

HUMANE K-9 TRAINING

Protecting Working Dogs and the Communities They Serve

Law enforcement agencies across the U.S. use thousands of K-9s to apprehend suspects, detect narcotics and explosives, and locate missing people. But some still rely on cruel, outdated training methods. What should you consider when evaluating your agency's K-9 program?

Humane Training Methods Protect K-9s

- ▶ Crude, antiquated practices such as hitting dogs with belts and chains, submerging their heads underwater, and "helicoptering"—hanging them by the leash and spinning them in the air until they stagger around and vomit—are now rightfully seen as cruel and ineffective, and they can result in criminal prosecution.
- ▶ Experts agree that dogs learn and maintain desirable behaviors best when trained with a reward-based system, and frightening or traumatic treatment induces anxiety and even panic.
- ▶ Expert K-9 trainer Deborah Palman says that force-free training methods lead to less stress, fewer injuries, and increased cooperation between dogs and handlers as well as time saved in training and less aggression.
- ▶ K-9 training expert Bob Eden agrees that training with punishment causes both dogs and handlers stress, making it more difficult for dogs to comply and creating a vicious cycle of escalating force and increasing anxiety.

"These animals are highly intelligent and deserve the best we have to offer them. It starts with training. As a former handler and trainer for many years, it's my opinion that we owe it to them to provide the best in training conditions and techniques. ... They don't deserve to be mistreated or abused. ... We all know they will give their life for ours without hesitation."

—MASTER TRAINER E. SMITH





Humane Training Methods Protect Communities

- ▶ According to one study, forceful handling techniques are more likely to yield negative results than to improve a dog's obedience.
- ▶ Scientific research found that K-9s whose handlers subjected them to hanging by the collar, scolding, and hitting didn't perform as well in exercises and were more distracted.
- ▶ Training expert Steve White emphasizes that using positive-reinforcement helps dogs learn to trust their handlers and develop a strong working relationship with them so that they can be relied upon to obey commands when it counts the most.
- ▶ Civilians depend on local police to keep their communities safe and are acutely aware of and upset by incidents of excessive police force.

K-9 Abuse Prompts Public Outrage

- ▶ **Salisbury, North Carolina:** A police officer was filmed lifting his K-9 off the ground by the leash, swinging him, dragging him in a "chokehold," body-slaming him into a vehicle, and punching him. The video went viral, prompting a local protest and international outrage. The officer was recommended for termination and resigned.
- ▶ **Vacaville, California:** An officer was removed from the K-9 unit after a video went viral of him punching a K-9 who was pinned on his back, sparking public ire and protests. The dog was later found to be fearful even when a different handler attempted to pet him; did not understand or respond to basic commands; and aggressively protected his food.
- ▶ **Hammond, Indiana:** An officer was suspended after a video showed him pulling a K-9 up off the ground by a choke collar and striking him with a leash. City employees were inundated with calls and e-mails from concerned citizens who viewed the video nearly 750,000 times in less than a week.
- ▶ **Raleigh, North Carolina:** A highway patrol officer was fired following a public outcry over a video of him hanging his K-9 from a railing and kicking him repeatedly to force him to release a toy. A legal battle revealed that the agency's training methods included shocking K-9s with stun guns and hitting them with rock-filled bottles. The resulting criticism and concern for K-9 welfare led the highway patrol to disband and later rebuild the program from scratch.

PETA works with and supports police departments all over the nation, often collaborating to investigate, charge, and prosecute animal abusers. We urge agencies to prioritize the health and safety of both their dogs and their handlers by eliminating abusive tactics and using only humane training methods. Go to [PETA.org/K9](https://peta.org/K9) to learn more.

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