

	Administrative General Order	11.13 Comfort Dogs	ORIGINATOR/REVIEW Chief's Staff
	SUBJECT <b>Virginia Beach Police Department General Order</b> Chapter –		DISTRIBUTION ALL
	<b>CALEA: 41.1.5</b>		
BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE POLICE CHIEF: <i>PWN</i>			

**Purpose:**

To establish guidelines for the proper utilization, training, and care of Police Department Comfort Dogs.

**Policy:**

- A. The primary goal of the Comfort Dog Program is to improve officer wellbeing by having the animals provide comfort in an effort to reduce the stress and anxiety of our employees. The Comfort Dogs will regularly interact with all employees to provide emotional support and serve as one element of the department's officer wellness initiative.
- B. First Responders, victims and witnesses endure and experience various types of traumatic events. Many of these events can have a negative impact on individuals over time. Comfort Dogs can serve a vital role in assisting First Responders and citizens to help reduce the long-term effects of trauma.
- C. At no time will a Comfort Dog be trained in aggression tactics or used as any level of force. Comfort Dogs will be selected based on their temperament to provide relief so they will be effective Comfort Dogs and successfully pass required training. There is no need for the dogs to have any training prior to being selected by the department. The dogs will be evaluated by a certified trainer prior to initiating the training.
- D. Each Comfort Dog will be managed by a sworn member, referred to as a Comfort Dog Facilitator, who will be responsible for the dog to include basic care and maintenance.
- E. Any employee or entity deemed appropriate by the Police Chief or designee may request the presence of the department's Comfort Dog(s). The Comfort Dog may also attend precinct musters, and public and community events to increase awareness of the department's efforts for employee and community wellness. Comfort Dogs will be utilized in a manner to compliment the mission of the Virginia Beach Police Department.
- F. The Comfort Dog will only travel outside the City of Virginia Beach with supervisor approval.

**Assignment as a Comfort Dog Facilitator 41.1.5 (c)**

- A. All Comfort Dog Facilitators will be selected by the Chief's Executive aide and approved by the Police Chief. A memo will be distributed soliciting members that are interested in being considered for the position.
- B. A Comfort Dog Facilitator may be removed from the program at any time at the discretion of the Police Chief or designee. The responsibilities associated with the role of Comfort Dog Facilitator will be completed in addition to the employee's normal duties.
- C. An employee's position may be a factor in determining if their assignment is conducive to an employee becoming a Comfort Dog Facilitator.
- D. An employee cannot be selected to serve as a Comfort Dog Facilitator unless he/she has a residence that is conducive to housing the dog.

**Comfort Dog Tasks 41.1.5 (a)**

The types of situations where the Comfort Dog may provide comfort services include, but are not limited to:

- A. First Responders who have witnessed or experienced a traumatic event.
- B. Traumatized persons.
- C. Witnesses/victims of crimes.
- D. Groups of individuals who have been evacuated or were involved in a critical incident
- E. Community Events to build community trust, build relationships and provide knowledge.
- F. Other Similar situations where it is appropriate to use a comfort dog.

**Comfort Dog Facilitator Specific Tasks**

- A. The Comfort Dog Facilitator assigned to a Comfort Dog shall be responsible for the care, training and feeding of the Comfort Dog.
- B. The Comfort Dog will reside with the Comfort Dog Facilitator inside their residence. The facilitator will be provided a dog crate for the dog to sleep or rest.
- C. While on duty, the Comfort Dog shall accompany the Comfort Dog Facilitator during their regularly scheduled shifts.
- D. The Comfort Dog Facilitator shall be the expert regarding the assigned Comfort Dog's abilities, training, and temperament and has the ultimate decision on whether it is safe to use the Comfort Dog in any situation.
- E. The Comfort Dog Facilitator shall provide the Comfort Dog frequent breaks and water and ensure the needs and safety of the Comfort Dog are met. This will enable the animal to maintain a calm demeanor, while ensuring the dog's needs are met.

- F. At all times, to include off duty hours, the Comfort Dog shall be the responsibility of the Comfort Dog Facilitator.
- G. Comfort Dog Facilitators shall attend all required training during regular working hours when possible. When training is during off duty hours, the Comfort Dog Facilitator will work with his/her supervisor to get approval and adjust scheduled work hours as necessary.
- H. Comfort Dog Facilitators will not bring their assigned Comfort Dog to any training they are attending that is not directly related to the dog. This would include but is not limited to annual In-Service or the Firearms Range.
- I. The Comfort Dog shall not be taken to court when the Comfort Dog Facilitator has been subpoenaed or anticipates testifying.
- J. Comfort Dog Facilitators will receive Canine Maintenance pay for each non-working day when they care for the animal.

**Criteria for Utilization 41.1.5 (i)**

The Comfort Dog Facilitator shall assess all requests for use of the Comfort Dog before utilization. In doing so, the following criteria shall be taken into consideration:

- A. Scene safety.
- B. Individual (s) is willing to interact with the dog.
- C. No other animal(s) in the area that cannot be safely and securely separated.
- D. Environment and status of the scene are safe for the Comfort Dog.
- E. Individual(s) does not appear to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- F. The Comfort Dog shall not be permitted to interact with any individual exhibiting signs of impairment.

Requesting VBPD personnel may pre-screen the request type and assist in determining Comfort Dog service appropriateness, however, once on-scene, the Comfort Dog Facilitator will re-assess the situation to confirm it is appropriate to utilize the Comfort Dog. Any time the comfort dog is utilized or deployed the facilitator will send documentation via email to the Chief's Executive aide, who will maintain an electronic copy of this information.

**Transporting the Comfort Dog**

- A. The Comfort Dog shall be transported in a vehicle suitable for transporting and maintaining the dog comfortably.
- B. A vehicle that is transporting a Comfort Dog shall never engage in any emergency response driving or vehicle pursuits.
- C. A Comfort Dog should never be left unattended in a vehicle more than five minutes.
- D. At no time shall a Comfort Dog be transported in the same vehicle as a person in

custody.

- E. The Comfort Dog shall not be transported on a UTV, Motorcycle or in the back of a pick-up truck or in any manner that is unsafe for the dog.

**Comfort Dog Equipment 41.1.5 (h)**

Only equipment approved by the department will be utilized with the Comfort Dog. That equipment will be maintained and inspected regularly by the Comfort Dog Facilitator. Supplies that will be provided for the Comfort Dog shall include, but not be limited to:

- A. Six-foot lead, unless the trainers require a longer lead
- B. Dog collars and/or harnesses
- C. Approved canine identification vest
- D. Food and water dishes
- E. Dog waste bags
- F. Dog bed(s) and/or mat(s)
- G. Dog crates
- H. Dog brushes, dental maintenance, nail clippers, and other grooming tools

**Comfort Dog Specific Training 41.1.5 (b,d,e,f)**

- A. Comfort dogs will be selected based on their temperament, demeanor, health, behavior, size, and ability to interact around unknown persons.
- B. The Comfort Dog Facilitator and Comfort Dog will be specifically trained to provide services for the Department, First Responders and citizens comforting them to reduce anxiety during stressful and traumatic experiences.
- C. The Comfort Dog's initial training will be completed by a departmental approved certified trainer. The Comfort Dog Facilitator will continue the training taught by the trainer during work hours.
- D. The Comfort Dog Facilitator will continually train with the dog monthly to reinforce obedience and skills training with the Comfort Dog to maintain proficiency.
- E. Comfort Dog Facilitators are responsible for maintaining their proficiency with the Comfort Dog and are not permitted to use other training methods.
- F. Each Comfort Dog will be required to successfully complete the American Kennel Club (AKC) Canine Good Citizen (CGC) test. The Comfort Dog will also be required to pass this test annually.
- G. All training will be documented in the Pistol database by each Facilitator in a timely manner.
- H. The Comfort Dog Facilitator will inform the Chief's Executive Aide immediately if the dog develops a health condition that affects its ability to perform its duties.

**Veterinarian Services 41.1.5 (g)**

All medical care for the Comfort Dog shall be provided by the department approved Veterinary services. These services will include, but shall not be limited to immunizations, check-ups as required by the veterinarian and other routine veterinary services necessary for the care, safety, and wellbeing of the Comfort Dog. At no time should the Comfort Dog receive routine veterinary care from any unauthorized clinic or individual. In the event of an emergency health issue the Comfort Dog should be taken to the nearest authorized emergency veterinary clinic. A list of these clinics will be maintained by the Chief's Executive Aide and provided to each Facilitator. All veterinary services shall be documented and maintained.

**Care of the Comfort Dog/Grooming**

- A. The Comfort Dog Facilitator shall regularly groom the Comfort Dog in an effort to maintain the highest level of health and wellbeing for the animal. The facilitator will be responsible for the 24 hour care and maintenance of the dog.
- B. It will be the responsibility of the Comfort Dog Facilitator to provide the Comfort Dog regular exercise to maintain a healthy weight.
- C. The Comfort Dog Facilitator shall provide food at least twice daily and fresh water throughout the day.
- D. The Comfort Dog Facilitator shall administer all medications, preventative and other treatments as prescribed by the veterinarian.

**Office Procedures**

- A. While in department office space, the Comfort Dog should remain on its bed, mat, or in its crate unless the Comfort Dog Facilitator approves the dog to visit other people.
- B. The Comfort Dog shall have a mat, dog bed and/or crate, where the dog can rest while not engaged in VBPD activities and while the Comfort Dog Facilitator is performing work in the office. In this area the dog will be provided a water bowl to stay hydrated.
- C. The Comfort Dog should have frequent access to water and only be given food and treats approved by the Comfort Dog Facilitator. At no time should another employee attempt to feed the dog unless the Comfort Dog Facilitator gives their approval.
- D. Only the Comfort Dog Facilitator may give commands to the Comfort Dog. At no time should another VBPD staff member attempt to give commands, exercise, perform any service, or train with the Comfort Dog, unless approved by a supervisor and the Comfort Dog Facilitator.
- E. To ensure the safety of all those involved, only the Facilitator shall be responsible for the Comfort Dog when engaging with individuals.
- F. If the Comfort Dog must remain in the office while the Comfort Dog Facilitator leaves the animal should first be taken outside for a break. If the Comfort Dog

Facilitator is unable to return within an hour, arrangements can be made for another VBPD employee to take the animal outside for a break. This employee should be designated prior and receive a briefing on the care of the animal.

- G. If the Comfort Dog Facilitator is on vacation or on a duty status that prevents proper care of the Comfort Dog, it will be placed with another employee selected by the Chief's Executive Aide. An employee, other than the Comfort Dog Facilitator will be identified to serve in this role when the Comfort Dog is first acquired. This will give that employee the opportunity to get acquainted with the Comfort Dog prior to the temporary placement. This employee will receive Canine Maintenance pay for any non-working days they are caring for the dogs. The Comfort Dog will not be deployed while the Comfort Dog Facilitator is not able to perform his/her Comfort Dog duties.

### **Responding to request for services**

The Comfort Dog Facilitator shall contact all those involved and conduct a needs assessment, to include the individuals desire to accept services of the Comfort Dog. The Comfort Dog Facilitator shall make the determination if it is appropriate to use the Comfort Dog based on criterion for utilization set forth herein.

### **Comfort Dog Utilization for Community Engagement**

- A. Requesting VBPD personnel may pre-screen the call type and assist in determining Comfort Dog service appropriateness.
- B. Once on-scene, the Comfort Dog Facilitator will re-assess the situation to confirm it is appropriate to utilize the Comfort Dog.
- C. A request for a presentation or visits from the Comfort Dog can be submitted to the Department for consideration. The Comfort Dog is a representative of the department and can be utilized for community outreach and presentations to different community groups such as schools, churches, and civic organizations.

### **Comfort Dog Injuries**

If the Comfort Dog is involved in an incident which results in an injury to the Comfort Dog, the Comfort Dog Facilitator will obtain the appropriate veterinary care for the animal. The Comfort Dog Facilitator shall notify their immediate supervisor and the Chief's Executive Aide. The supervisor will make the assessment and determination of the appropriate paperwork needed to include Riskmaster.

### **Injuries to Others**

In the event an injury occurs to an individual as a result of the Comfort Dogs actions, the Comfort Dog Facilitator shall request the appropriate medical care for the individual injured. The Comfort Dog Facilitator's immediate supervisor and the Chief's Executive Aide shall be notified and respond as soon as practical. The supervisor will make the assessment and determination of the appropriate paperwork needed to include Riskmaster. If the injury is a result of a bite, Animal Control shall be notified to properly document the incident.