



Summer Hazards for Working Dogs

Warm weather brings good news for outdoor activities. While swimming, water sports, camping and hiking are all the rage this time of year, there are hidden dangers for dogs that many people are unaware of until it happens.

Dry grasses like foxtails, needle grass, rip gut, and wild oats can be very dangerous to the dogs as they propagate by seed pods that have one-way barbs. These seeds can attach to the animals' fur and can lodge in the dog's nose, eyes, ears or skin, sometimes requiring surgical removal. As the weather warms up the green foxtails start to turn brown and drop off. Not only do we have to be cautious about the dry seeds noted above, rattlesnakes come out, and high temperatures can cause hyperthermia in our working dogs.

Because we are looking for old burials we need the dogs to smell the surface of the ground. If we have thick growth of plants or tall weeds the dogs are unable to put the nose on the surface. Recently arriving at a search I realized my mistake when I saw that the weeds were over 3 feet high and filled with sharp thistles. (see picture below) I forgot that the pictures I had been looking at of the project site were not the current conditions. Fortunately we were able to reschedule after the grasses had been cut.



Barbara showing how tall the thistles were.

The January 2017 ICF newsletter has a another article on Working Conditions for search dogs. If you want to read more about dangerous plants you can click on the link at the bottom.

-Adela



Locating burials through tall grasses is extremely difficult for the dogs because they can't get their noses on the ground to locate fragile scent.



Some of our Not Favorite Plants

Thistle, Star thistle, Foxtails and don't forget poison oak. Dogs do not react to poison oak like humans, but it gets on their fur and can be passed on to us..



Our dogs are living creatures and subject to weather, especially heat. Cool, moist conditions are best. The best conditions are not always possible due to the season or location of the project. We have adopted some standard working practices to help ensure the dogs are safe and we get the best possible results.

A basic list of guidelines we subscribe to follows:

- The dogs' workday varies from 4 to 6 hours per day, depending on weather and conditions. A workday is not the same as "nose time". Nose time is the amount of time the dog is actively working.
- The dogs can cover anywhere from 2 to 10 acres per workday depending on what they are looking for, the weather, the terrain and the search strategy used.
- Our dogs typically work 3 days on and 1 day off.
- We stop working dogs when the ground temperature reaches 100°F, or the dogs internal body temperature reaches 104°F.
- Weather and ground temperatures play a critical role in the dogs' ability to locate scent. We monitor ground temperatures as this directly affects the availability of scent. Hot weather conditions, especially ground temperatures 85°F and higher appear to decrease the scent available to the dog.
- In general ground temperatures below 85°F work best for locating burials. The higher the ground temperature, the lower the probability of detection. Ideal ground temperatures are between 40°F and 85°F. The most desirable conditions are mist and light rain. Heavy rain is difficult to work in for both the handler and the dog. Standing water or flooded conditions may make it more difficult to pinpoint a burial as it can block scent or move it around.
- The safety of our dogs always comes first. For example, we do not work deserts at night in the summer due to the presence of rattlesnakes. At some locations we work the dogs on a long line for their safety.
- Each handler has their own personal protection equipment (PPE) including a hard hat, high visibility vest for themselves and a high visibility vest for the dog.

Measuring Ground Temperatures

We measure the ground temperature when our dogs are working. You might be surprised that with an air temperature of 85°F the ground temperature can be well over 100°F. Ground temperatures are more important to the working dog than the air temperature.

Not only does the higher temperatures dry out the dog's nose making it more difficult to collect scent molecules, the dog will tire faster. We have observed in know areas where we train that when the ground temperature is over 100°F the scent appears to be less available to the dogs, making the probability of detection go down.

Our favorite measuring devise is available from Amazon:

MICROTEMP COMPACT NON-CONTACT INFRA RED THERMOMETER

Specifications:

- Measurement Range: -27°F to 230° F
- Distance to Spot Ratio: 1:1
- Accuracy: +/- 2° F
- Response Time: 1 second
- Category: Compact Size Key with Key Ring Slot

- Adela



MICROTEMP COMPACT NON-CONTACT INFRA RED THERMOMETER



Boots for injured feet, Goat head thorns, and if the dogs have to walk a distance on hot ground.

Marcy showing off her new Muttluks Mud Monsters.

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We are happy to talk to you about your project and how our dogs might help locate human remains
or burials. Email or call us.

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