

Each vest is carefully custom-fit for the dog and weighs approximately six pounds. RCMP Dog Handler, Cpl. Pete Nazaroff (Kamloops PDS) says, "I'm all for anything that can save my partner. I think the vest has a lot of potential. Having said that, I'd like to see more testing done first." His main concern is that the vest would compound heat exhaustion/frustration for dogs in the summer. Overheating is a big concern for these dogs to begin with. They have to be monitored closely and kept well watered. Despite these precautions, some police dogs die from heat complications every year. The vest's designer agrees heat is never something to be ignored. "The vest doesn't have cool packs or anything like that sewn in because it would be too bulky. ... There's no miracle as far as heat goes. It's something all dog handlers have to be aware of. It can get very hot in the summer and you have to be careful."

The problem is that unlike humans, dogs don't have a real 'sweating' mechanism to dispel heat. According to veterinarians, roughly 80% of the cooling process for dogs is through panting and heat loss through their foot pads — neither are restricted by the vest.

Sweating through the body occurs, but it is very minimal. Basically, as long as the dog can pant (and has access to water and shade) they can cool down.

Cpl. Nazaroff also expressed concern that a dog might get caught in debris in some search situations (i.e. a warehouse). However, the vest's designer Cpl. Jim Slater says it was designed and tested extensively with precisely that in mind. So far, he hasn't heard of a single dog getting caught up in debris because of the vest. "... Because there is a lot of work done initially to custom fit the vest, the dog retains all the same ability for speed, agility, and ability to run/track etc. There's really nowhere to grab."

He adds, "There's a spot with a gap of 1–2 inches near the buckles (along the top of the vest) where you can get your hand in — but even that's difficult. Everything is sewn down into the carrier. I actually had to change my technique for helping *Olaf* over fences because there just wasn't anywhere [on the vest] to grab hold."

RCMP Sgt. Scott Barber, I/C of Acquisition and pre-training at the Police Dog Services

## LOBBYING FOR PROTECTION OF ALL POLICE ANIMALS

A dedicated group of B.C. high school law students are helping RCMP Cpl. Pete Nazaroff, Kamloops Police Dog Services, lobby members of parliament to pass legislation making it an offence to assault, injure or kill a police dog. To further their lobby efforts, Project S.H.E.P. (Students Helping Encourage Parliament) was started by the students last fall.

The legislation should be extended to protect all police services animals, not just dogs. "It should state that it is an offence to assault, injure or kill a police service dog or any other animal (e.g. horse) while it is employed in the lawful execution of its duties. It should also make it an offence if someone assaults, injures or kills a police service dog/animal, knowing it is employed in these duties, while it is being kennelled or boarded." There is currently no legislation of this nature before Parliament. The only legislative amendments currently being proposed deal with bringing in tougher sentencing for people accused of cruelty to animals in general.

According to Cpl. Nazaroff, "MPs are starting to call back in response to the letters we've sent." They are hoping that the non-partisan nature of the issue will give it support from both government and opposition parties in the House of Commons. ❖