



CANINE SECURITY

AN EXPLOSIVE ISSUE

John Bigelow

Could man's best friend really be one of our most effective weapons when it comes to fighting the war on terror on the domestic front?

Remember when, as a child, an annoying dog drove you to distraction? It might have been your family pet, or perhaps a friend's dog. It could have even been a stray that you met at the park. No matter how many times you threw the ball away, no matter how much you ran away, no matter how loudly you yelled at the dog to go away and leave you alone, it was never enough. The dog kept running, it kept fetching... it just kept coming back! Most of us have, at some point met such an animal. Yet, according to some of Australia's leading canine training experts, this highly annoying, four legged nuisance could actually turn out to be one of our greatest weapons in the war against drugs and terrorism.

Dogs have been domesticated for most of human history and have thus endeared themselves to many over the years. Stories have been told about brave dogs that served admirably in war or that risked their lives to save persons in danger. In fact, when Pompeii - the Roman community destroyed by Mount Vesuvius in AD 79 - was finally excavated, searchers found evidence of a dog lying across a child, apparently trying to protect the youngster. It is in a dog's nature to protect, as much as it is in the nature of a great many dogs to want to play. When you can find a way to combine the two drives, the results can be astounding. For years, dogs have been on the front line in our efforts to detect and prevent the trafficking of drugs and other controlled substances in addition to helping authorities detect and disable explosive devices designed to kill and injure the innocent. Airports are but one example of areas in which dogs have been used to great effect. However, it seems that as global instability continues to mount, more and more facets of our society are turning to security guards of the four-

legged variety to help protect them from the evils that men do.

According to Chris Kotsopoulos of Detector Dogs Australia, one of the country's leading trainers and providers of canine detection services, included amongst the many industries now using canine detection services are major transport centres (train and bus stations) and, believe it or not, shopping centres.

"We are currently working with, or have in the past worked with, a number of shopping centres around the country who, being eminently aware of the increased risk of terrorism, have chosen to engage the services of a canine explosives detection unit to ensure the security and safety of their patrons."

According to Neville Williams, also of Detector Dogs Australia, this is not only a sensible safety precaution but also a prudent business decision.

"While the chances of an explosive device being detonated at a local shopping centre in countries like Australia and New Zealand may be remote, they are still much greater than they were a few years ago. Therefore, given the increased risk, it seems only sensible that reputable businesses would implement such measures. One has to remember that a service which may initially appear to be a significant expense is, in fact, positively cheap when compared with the loss of revenue a company might experience as the result of poor publicity, adverse public reaction and the downtime incurred as a result of reconstruction were a bomb to be detonated on their premises. Imagine the adverse publicity reaction to a shopping centre bombing. Not only would it drive customers away from the actual shopping centre which was the target of the attack, but it would also drive shoppers out of most other retail centres around the country for fear of similar incidents. Basic preventative measures such as the use of canine explosive

detection teams work in everyone's best interests - the patrons, the shopping centres and, in this case, the entire retail community."

To the casual observer, such security measures go largely unnoticed. In fact, what might seem like an extreme precaution would, in most cases, not even merit so much as a sideways glance from most people. Unlike most other forms of security, which rely on high visibility uniforms and personnel to create a deterrent effect, explosives detection using canine units is a low-key affair. According to Chris and Neville, most people do not even know that their staff is there.

"We deliberately try to keep a very low profile - for obvious reasons," states Neville. "The last thing any business operator wants is to have a highly visible security unit patrolling through a busy shopping centre during their busy periods with 'EXPLOSIVES DETECTION UNIT' emblazoned across their uniform for all to see. This would most surely erode public confidence in the safety of the centre as quickly as an actual attack."

Of course, given the nature of the task performed by these highly specialised security units, one must ask what happens in the event that a suspect item or person is identified? According to Chris Kotsopoulos, this, too is a relatively low-key affair.

"When one of our dogs detects something that it believes is an explosive, it will indicate the presence of explosive materials by sitting next to the object or person in question. This is what we refer to in the trade as passive detection. There are actually two methods that dogs are taught to use to indicate that they have found something, the first being passive, which, as I just mentioned, involves the dog sitting quietly next to the source of the odour. The second method is active indication. When a dog is taught to indicate the presence of an odour source actively, it will scratch and dig at the area where the

source is located. This method is more commonly employed in areas such as search and rescue, drug detection and cadaver retrieval (searching for dead bodies). This method of indicating an odour source is obviously not suitable for explosives detection as the dog's scratching at a bomb might be the last thing it ever does.

Of course, when one considers the vast array of different odour sources present in a busy,

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crowded centre such as a shopping centre or a public transport or airport terminal, one cannot help but wonder how a dog can differentiate and locate a single scent.

"As human beings, our primary sense is our sight followed by our hearing," states Neville. "In order for a computer monitor to give us an accurate representation of an image, it must display that image in millions of colours. For a dog, its primary sense is its sense of smell. In fact, a dog's sense of smell is thousands of times more developed than that of a human. Therefore, when a dog walks into a room, it does not see the millions of colours which create the visual image of the room but instead smells the thousands of

odours which comprise the contents of the room."

To take this example one step further, Chris explains that when we see a lipstick for example, all we see is the finished product – the actual lipstick. A dog however, does not just smell the lipstick. If the dog could talk, it would be able to tell you every single compound that had been used in the manufacture of the lipstick, as it can smell each individual component part of

the final product. It is the same with explosives explains Neville.

"There are roughly 19,000 different types of explosives currently in use. However, each of those explosives contains at least some portion of a select handful of basic building blocks used to create explosives. Modern explosives are, if you like, variations on a theme to some degree. When training dogs to detect explosives, we teach them to search for those key explosive components – the building blocks, such as black powder, nitro glycerin and so on. Once a dog detects the scent of one of these components, it is merely a case of locating the source of the odour."

According to Chris, the movement of air past the source of a scent creates a scent cone. "Imagine the source of an odour is at the pointy end of the cone. As the scent moves away from the source it spreads to create a cone shaped effect. When a dog is tracking a scent, it will zig zag across the scent cone, following the odour back to the source."

"To come back to our picture analogy from earlier," states Neville, "when a dog walks into an area and detects an odour, it is as if everything else in the room is blue and the odour is bright red. That is how clearly and easily a dog detects odour. It is a simple matter for the dog to then zero in on the source."

"However, the accuracy of a dog's sense of smell can occasionally create some interesting situations," explains Chris. "It is not uncommon to encounter someone who has done absolutely nothing wrong, yet the dog has indicated that they are the source of a particular odour. A person may be passing through an airport for example, and brush past someone who has been in contact with drugs, that simple brush with the other person can be enough to transfer enough scent onto the innocent person's clothing thus making them an odour source."

"We had one situation some time ago, which is funny in hindsight, but was not so amusing at the time. While working at a major

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concert, one of our dogs indicated that a particular container was emitting an odour consistent with explosives. We located the owner of the container and quizzed him as to the contents. The guy in question was one of the band's support crew and claimed he knew nothing about any explosives. When he was asked to open the container, sure enough, it was not explosives we found. However, it turns out the container

The highly accurate olfactory senses of a canine combined with the skill and intuition of a good canine handler can be an invaluable and reassuring tool in the war on terror. What is even more reassuring, however, is the knowledge that sensible business operators are starting to recognise and implement the highly skilled services of companies such as Detectors Dogs Australia in order to prevent incidents before

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had been given to the this person by someone in the United States who was a pyro-techniques specialist and that the container had, some months ago, contained fireworks used during the band's live performances.”

they happen. As it is so often said, we must do everything we can to prevent terrorist activity and we must get it right one hundred percent of the time because the terrorists only need to get it right once. ■



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