

Working Dogs: Used, Valued, Vulnerable

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Working Dog – “A dog used for work”

- Includes: service dogs, police dogs, herding dogs, search and rescue (SAR) dogs. Etc..
- These dogs are selected, bred and trained to assist humans in specific tasks.
- Selected and trained as puppies, they usually begin working around age 1 and typically retire between the ages of 8-10.



Challenges of Working Dogs

- Often demanding work environments: smoke, noise, traffic and stress
- Stress can lead to fear-based behaviours and reduced performance
- In large-scale disasters, SAR dogs can often suffer physical harm
- Service dogs assisting those with developmental disabilities may face psychological strain



Benefits and Drawbacks

- + Invaluable aid for many
- + Rewarding for the dogs
- + High standard of training and keeping
- + Does not affect mortality
- No autonomy, caretaker decides
- Health and comfort highly dependent on the handler
- Selection of puppies is ineffective
- Subjected to anxiety, fatigue and in SAR also wounds, irritation and diet irregularities

Reflections

- Norwegian Animal Welfare Act §3 states: “Animals have an intrinsic value which is irrespective of the usable value they may have for man. Animals shall be treated well and be protected from danger and unnecessary stress and strains.”
- The usefulness of the dogs should never come at the cost of their dignity or their inherent worth as living creatures.
- More research is required on how work affects both their physical and mental health
- Their role and contributions to society deserve greater recognition.



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