

THE CAPITAL

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Authorities enlist bomb-sniffing dogs to fight terrorism

Max, the Annapolis Fire Department's new bomb-sniffing dog, jabbed his nose into the unsealed flaps of a cardboard box in a hallway at the department's headquarters.

No bomb. But Max's nose proved even keener, detecting residue of explosive powder from a training exercise 1 week earlier.

That could translate into detecting sites where bombs had been made and tracking the scent of people who carried them.

"There's no greater tool (in explosives detection) than when it comes to their noses," said Bill Heiser, who trained Max in Daytona Beach, Fla. "It's a tool that can be taken to a problem, versus the problem being taken to the tool."

The recent addition of Max and a second dog, Enano, to a canine explosives detection unit at BWI Airport have enhanced the region's anti-terrorism defenses.

Max, a tan and black German shepherd, did 16 weeks of training at Mr. Heiser's Southern Hills Kennels Inc. before joining the (Annapolis) Fire Department in November. In Florida, he was trained to detect 14 different explosives odors in settings like airports, stadiums, warehouses and vehicles.

Mr. Heiser said only one in 40 canines he tests completes the program, saying a dog's drive or "hunt" is the main determinant. He called Max's drive "unbelievable."

And for Max, it's all about his tennis ball. Mr. Heiser said his canines are not searching for explosives, but rather their reward - which they get for detecting explosives.

"It's like a game to the dog... Max will pretty much kill to get his ball," said Capt. Douglas Remaley, Max's handler at the Fire Department.

Capt. Remaley has continued to train Max, planting explosive materials for Max to find at Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium

city government buildings, school lockers, residences and other locations.

Max also has responded to several bomb threats and reports of suspicious packages - once finding a hand grenade that the department's bomb technicians dealt with safely.

"His drive has not dropped at all - he's doing excellent," said Capt. Remaley, an investigator in the Fire Marshal's Office.

Second dog needed

Max has joined Jake, who became the department's first bomb-sniffing dog in 1997. The need for a second dog became apparent amid heightened concerns about terrorism and the department's growing number of explosives-related calls since the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks.

The Fire Marshal's Office responded to 36 explosives-related calls in 2000 and 27 through Sept. 10, 2001. It had 83 such calls the remainder of that year. Call volume stayed high with 103 in 2002 and is on a similar pace this year.

Capt. Remaley said having two dogs on a scene slashes the search time and will also give Jake and his handler, Lt. Jeffrey Morgan, a reprieve from being on call at all times.

It also boosts countywide capabilities, as several agencies pool dogs for larger sweeps. The County Police Department has six bomb-sniffing dogs with two more in training, the County Sheriff's Office has one and the Office of the State Fire Marshal's bomb squad has one at Baltimore-Washington International Airport.

Max's addition stemmed from a recommendation by Mayor Ellen O. Moyer's transition team on security. His training and yearly expenses are being funded by the Naval Academy, which enlists the department's canines for explosives calls.

Enano, a tan Labrador, completed an 11-week training

program in San Antonio with his handler, Maryland Transportation Authority Police Officer Wayne Butler, before coming to BWI about a month ago.

Officer Butler said the program taught him to pick up on the dog's cues and afforded them bonding time, saying Enano had done explosives training beforehand. At BWI, they're finishing up an acclimation period, doing training exercises in airplanes, terminals, ticket counters and vehicles and with luggage.

Like Max, Enano is excitable and infatuated with his reward, a black, oblong rubber ball. At a canine demonstration Tuesday, he rolled on his back, bit and frayed his leash and repeatedly jumped on Officer Butler. His handler sees this playfulness as a positive.

"He's a little hyper," he said. "I don't want to take that away because he plays hard, but when he works, he works hard."

When the duo enters into service shortly, they will become the fifth team in the Transportation Security Administration's National Explosives Detection Canine Team Program at BWI, another handler said. Another team is expected to begin working in August.

Officer Lawrence Collins, another Transportation Authority Police handler, lauded the canines' sense of smell and versatility to search sprawling areas like terminals and confined spaces, which much X-ray equipment can't do.

Said Thomas Taaffe, deputy director of TSA's canine program, of the dogs: "They are an integral part of our multi-layered detection arsenal, and the best tool we have that can go directly to the source of an explosives odor."

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