



## INTERIOR SEARCHES

We will be discussing and focusing on interior searches and all their elements (vessels, elevation, tight areas/corners).

Interior searches can be in any kind of indoor space with four walls, a ceiling or roof, and a floor that is shielded from the outdoors. If a structure has a room that lacks a roof or walls and is exposed to the outdoors it is not truly an interior, but such unusual spaces can still work for developing concepts and training patterns for interiors.

The dog learns through experience that everything in the search environment is potentially productive. Hide placement repetition and exposure will trigger them to investigate more closely the things in the room when they catch odor, such as trash cans, chairs, step-stools, desks, tables, cracks, corners, etc.

Things that greatly affect the odor picture for dogs in interiors are:

- Absorbent (carpeting or rugs), slick tile or wood floors, or rough flooring
- The room size will affect how available odor is
- Ceiling height and material the ceiling is comprised of (ceiling tiles vs drywall)
- HVAC and heating systems and whether they are on or not (air flow and temperature)
- Open/closed doors and windows, as well as those items being opened during a search
- Clutter/furniture in search area can catch odor and can make searching complicated
- People other than the handler in the search area catching/moving odor

The most common problems in interior scentwork with dogs are inconsistent criteria, over handling the dog, distractions, confusing odor movement, and a dog's over-fixation on specific objects. These challenges can arise at various stages of training, from novice dogs learning the game to advanced teams navigating complex environments.

It is always a good practice to incorporate distractions, a wide variety of objects, and occasionally blank searches early on to help the dog generalize the game. If dogs are not taught that it's okay to not find anything in a blank room, they may become frustrated or offer false alerts, convinced there must be an odor present.

### Issues You Might Encounter

- Searching for "stuff" instead of scent. Dogs that are primarily trained using hides on or inside objects may begin to believe the game is only about checking items. They may get flustered and frustrated when the odor is placed in an open area rather than on a physical object like a box or chair.
- Frustration or lack of motivation if training sessions are too difficult, too long, or the reward is not something the dog sees as high value. A dog can quickly become discouraged and lose its enthusiasm for the game if they struggle too often. Signs of frustration include a dog walking or running away from the search area, the dog looking to the handler for help, disengagement and focus on objects in the room that are not part of the scent plume.

- Some dogs will give a false alert if their handler stands still for too long, redirects them too often, shortens the leash and restricts movement. They believe the odor must be in that spot because the handler's body language says it's a possibility. This can become a learned behavior if not addressed early on.
- New handlers can inadvertently train their dog to wait for direction from the handler instead of independently searching for the odor. Let the dog drive the search unless they are truly struggling.
- Make sure to train in a variety of environments. Some dogs get scared or distracted in new environments. They may become hesitant or try to leave the search area if they are not comfortable with the unfamiliar surroundings, noises, or surfaces.
- The dog fringes on the edge of odor and does not continue to work towards the source. Unlike outdoor searches where scent travels on air currents, indoor scent can get trapped and pool or drift far from the source. A dog might alert at a pocket of pooled scent on the floor instead of the actual hide, which is located higher up, or get distracted by fringe odor coming from another room. Remember, the fringe is the edge or starting point of the available odor.
- Your dog gets confused by residual odor because their learning history is still young or the criteria was not laid out clearly. Odor particles can remain on surfaces long after a hide has been removed, a problem that can be intensified with porous materials like cardboard boxes. A dog might keep falsely alerting on old "hot" spots, confusing the search.
- Air from heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems can carry scent unpredictably, confusing a dog about the location of the source. Doors and windows can also cause drafts that interfere with scent. Be mindful of placement when setting up a search.
- Clutter-filled rooms can overwhelm a dog and handler. Too many objects provide excessive sniffing opportunities, and the dog may spend more time on random investigation than focused searching. Early interior practice should be in areas with less items and easy access to the source for the dog.
- Safety should be considered wherever you are searching, however interiors have their own unique hazards. Household cleaners, essential oil diffusers, or chemical fumes can irritate a dog's sensitive respiratory system, reduce its scenting ability, or in some cases be toxic. It is essential to use only pet-safe scents and ensure proper ventilation during training.
- The search area becomes contaminated, usually by human error. This includes touching containers that don't have the target scent or storing hot and cold training items together.
- Not being flexible and creative with your set up. Consistently hiding scent in the same types of locations (e.g., in a box) can prevent a dog from learning that odor can be anywhere in a room.