

# HITS 2026 Attendance Justification Document

HITS 2026 is a national law-enforcement K9 conference focused on deployment decisions, courtroom defensibility, operational performance, and long-term K9 program development.

The event brings together handlers, trainers, supervisors, agencies, instructors, legal professionals, and vendors serving active K9 operations.

## 01 Conference overview



Event:  
**2026 Annual HITS K9  
Conference**



Dates:  
**August 24–27, 2026**



Location:  
**JW Marriott Desert Ridge  
Resort, Phoenix, AZ**



Duration:  
**4 days, including pre-  
registration and vendor  
night**

## 02 Purpose of attendance

Attendance at HITS provides access to national-scale K9 instruction that may not be available through local or regional training alone.

The conference is designed to help attendees expand professional judgment, evaluate current practices, and bring back knowledge that supports safer deployments, clearer documentation, and stronger courtroom testimony.

## 03 Training value

HITS includes multi-track classroom instruction covering operational, legal, and training topics relevant to law-enforcement K9 work.

Attendance may support:

- ✓ **Improved deployment decision-making**
- ✓ **Stronger understanding of courtroom defensibility**
- ✓ **Exposure to legal and operational perspectives**
- ✓ **Continued professional development for handlers and supervisors**
- ✓ **Knowledge transfer back to the K9 unit**

## 04 Operational value for the agency

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The information gained at HITS can support the broader K9 program, not only the individual attendee.

After attending, the handler may be able to share takeaways related to training practices, documentation, vendor equipment, legal considerations, and operational decision-making with the rest of the unit.

## 05 Vendor and equipment evaluation

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HITS includes access to more than 100 vendors with equipment, working-dog resources, vehicle systems, duty gear, and operational tools.

This gives attendees the opportunity to evaluate equipment in person, compare available options, and make more informed recommendations for future agency purchases.

## 06 Professional networking

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HITS brings together K9 professionals from agencies across the country.

Attending provides opportunities to exchange experience with handlers, supervisors, instructors, vendors, and legal professionals working in similar operational environments.

## 07 Cost and logistics

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Registration Cost:	Early Registration	\$375.00	Late Registration	\$449.00
Travel:				
Lodging:				\$177.00/night
Meals/per diem:				
<b>Total:</b>				

## 08 Approval request

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I am requesting approval to attend the 2026 HITS K9 Conference to support continued training, operational readiness, and courtroom defensibility within our K9 program.

The conference provides instruction, vendor access, legal context, and professional networking that can benefit both the attending handler and the broader unit.





A HITS 2026 Classes and Instructor Overview can be attached to this request to provide class, instructor, and schedule details for review.

# HITS 2026 Classes and Instructor Overview

HITS 2026 provides law-enforcement and military K9 professionals with classroom instruction, legal education, vendor access, and peer learning across multiple areas of K9 operations.

This overview can be attached to an attendance request to show the classes, instructors, and training topics available at the conference.

## 01 About the conference

 <p>Event: 2026 Annual HITS K9 Conference</p>	 <p>Dates: August 24–27, 2026</p>	 <p>Location: JW Marriott Desert Ridge Resort, Phoenix, AZ</p>	 <p>Audience: Law-enforcement and military K9 handlers, trainers, supervisors, command staff, and working-dog professionals</p>
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## 02 Training areas covered at HITS 2026

HITS classes are built around the operational, legal, and training challenges K9 teams face in active field work.

- ✓ K9 deployment decisions and field operations
- ✓ Patrol, detection, tracking, and trailing work
- ✓ Search strategy and handler decision-making
- ✓ Report writing, documentation, and training records
- ✓ Courtroom testimony and legal defensibility
- ✓ Current case law and legal updates affecting K9 teams
- ✓ Training problem-solving and performance improvement
- ✓ K9 supervisor and program management topics
- ✓ Handler safety, K9 health, and operational readiness
- ✓ Equipment, technology, and vendor education for K9 units

## 03 Class schedule

Day 01 Tuesday	25 AUG 2026
08:00 AM - 10:00 AM	
Drug Canine Legal Update	Ted Daus
High Risk Tracking with Limited Cover	Jeff Schettler
E-Collar Mastery: The 5-Step E-Collar System for Working K9s	Garret Wing
Advanced Decoy Techniques	Carlos Ramirez
Building a Training Aid "Tool Box" for Fentanyl (and other Emerging Drug Threats)	Jonathan McGrath
10:30 AM - 12:30 PM	
Reliable Detection: Clarity of Task, Confidence, and Operational Accuracy	Mike Liley
Operational Control: The Skills That Get You to the Dance	Michael Nezbeth
The Silent Career Killers: Early Recognition and Management of Over-Use Injuries in Working K9's	Dr. John Waterhouse
Explosives Explained	Todd Wilber
Canine Program Management	Zach Pfannenstiel
1:30 PM - 3:30 PM	
Conducting Double Blind Exercises for K9 Team Certifications and the ORT process	Fred Helfers
No Equipment, No Hesitation: Muzzle Fighting for K9 Teams	Erik Good
Building Reasonable Suspicion Through Conversation During Consensual Encounters	Nicholas Bonney
Reactivity, Impulse Control and Capping	Justin Rigney
Operations-Based Training: Train the Dog, Train the Handler, Train the Team	Brad Gillespie
4:00 PM - 6:00 PM	
Tactical Debrief: Optimizing K9 Deployments	Zach Pfannenstiel
Why Dogs "Disobey": How Context and Conditioning Control Behavior	Dr. Melanie Uhde
Heat Kills K9s: A Preventable Line-of-Duty Death	Kathryn McConnell
Learning to utilize "Point to Point" and "Quartering" exercises (Fieldwork) to enhance ALL aspects of your detection dogs performance	Don Blair
Just Because You Can, Does Not Mean You Should: Is the Bite Really Worth It?	Eugene P. Ramirez

## 03 Class schedule

Day 02 Wednesday	26 AUG 2026
08:00 AM - 10:00 AM	
Conducting Double Blind Exercises for K9 Team Certifications and the ORT Process	Fred Helfers
The Silent Career Killers: Early Recognition and Management of Over-Use Injuries in Working K9's	Dr. John Waterhouse
Advanced Decoy Techniques	Carlos Ramirez
Markers and Prey Toys: Shaping Behavior for Patrol	Heath Kuhlmann
10:30 AM - 12:30 PM	
Operational Obedience: From Foundation to Deployment	Erik Good
From Error to Excellence: Leveraging Mistakes to Improve Detection Performance	Jason Purgason
Canine Nutrition and Heat Stress in the Working Dog	Rob Downey
AI-Powered Grant Funding Strategies to Equip and Sustain K9 Units	Michael Asimor
Just Because You Can, Does Not Mean You Should: Is the Bite Really Worth It?	Eugene P. Ramirez
1:30 PM - 3:30 PM	
Canine Program Management	Zach Pfannenstiel
Outs, Recalls, and How to Train Control for Both the Street and Certifications	Ronnie Manganiello
Practical, Science-backed Tactics for Producing Operationally Relevant Detection Dogs	Kevin Good
Operational Detection: Closing the Gap Between Training Success and Street Reality	Stu Phillips
High Risk Tracking with Limited Cover	Jeff Schettler
4:00 PM - 6:00 PM	
How to Make Money Training Dogs	Garret Wing
Reliable Detection: Clarity of Task, Confidence, and Operational Accuracy	Mike Liley
Reactivity, Impulse Control and Capping	Justin Rigney
K9 MYTHBUSTERS: Advancing Science & Standards	Furton & Frank
Drive Engineering: Apply Behavior Science to Build Reliable Combat-Ready K9s Under Stress	Shay Maimoni

## 03 Class schedule

Day 03 Thursday	27 AUG 2026
08:00 AM - 10:00 AM	
E-Collar Mastery: The 5-Step E-Collar System for Working K9s	Garret Wing
No Equipment, No Hesitation: Muzzle Fighting for K9 Teams	Erik Good
Heat Kills K9s: A Preventable Line-of-Duty Death	Kathryn McConnell
Operational Detection: Closing the Gap Between Training Success and Street Reality	Stu Phillips
K9 MYTHBUSTERS: Advancing Science & Standards	Furton & Frank
10:30 AM - 12:30 PM	
Why Dogs "Disobey", How Context and Conditioning Control Behavior	Dr. Melanie Uhde
Tactical Debrief: Optimizing K9 Deployments	Zach Pfannenstiel
Canine Nutrition and Heat Stress in the Working Dog	Rob Downey
Learning to utilize "Point to Point" and "Quartering" exercises (Fieldwork) to enhance ALL aspects of your detection dogs performance	Don Blair
Drive Engineering: Apply Behavior Science to Build Reliable Combat-Ready K9s Under Stress	Shay Maimoni
1:30 PM - 3:30 PM	
Operational Control: The Skills That Get You to the Dance	Michael Nezbeth
Drug Canine Legal Update	Ted Daus
Outs, Recalls, and How to Train Control for Both the Street and Certifications	Ronnie Manganiello
AI-Powered Grant Funding Strategies to Equip and Sustain K9 Units	Michael Asimor
Practical, Science-backed Tactics for Producing Operationally Relevant Detection Dogs	Kevin Good
4:00 PM - 6:00 PM	
Building Reasonable Suspicion Through Conversation During Consensual Encounters	Nicholas Bonney
From Error to Excellence: Leveraging Mistakes to Improve Detection Performance	Jason Purgason
Operations-Based Training: Train the Dog, Train the Handler, Train the Team	Brad Gillespie
Explosives Explained	Todd Wilber
Markers and Prey Toys: Shaping Behavior for Patrol	Heath Kuhlmann

## 04 Class descriptions

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### **Advanced Decoy Techniques**

Carlos Ramirez — Founder, CRK9

Building upon the foundation established in last year's course, this class is designed for experienced K9 handlers and decoys who want to further refine their skills in realistic working dog scenarios.

### **AI-Powered Grant Funding Strategies to Equip and Sustain K9 Units**

Michael Asimor — Chief Executive Officer, Dynamic International

K9 units face increasing demands, rising equipment costs, and shrinking operating budgets. This class covers grant funding available to support dogs, handlers, vehicles, training, detection equipment, kennels, PPE, and more.

### **Building a Training Aid "Tool Box" for Fentanyl (and other Emerging Drug Threats)**

Jonathan McGrath — PhD, Technical Advisor, U.S. Customs & Border Protection

Addresses the limited training aid options for Fentanyl detection, exploring what the most appropriate training aids are and how odor availability is affected by purity, age, and cutting agents.

### **Building Reasonable Suspicion Through Conversation During Consensual Encounters**

Nicholas Bonney — Instructor, Ace Interdiction Tactics

Gives officers practical skills for developing reasonable suspicion through casual conversation during consensual encounters.

### **Canine Nutrition and Heat Stress in the Working Dog**

Rob Downey — Founder, Annamaet Petfoods

Focuses on the science and practical application of feeding the canine athlete and managing heat stress, with emphasis on high-performance working and sport dogs.

### **Canine Program Management**

Zach Pfannenstiel — CEO, Echelon K9

Covers the administrative and supervisory responsibilities that follow K9 deployments and apprehensions, including post-apprehension follow-ups, incident documentation, and record management.

### **Conducting Double Blind Exercises for K9 Team Certifications and the ORT Process**

Fred Helfers — Owner, Fred Helfers Consulting

Covers conducting double blind exercises for K9 team certifications and the ORT process, supported by a research paper published in January 2026.

## 04 Class descriptions

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### **Drive Engineering: Apply Behavior Science to Build Reliable Combat-Ready K9s Under Stress**

Shay Maimoni — Founder, Israeli Special Tactics K9

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Effective K9 performance is not defined by drive alone, but by the ability to control, channel, and sustain that drive under real operational stress.

### **Drug Canine Legal Update**

Ted Daus — Owner, HITS T&C

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Nationally recognized for prosecuting drug trafficking cases, Ted Daus tells it like it is — a direct opportunity for K-9 handlers to learn what prosecutors need on the stand when presenting drug cases to a jury.

### **E-Collar Mastery: The 5-Step E-Collar System for Working K9s**

Garret Wing — Founder, American Standard Dog Training

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Presents the 5-Step E-Collar™ System, a structured, step-by-step approach designed to turn the e-collar into a precise communication tool rather than a simple correction device.

### **Explosives Explained**

Todd Wilber — President, Precision Explosives

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Provides a thorough but palatable introduction to explosives for the canine handler, including an introduction to transnational threats with the use of home-made explosive devices.

### **From Error to Excellence: Leveraging Mistakes to Improve Detection Performance**

Jason Purgason — President, Highland Canine

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Examines how training and operational errors can be intentionally used to improve detection performance rather than avoided or dismissed.

### **From Error to Excellence: Leveraging Mistakes to Improve Detection Performance**

Kathryn McConnell — President, Nevada Operational Canine Medical Group

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Addresses how operational K9s routinely work in high-intensity environments that place them at significant risk for heat-related injury, and how dogs have limited mechanisms for dissipating heat.

### **High Risk Tracking with Limited Cover**

Jeff Schettler — Owner, Georgia K9 NTC

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Covers Small Unit Tactical Tracking for limited-cover situations — minimizing risk while maximizing find ratios in one of the most dangerous operations a patrol K9 handler will face.

## 04 Class descriptions

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### **How to Make Money Training Dogs**

Garret Wing — Founder, American Standard Dog Training

A practical look at how dog training can be turned into a reliable source of income, designed for handlers, trainers, and anyone with experience working dogs.

### **Just Because You Can, Does Not Mean You Should: Is the Bite Really Worth it Nowadays?**

Eugene P. Ramirez — Partner, Manning & Kass, Ellrod, Ramirez, Trester LLP

An interactive discussion on current trends involving canine units, including how some states are contemplating eliminating apprehension dogs and the legal/operational considerations involved.

### **K9 MYTHBUSTERS: Advancing Science & Standards**

Dr. Kenneth Furton — Executive Director, Global Forensic and Justice Center

Demonstrates how new scientific discoveries are dispelling common K9 odor myths and how new national standards are advancing K9 teams, including how attendees can get involved.

### **Learning to Utilize "Point to Point" and "Quartering" Exercises (Fieldwork) to Enhance ALL Aspects of Your Detection Dog's Performance**

Don Blair — Owner, Canine Intelligence Academy

Using proper training procedures and "fieldwork" techniques, both handlers and trainers will see improved performance and enhanced detection capabilities across the board.

### **Markers and Prey Toys: Shaping Behavior for Patrol**

Heath Kuhlmann — Owner, FACT K9 Training

Provides students with the tools to implement reward and correction markers, and prey toy work into their training routine.

### **No Equipment, No Hesitation: Muzzle Fighting for K9 Teams**

Erik Good — Head K9 Trainer, Fort Lauderdale Police Department

Muzzle fighting is a critical component of training that prepares your dog to confidently engage a suspect without the presence of bite equipment.

### **Operational Control: The Skills That Get You to the Dance**

Michael Nezbeth — Founder, Grassroots K9

Focuses on the foundational skills that actually get you to the flashy parts of training — bites, scenarios, and high-drive moments.

## 04 Class descriptions

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### **Operational Detection: Closing the Gap Between Training Success and Street Reality**

Stu Phillips — Instructor, Stu Phillips K9

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Addresses how detection dogs often perform well in structured training but struggle during real deployments where conditions are complex, unpredictable, and imperfect.

### **Operational Obedience: From Foundation to Deployment**

Erik Good — Head K9 Trainer, Fort Lauderdale Police Department

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Covers how operational obedience must be fast, reliable, and clear under pressure, and how it enhances drive, clarity, and performance rather than suppressing the dog.

### **Operations-Based Training: Train the Dog, Train the Handler, Train the Team**

Brad Gillespie — Canadian Police Canine Association

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Designed for professional working dog handlers and teams seeking to enhance operational effectiveness through realistic, principle-based training.

### **Outs, Recalls, and How to Train Control for Both the Street and Certifications**

Ronnie Manganiello — President, Florida Law Enforcement Canine Association (FLECA)

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Teaches how to train the immediate out, an explosive recall, and modern control techniques needed for street work and certifications.

### **Practical, Science-backed Tactics for Producing Operationally Relevant Detection Dogs**

Kevin Good — Engineer, Battelle

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Addresses how common training pitfalls and missteps can have long-lasting detrimental effects on detection canine performance, and how to avoid them.

### **Reactivity, Impulse Control and Capping**

Justin Rigney — Founder, K9 Services Unlimited

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Covers issues spanning all dimensions of dog work — including excessive barking, breaking obedience, decoy neutrality, and reactivity to non-target humans or animals.

### **Reliable Detection: Clarity of Task, Confidence, and Operational Accuracy**

Mike Litley — Owner, MLK9

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Focuses on how true operational reliability requires equal clarity when odor is absent, not just when target odor is present.

## 04 Class descriptions

### Tactical Debrief: Optimizing K9 Deployments

Zach Pfannenstiel — CEO, Echelon K9

Uses real body-worn camera footage to examine decision-making during critical incidents involving police K9s, including officer-involved shootings and barricaded subjects.

### The Silent Career Killers: Early Recognition and Management of Over-Use Injuries in Working K9's

Dr. John Waterhouse — Founder, Hero Canines

Covers how many career-limiting injuries in working K9s develop gradually from repetitive micro-trauma associated with patrol and operational work.

### Why Dogs "Disobey", How Context and Conditioning Control Behavior

Dr. Melanie Uhde — Canine Researcher

Explains how context and past training shape a dog's expectations and behavior, even when no command is given, and how environmental cues and repeated training setups prepare the dog's brain for specific actions.

## 05 Instructor overview

HITS brings together instructors, legal professionals, trainers, supervisors, and experienced K9 professionals who understand the demands of working-dog operations.

### Michael Asimor

CEO, Dynamic International

CEO of Dynamic International teaching AI-powered grant strategies to equip and sustain K9 units.

### Don Blair

Owner, Canine Intelligence Academy

Veteran K9 trainer specializing in detection fieldwork, point-to-point, and quartering exercises for operational detection teams.

### Nicholas Bonney

Instructor, Ace Interdiction Tactics

Nebraska State Patrol interdiction specialist teaching consensual encounter tactics and reasonable suspicion development.

### Ted Daus

Owner, HITS T&C

Counsel of record in U.S. Supreme Court K-9 cases and longtime Broward County prosecutor. National lecturer on canine law and search-and-seizure with decades of courtroom experience.

### Rob Downey

Founder, Annamaet Pet Foods

Founder of Annamaet Pet Foods focused on nutrition science and heat stress prevention for operational K9s.

### Dr. Kelvin Frank

Forensic Science Lecturer, FIU

Assistant professor at FIU's Global Forensic and Justice Center, leading canine detection science, standards, and the International Commission on Detector Dogs (ICODD).

### Dr. Kenneth Furton

Executive Director, Global Forensic and Justice Center

Provost Emeritus and Distinguished University Professor; Executive Director of the Global Forensic and Justice Center and a world-leading scholar in detection-dog science.

### Brad Gillespie

President, Canadian Police Canine Association

Senior trainer and president of the Canadian Police Canine Association, specializing in operations-based K9 team development.

### Erik Good

Head K9 Trainer, Fort Lauderdale Police Department

K-9 handler and head trainer for Fort Lauderdale PD with 18+ years of specialized K-9 experience in patrol, EOD, and muzzle fighting training.

## 05 Instructor overview

HITS brings together instructors, legal professionals, trainers, supervisors, and experienced K9 professionals who understand the demands of working-dog operations.

### Kevin Good

Engineer, Battelle

Battelle engineer teaching practical science-backed tactics for producing operationally relevant detection dogs.

### Fred Helfers

Owner, Fred Helfers Consulting

Retired detective and detection dog trainer specializing in double-blind certification exercises for narcotics, explosives, and accelerant detection teams.

### Heath Kuhlmann

Owner, FACT K9 Training

Heath Kuhlmann is the founder and lead trainer of FACT K9 Training, specializing in marker-based shaping for patrol behavior

### Mike Lilley

Owner, MLK9

Professional K9 trainer with extensive experience in law enforcement, working dogs, and operational deployments.

### Shay Maimoni

Founder, Israeli Special Tactics K9

Founder and lead trainer at Israeli Special Tactics K9, specializing in muzzle fighting, drive engineering, and counter-terrorism K9 development.

### Ronnie Manganiello

President, FLECA

South Florida K-9 handler, head trainer, and president of the Florida Law Enforcement Canine Association (FLECA).

### Kathryn McConnell

President, Nevada Operational Canine Medical Group

Emergency veterinarian and president of the Nevada Operational Canine Medical Group, focused on heat injury prevention and K9 operational medical readiness.

### Jonathan McGrath, PhD

Technical Advisor, US Customs and Border Protection

Technical Advisor for U.S. Customs and Border Protection Laboratories; manages the national canine training-aid program and federal forensic science initiatives.

### Michael Nezbeth

Founder, Grassroots K9

Founder and Training Director of Grassroots K9, an internationally recognized canine training company specializing in law enforcement and working dog development.

### Zach Pfannenstiel

CEO, Echelon K9

Brings over 18 years of law enforcement experience, including more than 12 years in canine operations.

### Stu Phillips

Instructor, Stu Phillips K9

Detection dog operator and instructor closing the gap between training success and street reality.

### Jason Purgason

President, Highland Canine Training

President of Highland Canine Training teaching detection teams to leverage mistakes for performance gains.

### Carlos Ramirez

Founder, CRK9

K9 trainer with experience in animal psychology and behavior.

### Eugene P. Ramirez

Partner, Manning & Kass, Ellrod, Ramirez, Trester LLP

Trial attorney and USPCA General Counsel teaching K9 use-of-force policy, supervisor liability, and deployment documentation

### Justin Rigney

Founder, K9 Services Unlimited

Founder of K9 Services Unlimited with 25+ years training police and pet dogs in reactivity, impulse control, and operational K9 work.

## 05 Instructor overview

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HITS brings together instructors, legal professionals, trainers, supervisors, and experienced K9 professionals who understand the demands of working-dog operations.

### **Jeff Schettler**

Owner, Georgia K9 NTC

Retired police K9 handler who served with the City of Alameda and the County of Amador in California.

### **Dr. Melanie Uhde**

Canine Researcher, [caninedecoded.com](http://caninedecoded.com)

Ph.D. biologist bridging neuroscience and applied K9 training, with research on motivation, stress, and resilience in working dogs.

### **Dr. John Waterhouse**

Founder, Veterinary Teaching Academy

Veterinarian focused on working dog medicine, rehabilitation, and injury prevention for law enforcement and military K9 teams.

### **Christine Wilber**

President, Precision Explosives

President of Precision Explosives, specializing in explosives chemistry and detection canine training aid best practices.

### **Todd Wilber**

President, Precision Explosives

Worked for over 20 years in counterterrorism as a responder, researcher, policy writer, and senior manager.

### **Garret Wing**

Founder, American Standard Dog Training

Retired law enforcement lieutenant and founder of American Standard Dog Training and [DIYK9.com](http://DIYK9.com), specializing in e-collar systems and working K9 training.

## 06 Vendor and equipment access

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In addition to classroom training, HITS gives attendees access to more than 100 vendors serving the K9 community.

Attendees can review equipment, technology, vehicle systems, duty gear, training tools, and other working-dog resources in person.