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On heavy duty

Sniffer dogs have heavy responsibility and their physiological and psychological wellness is of prime importance

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Veterinarians and cops cannot discount the indispensable role sniffer dogs play in averting planned catastrophes like the one that shook Mumbai recently. That they can sniff out RDX, explosives and drugs using their phenomenal sense of smell is irrefutable. But, sniffer dogs have erratic work schedules and heavy responsibility, and thus, their physiological and psychological wellness is of prime importance. Recently, a one-day workshop was organised by Pune's CID Dog Squad in order to make police dog trainers aware of all that goes into training and managing sniffer dogs. Veterinarian Milind Hatekar, along with Shalaka Mundada, owner, Pet Sitters and Meera Thosar, a

canine trainer, expounded on issues such as handling injuries, food and nutrition of sniffer dogs, vaccinations, stress management, their housing and transportation and new methods of training.

Hatekar imparted instruction on how one can handle gunshot wounds inflicted upon the dog, moving dogs with fracture, and how often should one bathe sniffers. "Skin care, handling ticks, stress management, vaccination, food and nutrition were some other issues I spoke on. These chores are quite simple and dog handlers can adhere to these without much trouble. Communicating this fact to them was one of the aims of the workshop," explains Hatekar. He says that dogs are often made to travel long distances, followed by immediate training. "It can be extremely stressful. One should not commence the training procedure immediately after the dog has travelled a long expanse, for doing so affects its performance and health," he adds. #

Shalaka reveals that the police is coming up with a new kennel facility at the SRPF ground. "The ideal kennel size, materials that go into constructing kennels, kennel flooring, the kind of disinfectants that should be used and their significance, and the importance of comfort during pet transportation were some of the subjects I dealt with," she reveals. Shalaka says that dogs are placed on the floor of the dog vans while travelling, which is quite stressful for the dog due to lack of fresh air and improper ventilation. "Dogs may even get hurt while travelling, and thus, I chalked out ways to reduce the stress that dogs face during transportation. Also, the dirty kennels, or lacking basic amenities like comfortable bedding or water, or smelling bad can also stress the dog out," she adds.

New methods of training were covered by Thosar. He says, "Methods such as shaping, reverse chaining, accidental learning, guided learning, observational learning, trial and error and avoidance learning, along with how to be an ideal trainer, some recommended training principles and tools were enlarged upon. Also, ways to identify if a particular dog is stressed were some other issues I spoke on."

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