



Courthouse Facility Dog Practicalities

Having a Facility Dog as a member of the staff raises certain questions that need serious answers.

Where will the dog go to the bathroom?

A professionally-trained Facility Dog will have been trained to toilet on command on any type of outdoor surface. An area of about 6 feet square will be chosen at each facility where it is convenient for the dog to relieve itself. If this small area is covered with crushed gravel or bark, it will be easy to keep it completely clean and odor-free, even if it is near an entrance that is frequented by members of the public.

Where will the dog stay when it is not working? There are times we just don't want to have the dog around.

The best solution for a working dog is to have its own "home" within the facility. This will usually be a dog crate. A transport crate will work better in this situation than a more open wire crate, as the semisolid walls give the dog a "den" where he feels safe and at ease. With a soft blanket and a chew toy, the Facility Dog can comfortably left in this enclosure for several hours at a stretch. The best place for the crate to be is in an out-of-the-way corner of his handler's office.

What about food and water for the Facility Dog?

The dog will not need to eat during regular business hours. However, the trained handler may decide to incorporate feeding of the dog into some routine during the day, such as having the children clients at a Child Advocacy Center feed the dog as part of her work with the children. It will be necessary for the handler to teach other staff members not to offer the dog snacks of human food.

Water for the dog will need to be available every hour or two throughout the working day, depending on the temperature in the facility and the dog's level of activity. This is best accomplished by having a water bowl on the floor in the handler's office, with the dog taken there to drink often. A water bowl can also be attached to the dog's crate, so that during rest times he has constant access to fresh water.

Is this type of work hard on the dog? Wouldn't he rather be outside in his own backyard?

A dog's strongest drive is to stay with his "pack" at all times. It is a lucky dog indeed who gets to be with his handler most of each day. A dog left outside at home usually spends most of his time right by the backdoor waiting for his family to return.

It is important that the Facility Dog be given quiet breaks in his den when needed. The trained handler will be able to recognize early signs of stress in her dog, and give him a break at the next opportunity in the schedule.