

Dog Scouts of America

Water Rescue Training Instructions

The dog must have a solid retrieve to earn this merit badge. Instructions for several of the exercises for Water Rescue I are in Water Safety 1, 2, and 3. There are a few added requirements for the Water Rescue I merit badge.

The dog not only has to retrieve a thrown dummy, but he must retrieve objects that are "placed" into position by someone else (like a blind retrieve). The dog must also be able to retrieve bulky, unusual objects, like life jackets and boat cushions.

The dog must also take a line out to a person in the water. To teach this, we start on land. We teach the dog to go out to a person with treats on him. The person calls, "Help, help." The dog runs out to the person who holds out a treat in his right hand. As the dog gets to the person, the person leads the dog around him in a clockwise circle with the treat. When the "victim" has been completely encircled, he gives up the treat to the dog. Start this at close range, and build up to a distance of over 50 feet. Then, make sure that the dog will do this with a line either attached to his harness, or to a dummy that he will take in his mouth. I prefer the later, because there is less chance for a thrashing person to accidentally drown the dog if the line is not attached. This means that the dog must be willing to take the dummy and drag the weight of the rope into the water.

The dog must tow a boat, by either attaching a line to the harness, or by taking a dummy with a line attached and pulling it with his mouth. Again, I prefer the later, because if the dog were ever going to act on his own to save anyone, he would not have anyone there to attach the rope to his harness. This means that the dog would have to get used to pulling the weight of not only the rope, but a boat, through the water. This can be practiced on land with an object used for a drag, to simulate a boat. Eventually, the dog will have to tow a boat for 50 feet in wading depth water.

In addition to swimming with the handler, the dog will also have to tow the handler to shore. The dog must, of course, be a good swimmer, and he must get used to having someone hang on to his harness or collar while he swims. He must additionally learn to pull in the direction of shore on cue. In training, you can help "steer" the dog by taking hold of his collar and tail, and aiming him toward shore. When teaching this to the dog, be sure to wear a life jacket for your own safety, and to make sure that you don't put too much weight on the dog. Do not attempt this exercise if the dog has not learned to swim next to a person in the water without climbing on them.