

# GUIDELINES FOR TRACKLAYERS BY PAFTA\*



\* Palo Alto Foothills Tracking Association, Inc.

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Original text by Anne Hershey. Original sketches by Mario Salacone

# Guidelines For Tracklayers

*Note – Although these guidelines are written for AKC test tracks, much of the information is pertinent to training tracks. The guidelines in this booklet are based on the “AKC Tracking Regulations”, Amended July 1, 2023.*

## **GENERAL**

Tracklaying for a test is a two-day commitment. You must be in the field with the judges while the track is being plotted. While it is the judges’ responsibility to see that the rules are followed and that the tracks are properly laid, your knowledge and preparation will make the job go smoothly. Usually the clubs assign a Chief Tracklayer who coordinates the Tracklayers and keeps account of such details as flags and the exact times Tracklayers arrive and walk their tracks, so that the Judges may concentrate their attention on the activities in the tracking fields. Prior to the day of plotting, you should read the Tracking Regulations (available by writing to the American Kennel Club\* and for download at <https://akc.org/rules>).

**When the dog passes on a track that you laid, or that you cross-tracked, you feel that you are a part of the celebration!**

**Good luck! May you earn a “Smelly Boot” award.**



## **FUNDAMENTALS FOR ALL AKC TEST TRACKS**

**On test day, please do not discuss the tracks, and avoid the exhibitors, if possible, until your track has been run. It is preferable for the exhibitors to not know in advance who has laid his/her track.**

Remember, the Judges are in sole control of the tracking field! However, on plotting day they may appreciate tactful suggestions from Tracklayers who have knowledge of the site and current conditions present there.

According to AKC regulations, a person cannot act as a Tracklayer for a dog at a test if that person has boarded, laid track for, or regularly trained the dog whose track he/she is to lay within the previous ten days. The Tracklayer must not be a person with whom the dog has resided or a member of the household or a member of the immediate family of the dog's handler. **If you fit any of these categories, you should advise the Test Secretary prior to the draw on test day.** The Judges may modify the draw so that you can still be a Tracklayer.

## **EQUIPMENT**

You must wear your own footwear, which may be any material.

You should have on your person a watch and a clipboard with paper and pencils for drawing (for your own use) a map of your assigned track. It is suggested that you carry a covering of some kind, such as a clear plastic bag, to protect your map in case of rain. "Rite in the Rain" (address on last page\*\*) all-weather paper is ideal for tracking maps, or sheets of mylar may be used. Some people also find a hiker's compass to be useful in laying and mapping a track.

## **ARTICLES**

The Judges choose tracking articles from those furnished by the sponsoring club and/or by the individual tracklayers. Check with the Chief Tracklayer in advance of plotting day as to whether you should bring your own articles for the Judges to choose from.

It is very important that the tracking articles be well scented. It is a good idea to carry the articles on your person continuously during and after the plotting of your track and until you place the articles on the track the next day. This assures thorough application of your scent onto the article.

Unless the club is providing you with articles, bring more than you will need on plotting day so that the Judges may choose which items to use. All articles will be inconspicuous in color in comparison to the surrounding terrain. The number and type of article differs for each level test, so refer to the guidelines chapter for your test for the article specifications. Often a successful tracking team asks to keep the articles found on the track as mementos, so if you use your personal articles be prepared to give them away.

You must know the precise location of the article drops as determined by the Judges. If by some quirk of fate, you get to the drop location and don't have your articles, try to improvise (for example: use your own sock, cap, or glove) and then notify the Judges and/or the Chief Tracklayer.

On test day, always complete your track – notify the Judges and/or the Chief Tracklayer of changes or unusual circumstances. Do this quietly and out of earshot of the spectators and handlers. If there is a problem, the Judges will decide how to handle the situation.



# **TD PROCEDURE**

## **TD PLOTTING DAY**

### **FLAGS**

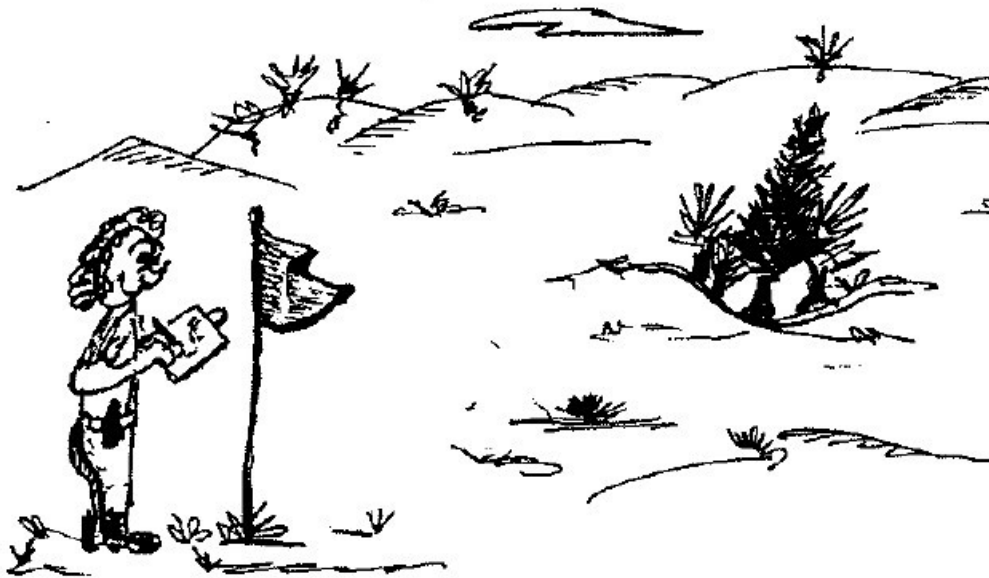
The Chief Tracklayer will provide you with sufficient flags to mark your track before you go out into the field. Be sure you have surveyors' tape or other extra markers to use in case you need them. You will mark the start, the thirty-yard flag, locations of corners, and the end article with the flags provided. Note the color of your flags, and record the number of flags and extra markers you have placed on your track.

### **ARTICLES**

On plotting day, the judge will provide you with the start and end articles or approve the articles you are supplying. You should keep them on you to absorb your scent until the test. For TD tests, the start article will be cloth and the end article will be a glove or a wallet. Carry only those articles you intend to use so that extra articles are not dropped accidentally.

### **MAP DRAWING**

As previously indicated, the map that you draw is for your own use. First map the exact location of your start. Prior to leaving the starting flag, look down the leg and pick out two landmarks which line up with each other in the direction of the leg. A combination of one landmark on the ground plus one on the horizon works well. Although the Judges generally point out the landmarks, you may see others that you wish to use in addition to theirs. Good landmarks are indispensable because changing conditions such as fog, light, and shadows can make landmarks look different than they did on plotting day. Open flowers on plotting day may be closed when you lay the track early on test day.



It is your responsibility as a Tracklayer to know the track well, so that on the morning of the test, if you discover that flags are missing or that you can't see them because of fog, you will be able to lay the track precisely as it was plotted. Any deviation from the original track or unusual occurrences on the track should be carefully explained to the Judges and/or the Chief Tracklayer. For example:

“On the third leg right after I crossed the path, there was a skunk sitting in the middle of the track, so I made a detour around this oak tree and these rocks, picking up the original track here, and then continued without any further problems.”



## **LEGS**

As you proceed down each leg, pay particular attention to small details along the way. Items such as rocks, distinctive weeds, unique grass clumps, bare spots, or paths that you may cross should be noted on your map.

Line up a ground marker in the *middle distance* with a distant object in line with the leg of the track to help you in walking in a straight line. Examples of good distant landmarks are: a telephone pole, a distinctive tree, building, or highway sign. Do not use objects that may be moved, such as parked automobiles, garbage vans, or outhouses.

## **TRACK LENGTH**

Count your own normal paces for each leg, and note these on your map. These numbers probably will not agree with the distances the Judges calculate, as they are estimating in yards rather than paces.

It is recommended that you divide each leg of your track into segments, such as forty-five paces to the path from the corner, twenty-five paces to the dry weeds with the two rocks, etc., adding up the total paces for each leg as it is completed. If you do not have time to record all of this information while the judges are plotting the track, you may add it to your map when you re-walk your track later. This information is for your own use in locating and laying the track on test day.

## **CORNERS**

When you cannot readily see the Judges' corner landmarks, you will have to find identifying items for yourself.

Not all corners are right angles. Some may be obtuse or even slightly acute, so be sure to record this as well as your forward and backward landmarks. Carefully look at all landmarks surrounding the corner. If it is very barren, ask the Judges if they would import some appropriate ground markers that you can later identify, such as a rock or a branch. Someone other than the Tracklayer should place the marker, as the Tracklayer's scent on it might distract the dog.

Remember, when you lay the test track tomorrow, no one will be available to give advice or help! You will have to rely on your carefully prepared map and your memory of the landmarks if the flags are gone.

## **EXIT**

After you have carefully noted where the end article is to be placed, exit the tracking field by continuing in a straight line for at least thirty yards as an extension of the last leg of the track. Then exit the field as directed by the Judges.





## **REWALK THE TRACK**

It is a good idea to rewalk the track right after the Judges finish plotting it. At this time, you can revise and perfect your map, find additional landmarks, check compass headings, recheck paces on legs, and place additional flags or removeable markers for your own use when you lay the track the next day. Carry with you an extra flag or two, some brightly colored surveyor tape, or colored clothespins when you rewalk the track. Use them to mark any areas where you feel you may need additional guides to find the track.

For instance, you may need to use an additional marker to identify the approach to the starting flag as directed by the Judges. On test day, the starting flag may be missing, or the approach to the start could be changed from the one used on plotting day. Tall cover, hills, bushes, and trees may hide distant corner flags, or some legs may be so long that it is difficult to see a distant corner flag. In these instances, you will need to place extra flags or markers to maintain your straight path from corner to corners.

Record the total number of flags and locations of ribbons/tapes/clothespins (if used) on your map so that you will be able to retrieve them the next day. Exit as indicated above.



# TD TEST DAY

## GENERAL

On plotting day, the Chief Tracklayer will tell you what time to arrive at the test site on test day. Arrive well ahead of your scheduled time to allow for coffee, putting on boots, potty breaks, and to check for final instructions from the Chief Tracklayer or Judges. Check with the Chief Tracklayer regarding the exact time you are to lay your track; this may differ from the time planned on the day of plotting. Synchronize your watch with the Chief Tracklayer's watch and be sure any needed transportation is available. Be near your track and ready to begin on time. Note the time you actually start laying the track. A pair of binoculars is very helpful to see distant landmarks and flags. AKC rules state that the Judges, when possible, observe the track being laid.

1. Be sure that you have your tracking articles with you. An extra start article is required but should not be taken on the track when laying it. Have it with you when the dog and handler are ready to begin the track.
2. Take an extra start flag and thirty-yard flag with you in case the original flags are missing.
3. Make certain that you have your watch, map, and pencil. Record on your map the time that you begin to lay the track as well as any unusual events along the track. Report these to the Chief Tracklayer and/or Judges when you have completed laying the track.
4. Approach the starting flag as previously directed by the Judges. At the starting flag, pause, drop the start article, and sight on the thirty-yard flag and down the first leg. Use your landmarks as well as the flags to make sure that you head for the corner flags in the correct sequence. (When you can see several flags at once, it is easy to confuse one corner with another!) When you are certain of the correct direction, proceed to walk the track.

Walk in a normal manner. Circling the flag, scuffing your feet around the flag, or scuffing your feet over any portion of the track **is prohibited**.

As you walk, pick up all flags except the starting and thirty-yard flags. **Repeat – do not pick up the starting and thirty-yard flags!** At the corners, hesitate only long enough to pick up the flag and locate the direction of the next leg.

Tapes, ribbons, and any other extra artificial markers must also be picked up as you lay the track. After you have exited the track, count the tapes and flags that you are carrying with you and compare these numbers with the numbers indicated on your map to make certain that you have the right number. If you don't have all your flags or markers, do not go back onto the track, but make a note of the discrepancy and inform the Chief Tracklayer and/or Judges.

5. If a flag is down and to the side of the track **out of reach**, leave it there. Mark this discrepancy on your map and continue walking the track. Report this to the Chief Tracklayer and/or Judges.



6. Place the end article exactly where indicated on your map. Do not cover the article with any substance in order to conceal it. Do not step on the end article, either after placing it on the ground or when exiting your track. Then continue walking in a straight line for thirty yards and exit the field as directed by the Judges. This is important not only because it is a rule, but also because if you should make a turn or curve sooner, the dog may cut the corner and may miss the end article. If you failed to leave the end article (forgotten, etc.), be sure to notify the judges.
7. Prior to the running of the track, ask the Judges or Chief Tracklayer where they would like you to wait while the dog and handler are working. *Some judges want the Tracklayer to be within summoning distance, but others prefer the Tracklayer to wait behind the start or with the spectators.*
8. Do not leave the tracking test until after your track has been run, as the Judges may need you to help the handler complete the track with a failed dog.
9. **If you have any questions, please ask the Chief Tracklayer and/or the Judges!**

# **TDX PROCEDURE**

## **GENERAL**

TDX tracklaying builds upon the same basic guidelines used for TD tracklaying.

There are a few differences: a TDX track is much more complex, and a thorough knowledge of the rules is mandatory. On rare occasions, conditions of the tracking field may be so different on test day from when they were on plotting day that you may need to change your path or your article placement. **Always keep the Judges and/or Chief Tracklayer informed of any changes you make.**

## **ARTICLES**

A TDX Test requires 4 articles. They should be dissimilar, approximately the size of a glove or wallet, inconspicuous in color in relation to the surrounding terrain, safe for the dog to pick up, and easily carried by the tracklayer. They must be very well scented to withstand several hours in the hot sun. AKC regulations state that only the last article on the track may be a glove or a wallet. Carry only those articles you intend to use so that extra articles are not dropped accidentally.

Be sure to record the location of each article, including the one at the start, by using ground markers, landmarks, paces from corner, etc.

## **FLAGS**

In addition to the start and corner flags, there will be article flags and cross-track flags. Note the color and pattern of each type of flag. Article flags must be carefully indicated on your map, because you must be able to pinpoint where the article is to be dropped if the flag is missing. Also record the position of the cross-track flags.



## **LAYING CROSS-TRACKS**

Cross tracklayers are important. Properly laid cross-tracks are essential to a well-planned and well-laid TDX test track. Each main track is crossed on two different legs by two cross-tracklayers walking side-by-side.

### **PLOTTING DAY**

Only the Primary Cross-tracklayer must be present on plotting day. The Primary Cross-tracklayer walks the cross-tracks, following the judges' directions, and must become totally familiar with the entrance and exit routes as well as the sites where the track is actually crossed. Mark these well with flags or tape. Count and record the number and locations of cross-track flags and markers used, because you must pick them up on test day when the cross-tracks are laid.

The Primary Cross-tracklayer must make a map which includes the entrance and exit routes as well as where the track will be crossed (at a right angle to the main track).

**Do not re-walk the cross-tracks.**

# **TDX TEST DAY**

## **GENERAL**

On test day, the Tracklayer walks the track, places articles in locations previously indicated by the Judges, and removes all flags and markers except the starting flag and cross-track flags.

The Cross-tracklayers walk the cross-tracks approximately an hour and a half later and remove all cross-track flags and their own additional markers.

## **TRACKLAYER**

Check with the Chief Tracklayer regarding the exact time you are to lay your track; this may differ from the time planned on the day of plotting. Note the time you actually start laying the track. The Chief Tracklayer needs this information to determine the time for laying the cross-tracks, and the Judges need it before the dog and handler start to run the track.

Cross-tracks are laid at least one hour and fifteen minutes, but not later than one hour and forty-five minutes, after the Tracklayer started laying the track.

Check to be sure you are carrying all of your articles.

Have an extra flag available in case the start flag is missing.

You will begin at about thirty yards from the starting flag, lining up with the starting flag and the next flag. Proceed along this line so there is no turn at the starting flag. While walking this line, pause only momentarily to drop the first article in the position indicated by the Judges.

The second and third articles will be dropped along the track at the locations designated by the Judges. Only the last article may be a glove or a wallet, and this is to be dropped at the end of the track.

The Tracklayer must pick up all the flags and additional artificial markers, except the starting flag and the cross-track flags, as he/she walks the track. Exit in the same manner as for the TD.

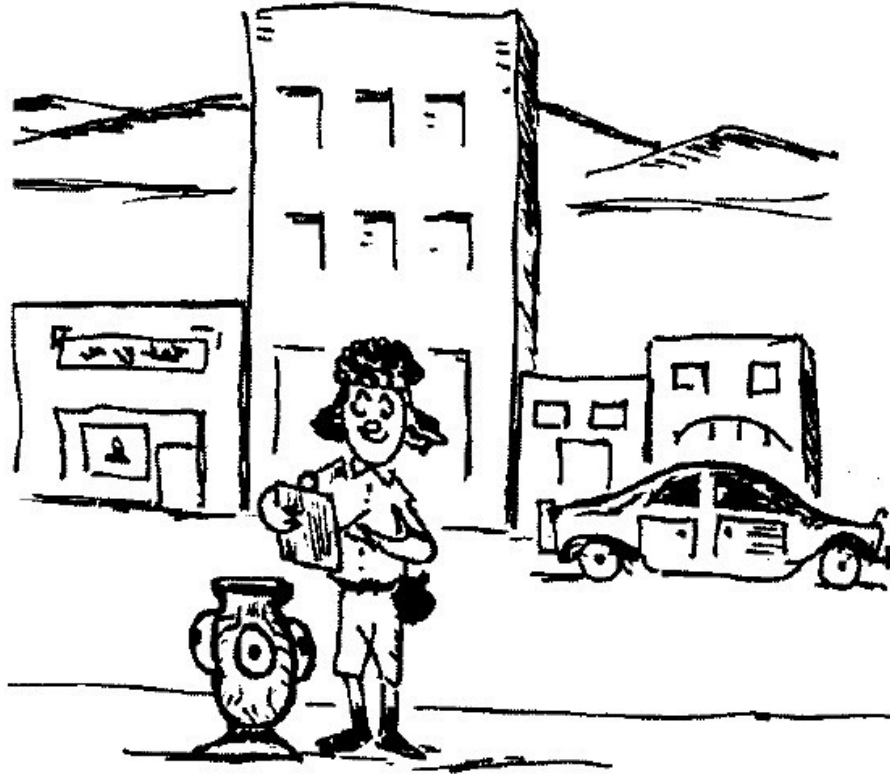
## **CROSS-TRACKLAYERS**

Cross Tracklayers will lay the plotted cross-tracks at least one hour and fifteen minutes, but not later than one hour and forty-five minutes, after the Tracklayer has started laying the actual test track. Ask the Chief Tracklayer for the exact time you are to begin laying the cross-tracks; this time may be slightly different from what was originally planned.

Since there will be another person crossing the track with you, be sure to locate that person in plenty of time to get to your cross-track entrance and be ready to lay the cross-tracks.

The Cross Tracklayers should walk side-by-side about four feet apart and should follow each of the two cross-tracks which were plotted and flagged the day before, crossing the track at an angle of approximately ninety degrees and picking up all cross-track flags and markers as they proceed. Cross-tracklayers should not stop on the actual track. After the last crossing of the track, the Cross-tracklayers should proceed straight ahead for at least fifty yards before exiting the field as directed by the Judges on plotting day. This is important because the rules allow the dog to follow a cross-track for up to fifty yards before he fails.





# **VST PROCEDURE**

## **GENERAL**

Unlike TD and TDX test tracks, which are laid in open fields and marked with flags, VST Tracks are laid in urban settings which include buildings, walkways, lawns, and parking lots, where artificial markers have already been built into the landscape. Extra markers are only occasionally used.

## **ARTICLES**

Generally, the sponsoring club will furnish the tracking articles. However, it is a good idea to check with the Chief Tracklayer in advance of plotting day as to whether you should bring your own articles for the Judges to choose from. Four are required: one each of metal, plastic (rigid or semi-rigid), fabric, and leather, each measuring 2"x4" to 5"x5" and weighing no more than a ½ pound. The end article must be marked in some NON-PERMANENT way with a number "4". A "post-it" or a small piece of tape attached to the underside of the article does the job.



## **FLAGS**

A single flag is used at the start of the track.

## **MAP DRAWING**

An accurate map is your only guide when laying a VST test track, because no corner flags or article flags are placed on plotting day.

- The Judges will choose specific architectural or landscaping features as locators for turns or article placements. Pay close attention to these possibilities for confusion:
  - The Judges may select a single parking space line from a row of them in a lot or one window from a row in the wall of a nearby building. Be sure to count the sequence carefully and record the exact number of the chosen marker.
  - Look around when the Judges choose commonly occurring features such as lamp posts, trees, or sprinkler heads. Be sure you include additional information to make the features unique from all the others that may surround them.
- It is easy to get lost on an unfamiliar campus. Drawing the general shape of your track on the site map, listing the names or numbers of buildings and streets that surround your track, and noting unique appearances of nearby buildings are strategies that will help you avoid confusion.
- You must enter and exit your VST track exactly in the manner the Judges indicate on plotting day. Make sure you understand exactly what the Judges want and that you follow the plan both on plotting and test days. Scent flows very freely in VST spaces, so it is extra important that your routes to and from the test track do not interfere with the scent path presented to the tracking dog on his test track. Often Tracklayers are driven to the starts and away from the exits of their VST tracks for this reason.

# VST TEST DAY

On test day, carry an extra well-scented article of the same composition as the start article, to be available upon the Judges' request in case the start article is missing.

Have an extra starting flag available when you lay the track, just in case the starting flag placed on plotting day is missing.

Check with the Chief Tracklayer regarding the exact time you are to lay your track. This may differ from the time planned on the day of plotting. Note the time that you actually start laying the track.

A tracking dog may easily be decoyed away from his test track by whiffs of fresher tracklayer's scent drifting towards his track from nearby locations. To avoid contributing to the dog's failure in this way, follow these important guidelines:

1. Enter and exit exactly as directed by the Judges.
2. Use restrooms that are distant from the track you have laid.
3. Do not follow on an adjacent track as a spectator unless your track has been run earlier.



# **TDU PROCEDURE**

## **GENERAL**

TDU tracklaying draws on basic guidelines from both TD and VST tracklaying. A TDU track is similar in length to a TD test track, with the same number of turns. However, like VST test tracks, TDU test tracks are laid in urban settings which include buildings, walkways, lawns, and parking lots, where artificial markers have already been built into the landscape. Extra markers are only occasionally used.

## **ARTICLES**

Generally, the sponsoring club will furnish the tracking articles. However, it is a good idea to check with the Chief Tracklayer in advance of plotting day as to whether you should bring your own articles for the Judges to choose from. Unless the club is providing you with articles, bring more than you will need on plotting day so that the Judges may choose which items to use.

For TDU tracks, 3 articles of dissimilar fabric or leather are required, plus an extra start article. The start article will be cloth. The end article will be a glove or a wallet. The intermediary article should be dissimilar to the other two and approximately the size of a glove or wallet. Carry only those articles you intend to use so that extra articles are not dropped accidentally.

Be sure to record the location of each article on your map, including the one at the start, by using ground markers, landmarks, paces from corner, etc.

## **FLAGS**

Two flags are used for TDU tracks, one at the start of the track and one to mark the direction at 30 yards.

## **MAP DRAWING**

An accurate map is your only guide when laying a TDU test track, because no corner flags or article flags are placed on plotting day. Please review the Map Drawing guidelines for VST tracks, they also apply to TDU tracks.

# **TDU TEST DAY**

On test day, carry an extra well-scented article of the same composition as the start article, to be available upon the Judges' request in case the start article is missing.

Have an extra starting flag available when you lay the track, just in case the starting flag placed on plotting day is missing.

Check with the Chief Tracklayer regarding the exact time you are to lay your track. This may differ from the time planned on the day of plotting. Note the time that you actually start laying the track.

A tracking dog may easily be decoyed away from his test track by whiffs of fresher tracklayer's scent drifting towards his track from nearby locations. To avoid contributing to the dog's failure in this way, follow these important guidelines:

1. Enter and exit exactly as directed by the Judges.
2. Use restrooms that are distant from the track you have laid.
3. Do not follow on an adjacent track as a spectator unless your track has been run earlier.

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Established 1983  
[www.pafta.org](http://www.pafta.org)

Written by Anne Hershey, with sketches by Mario Salacone  
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## **TRACKING TEST COMPARISONS**

Test	Track Age	Flags	Articles	Turns	Distance
TD	30 min to 2 hrs	2 (start & 30yds)	2	3-5	440-500yds
TDX	3 to 5 hrs	1 (start)	4	5-7	800-1000yds
VST	3 to 5 hrs	1 (start)	4	4-8	600-800yds
TDU	30 min to 2 hrs	2 (start & 30yds)	3	3-5	400-500yds

## **REFERENCES**

\*American Kennel Club  
8051 Arco Corporate Drive, #100  
Raleigh NC 27617-3390  
[www.AKC.org](http://www.AKC.org)

\*\*“Rite in the Rain” products  
J.L. Darling Corporation  
2212 Port of Tacoma Road  
Tacoma WA 98421  
[www.riteintherain.com](http://www.riteintherain.com)