ideally, the animals are on a grate with spaces that Will not catch a nail or toe, which will keep them above and away from a pool of contaminated water.
- Once finished, confine the canine to a collection area, away from any contaminated run-off, and use a dryer if cold and/or wind chill factor weather would pose a hypothermia hazard.

Canine Decontamination Steps

1. Assessment

- Medical assessment, if possible, to check the canine for health issues that warrant true emergency decontamination.
- If stable, 'emergency decon' can be repeated until the contaminant is judged to be removed.
- Owner can accompany the canine through decon if possible.
 - If not, an experienced canine handler is preferred
 - If a canine cannot be safely decontaminated without the owner, confine to contain contamination and alert animal control or appropriate health authorities
 - If medical attention is needed, request immediate qualified personnel assistance

2. Preparation

- Remove all equipment and gear from the canine and place in HAZMAT container until cleansed, deemed safe, or disposed.
- A clean all metal collar and lead is placed on the canine. Alternately, inexpensive nylon may be used, then disposed of when done.
- Muzzle use considered to prevent licking, drinking wash water, or bite prevention.
- Maintain control so as not to spread contaminants to clean areas.
- Personnel assisting should have proper PPE to prevent being contaminated themselves.

3. Rinse-Wash

- If HAZMAT material is oil based, use mineral oil on contaminated areas.
- Thoroughly rinse the canine from behind the ears, down the back of the neck, from top of the back downward to the paws.
- Cleanse the head and face with moist towelettes, gauze pads, clean warm water
- Ophthalmic saline rinse for the eyes.
- Follow with a soap wash and soft scrub in the same manner as the rinse, paying special attention to the paw pads with a soft scrub brush.
- Rinse thoroughly and repeat wash-rinse 2 more times.
- If deemed necessary, a basin filled with 1-2 inches of 0.5% hypochlorite solution (1:10 diluted household bleach) followed by a basin filled with clean water can be set up for the canine to walk through.
- Enclosures are nice to limit the inevitable shaking off of water, otherwise surrounding personnel should be protected.

4. Monitor and return to Service

- Once eyes have been thoroughly flushed, ophthalmic solution may be applied to the dog's eyes. A solution is preferred as ointment may interfere with a fluorescein dye check by medical personnel for corneal damage.
- Monitor for contamination (radioactive cheeks need to be done when dry).
- Repeat decon if necessary, otherwise dry off the canine, especially if hypothermia is a risk. Replace all leashes and collars.
- Veterinary examination is recommended and treatments as needed.

Reference: Canine Emergency & Gross Decontamination Procedures Lori E. Gordon, DVM

Modified March 12, 2008, Scott Mason DVM