

Courageous Companions and MSAR would like to submit the following Service Dog standard to your committee for consideration for use by Veterans Affairs.

Who We Are

I am a 30 year veteran and former municipal engineer with a service dog.

I am also the Chairman of Courageous Companions, one of the largest service dog providers in Canada that provides services dogs to veterans and first responders. www.courageouscompanions.ca.

We are one of the largest and longest standing charities for service dogs for veterans in Canada.

Since 2013 we have been utilising the MSAR standard which has been approved by the Department of National Defence. MSAR has been involved in discussions with DND and VA for the Past 15 years to ensure their expectations are met when pairing dogs with veterans.

This standard and our Courageous Companions program is based on these discussions.

I also chair the “Canadian Association of Service Dog Trainers” Canadas only federally incorporated medical service dog trainers association whose mission is collaboratively bring together the best practices encompassing service dog training standards and methods within Canada. www.casdt.ca CASDT is currently in the process of adopting this standard as well.

For future discussions, both MSAR and Courageous Companions would like to ask the Veterans Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, if you would please consider allowing our teams to have the privilege to sit at the committee table regarding the Service Dog Standards.

MSAR Standard Details

The MSAR Service Dog Standard is currently available for veterans Affairs to utilise.

This standard is very high which is why we use it and keeps public safety at its forefront. This is a 2013 Standard that is currently being updated in 2021 to include testing and intake requirements.

This MSAR standard for Service Dog Training can be viewed her <http://courageouscompanions.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Training-and-Certification-Standard.pdf>

This standard has been recognized by the Canadian Armed Forces in DAOD 2005-0, Service Dogs <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/defence-administrative-orders-directives/2000-series/2005/2005-0-service-dogs.html>

and DAOD 2005-1, Service Dogs Access to Defense Establishments.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/defence-administrative-orders-directives/2000-series/2005/2005-1-service-dog-access-defence-establishments.html>

MSAR's standard was framed by a Standards Specialist in Ottawa who is the retired Director of Standards, Standards Council of Canada (SCC).

The standard was prepared by eight members of a working group following public consultation.

The objectives of the MSAR standard are:

- Indicate the pre-requisites to be recognized as a team (that the person has a disability, and the service dog has special abilities [achieved through training] to help the person mitigate their challenges);
- Ensure the team is safe in public, and safe to the public;

- Ensure the ability of the team to function under normal conditions as well as unusual circumstances;
- Provide guidance to regulators on the factors to be considered and regulated;
- Promote the well-being of the service dog as well as the human-animal bond;
- Give background (rationale) for the requirements provided;
- Be useful to trainers as a baseline to be achieved when training dogs as well as persons with a disability;
- Be useful as the basis for certification (of the team).

The MSAR standard is composed of five sections covering various aspects of Persons with a Disability Teamed with a Service Dog; the five sections cover:

- Section 1 - General Requirements
- Section 2 - Performance in Public
- Section 3 - Performance (Enhanced)
- Section 4 - Requirements for Response to and Detection of Disability Related Incidents
- Section 5 - Requirements for the Care of the Service Dog

The MSAR standard was drafted in accordance with the rules of the International Organization for Standardization and the International Electrotechnical Commission, ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2, Rules for the structure and drafting of International Standards.

It is written to present performance requirements to the greatest extent possible.

The MSAR Standard is a public document to ensure public safety when it comes to training and testing service dogs.

MSAR certification testing does not simply test obedience but ensures the dog will work for the handler during moments of duress, activation, etc., something most service dog testing with other organizations does not validate.

MSAR testing ranges between three and five days depending on the level of testing the team is doing and follows a minimum of one year of training together as a team.

The dog also cannot be tested until it reaches a minimum of two years of age.

Our certification test encompasses all aspect of assessment (obedience, task assessment, public access, etc. to ensure they are safe to operate in public.

Most current government regulated service dog testing (which follows ADI standards//so to speak) takes approx. 1-2 hours.

MSAR testing is done over 3-5 days and in our professional opinion most other organizations comes nowhere near their assessment standard to effectively certify a dog and handler in the time frame it is administered.

The MSAR test is based on feedback from the Department of National Defense in 2010 who wanted absolute assurance the team would be safe to the public while operating as a service dog team, knowing the condition of their PTSD disability and the specialized training soldiers undergo which could be result in a dangerous encounter when denied access or confronted.

Depending on the type of disability, triggers and activation associated with some of our program participants, MSAR also conducts an off-leash certification.

- This certification requirement was verified after data analysis from an International PTSD Service Dog Study that MSAR Service Dogs was involved in.

- This study was done in 14 countries using 500 veteran and first responder service dog teams.
- Study data was reviewed by medical professionals who determined this type of certification is required in some circumstances.
- This certification test is five days long and done completely off leash where the dog must always remain within 6 feet of the handler throughout the test.

I believe this standard would help Veterans Affairs immensely.

John Dugas (K9 Bailey)

Chairman

Courageous Companions – www.courageouscompanions.ca

Canadian Association of Service Dog Trainers (CASDT) – www.casdt.ca