



Audit of the Bureau of  
Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives'  
Accelerant Detection Canine Program



AUDIT DIVISION

23-107

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**SEPTEMBER 2023**

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## Audit of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' Accelerant Detection Canine Program

### Audit Objectives, Scope and Methodology

In response to a request by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), the OIG initiated an audit of the ATF's practices and metrics for evaluating the performance of the Accelerant Detection Canine (ADC) Program and to determine how the ATF ensures that the ADC Program contributes to its mission and performance goals.

To achieve our audit objectives, we interviewed ATF program officials and a sample of state and local handlers. We also interviewed officials responsible for designing the ADC's new tracking system and for the training aspects of the ADC Program. Due to the implementation of the new tracking system, our data accuracy testing covered May 2022 through November 2022. We did not test the reliability of the ADC Program's new tracking system as a whole, therefore, for any findings involving information from this system, we verified our results with documentation from other sources. Our internal control assessment focused on the monitoring component of the program's internal control framework.

Generally, the scope of our audit was October 2020 through August 2023. We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective.

### Background

Since 1986, ATF has managed a program to provide canine handlers—individuals who handle trained dogs to conduct investigations— at state and local agencies with canines trained to detect a variety of ignitable liquids that could be used to start and accelerate fire.

In FY 2023, the ADC Program's discretionary budget was \$170,000, which consisted of funds for canine procurement, student lodging and per diem incurred during the 12-week training program, student supplies, and veterinary care. In addition, all 6 trainers associated with the ADC Program are full-time, salaried, non-law enforcement ATF employees who, among other responsibilities, train canines to detect explosives. The trainers also conduct annual re-certifications of canine teams.



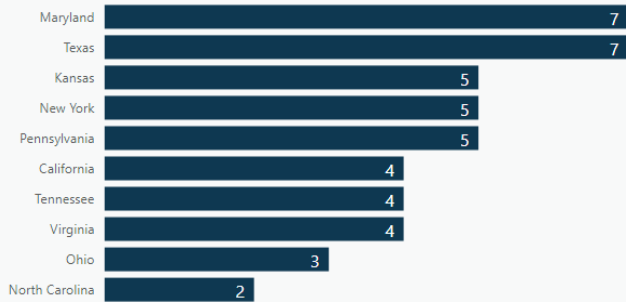
Source: ATF website

The ADC Program is the only one of its kind accredited by the Federal Law Enforcement Training Accreditation Board. ATF's ADC Program provides qualified state and local law enforcement and fire service agencies with a canine and with training for the canine and assigned handler, known as a canine team. To participate in the program, a state or local agency signs an agreement with ATF that details the responsibilities for both the agency and ATF. As of January 2023, the ADC Program included 64 active canine teams working for 54 agencies located across 27 states and the District of Columbia. Most of the handlers and canines are in the eastern and midwestern United States.

Participating States and D.C.    Total Participating Agencies    Total ATF ADC Teams

28                      54                      64

States with 2 or more ATF-trained ADC Teams



Source: Data provided by ATF

The ADC Program supports both ATF and state and local partners. As part of the ADC Program agreement, it is mandatory for ATF-trained canine teams to respond to ATF requests for assistance. The canine teams also support their agency and assist fire investigations for other state and local partners upon request.

**Audit Results**

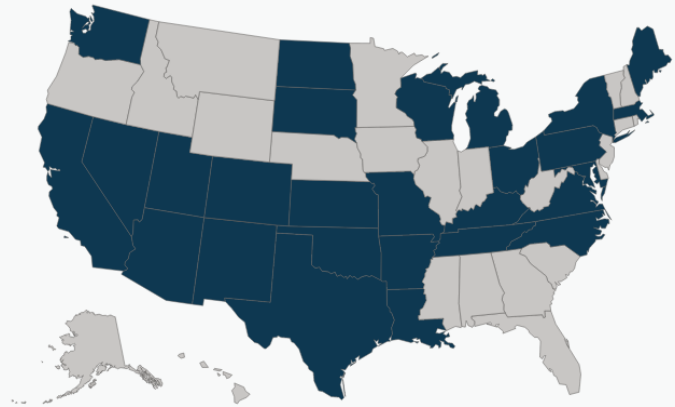
ATF's training for ADC Program participants, as well as the continued support provided to ADC-trained state and local handlers aligns with the goals of this program and ATF's overarching mission. However, we found that ATF did not have performance criteria or reliable performance information that would enable the ADC Program to evaluate its effectiveness. Therefore, ATF cannot verifiably demonstrate the ADC Program's contribution to the agency's overall mission goals.

**Quality Training and Continued Support**

ADC Program training starts with a 6-week phase to train canines to detect accelerants. The canines are then paired with handlers to be trained as a team for an additional 6 weeks. The ATF's National Canine Division generally offers this training once a year to selected state and local applicants from across the country. In 2022, the ATF trained 12 canine teams. As of August 2023, the ADC Program had a waiting list of 36 agency applicants. To become certified, canine teams—canine and handler—are required to pass both an accelerant recognition test and practical exercises simulating real-life accelerant searches. Thereafter, ATF requires all canine teams to be recertified annually. The recertification includes a series of odor recognition tests as well as practical exercises, such as a vehicle or clothing search.

In exchange for receiving the initial training and annual recertification tests of the canine team from the ATF at no cost, handlers are responsible for providing ongoing training to their canines; attending an annual recertification

States with ATF Certified Accelerant Detection Canine Teams



seminar; managing the canine's health and safety; submitting to the ATF information on canine training, medical history, deployment, and utilization; ensuring the availability of the canine team for ATF-initiated activations; and utilizing canines in their respective jurisdictions.

We determined that the ADC Program's training regimen aligns with two of ATF's major functions: (1) reduce the risk to public safety caused by criminal use of fire and (2) provide support to law enforcement and public safety partners. As of August 2023, six classifications of ignitable liquids were used in the ATF's canine training. In contrast, according to some ATF officials and its program-trained canine handlers, the only canine program of similar size is offered commercially and uses one ignitable liquid as the sole flammable liquid for its training purposes.

Testimonial evidence gathered through our onsite interviews of canine handlers described the ATF's ADC Program as robust and well-run. The 10 ADC Program-trained handlers we interviewed (representing law enforcement and fire service agencies in 9 states) recounted how effective the ADC Program-trained canines were in helping solve arson-related cases and reported positive feedback about the ongoing support provided by ATF. In addition, both of ATF's fire debris chemists stated that samples taken from arson scenes to identify the source and cause of fires were usually better when ADC Program-trained canines were used. They also noted that smaller and fewer samples from a fire scene need to be collected and analyzed when canines are involved, thus reducing the workload required of laboratories for such cases. Notably, according to some handlers, some cases would not have been solved had the ADC Program-trained canines not been involved.

**Lack of Performance Metrics**

Historically, data collection for the ADC Program was cumbersome and labor-intensive. For example, state and local handlers were previously required to manually complete monthly training logs, reports on canine deployment and utilization, and yearly canine medical

reports, and then scan these materials for transmittal to ATF's National Canine Division. This previous manual system for gathering data relied on handlers' individual submissions and were not aggregated or analyzed. Therefore, ATF limited its ability to measure the program's effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

In May 2022, the ADC Program implemented a web-based tracking system that provided ATF an overview of canine training, health, and utilization, including the ratio of positive alerts and negative alerts. Further, the system streamlined and automated data reporting for the handlers, which now enables ATF to have a real-time view of the information collected. ATF developed the tracking system, in part, to evaluate ADC Program-trained canine performance. With this information, the ATF has the data to assess whether each handler and canine team were meeting a baseline of acceptable performance. However, we found that ATF did not establish standards or criteria for such a performance evaluation. As a result, ATF cannot evaluate the ADC Program's effectiveness against measurable goals to demonstrate that the ADC Program contributed to ATF's mission and goals.

### **Inaccurate Reporting of Laboratory Results**

In order to assess whether the data collected in the new tracking system was reliable and accurate, we selected a judgmental sample of monthly reported canine alert results from arson investigations and compared them to the corresponding laboratory reports. While this non-statistical sample design did not allow projection of the test results to the universe of samples, we believe our testing results provide reasonable insights to form the basis for our conclusions. For example, we focused our testing of data accuracy on states with a larger number of handlers and on handlers with extensive experience with the program. We selected our sample in this manner because we believe that these states and handlers were more likely to have had the opportunity to use their canines in arson investigations.

Our sample of 27 fire incidents entered in the ATF's tracking system by 5 handlers in 5 states showed that reported laboratory results for 10 of the 27 incidents did not match laboratory reports. For example, one handler recorded four confirmed positive test results when laboratory reports indicated only two positive test results. In addition, another handler reported an "inconclusive" laboratory test result as a "positive." Although we alerted the five handlers as well as ADC Program leaders to the reporting issues, only one of the 10 reports was fully and accurately updated when we reviewed the same files again about 1 month later. Without accurate data, any analysis based on this information would merely yield unreliable metrics, regardless of any ATF established criteria for performance evaluation.

**Positive alert:** when a canine-alerted fire debris sample is later confirmed by laboratory testing to have contained accelerants.

**Negative alert:** when a canine-alerted fire debris sample cannot be confirmed by laboratory testing to have contained accelerants.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The ADC Program provides a mechanism through which state and local partners can respond to arson-related crimes in their communities and carry out important public safety missions. Improvements to program data collection and analysis methods will help the ATF ADC Program more reliably evaluate the effectiveness of the program and thereby enhance the support ATF is able to offer its state and local partners, as well as to identify areas that may necessitate greater attention for training and certification of its canines and handlers.

We recommend that ATF: (1) establish metrics to measure the ADC Program's effectiveness and (2) develop guidance and controls to help ensure complete and accurate performance data. ATF concurred with our recommendations and provided a response to our draft report, which can be found in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 contains our analysis of ATF's response.

# APPENDIX 1: The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' Response to the Draft Audit Report



U.S. Department of Justice

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco,  
Firearms and Explosives

*Assistant Director*

*Washington, DC*

[www.atf.gov](http://www.atf.gov)

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September 7, 2023

MEMORANDUM TO: B. Allen Wood  
Regional Audit Manager  
Atlanta Regional Audit Office  
Office of the Inspector General

FROM: Assistant Director  
(Office of Professional Responsibility and Security Operations)

SUBJECT: Status Update #1 - Office of the Inspector General's Report on the  
Audit of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives'  
Accelerant Detection Canine Program

This memorandum serves to transmit ATF's response to the above-cited report. Attached is a summary of the status of the actions taken relative to the open recommendation.

Should you have any questions or need additional information, please contact the Chief of ATF's Audit Liaison Office, Adam Pallotto at (202) 446-4691.

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Attachments

cc: Director  
Assistant Director (Office of Management)  
Chief Counsel  
Assistant Director, Audit Liaison Group, Department of Justice





**U.S. Department of Justice**

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco,  
Firearms and Explosives

*Assistant Director*

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*Washington, DC 20226*

*www.atf.gov*

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September 5, 2023

MEMORANDUM TO: Assistant Director  
Office of Professional Responsibility and Security Operations

FROM: Assistant Director  
Office of Field Operations

SUBJECT: Audit of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and  
Explosives' Accelerant Detection Canine Program

This memorandum responds to the Office of Inspector General's (OIG) draft audit report titled "Audit of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' Accelerant Detection Canine Program." We welcome OIG's constructive comments and appreciate the opportunity to respond.

**Recommendation 1: OIG recommends ATF establish a metrics to measure the ADC Program's effectiveness.**

ATF concurs with this recommendation. ATF collects data on a number of elements of our Accelerant Detection Canine (ADC) program that might be suitable as performance measures. For instance, ATF tracks the rate at which canine teams pass certification and recertification. We will consider formalizing this tracking as a performance measure and establishing a goal for the pass rate. We will also review additional data sets to identify others that might be appropriate for evaluating the program's effectiveness. ATF expects to have our performance metrics document formalized and approved within 90 days.

**Recommendation 2: OIG recommends ATF develop guidance and controls to help ensure complete and accurate performance data.**

Assistant Director  
Office of Professional Responsibility and Security Operations

ATF concurs with this recommendation. ATF will establish guidelines for use by State and local canine handlers to review, and when necessary, correct information they enter into the ADC reporting system. These instructions will be formalized and distributed to ADC canine handlers within 90 days.

Please let me know if I can be of further assistance on this or any other matter.

KRISTEN  
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## **APPENDIX 2: Office of the Inspector General Analysis and Summary of Actions Necessary to Close the Audit Report**

The OIG provided a draft of this audit report to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). ATF's response is incorporated in Appendix 1 of this final report. In response to our audit report, ATF concurred with our recommendations and discussed the actions it will implement in response to our findings. As a result, the status of the audit report is resolved. The following provides the OIG analysis of the response and summary of actions necessary to close the report.

### **Recommendations for ATF:**

**1. We recommend ATF establish metrics to measure the Accelerant Detection Canine Program's (ADC) effectiveness.**

Resolved. ATF concurred with our recommendation. ATF stated in its response that it collects data on a number of elements of its ADC program that might be suitable as performance measures. For instance, ATF tracks the rate at which canine teams pass certification and recertification. ATF stated that it will consider formalizing this tracking as a performance measure and establishing a goal for the pass rate. ATF further stated that it will review additional data sets to identify others that might be appropriate for evaluating the program's effectiveness. ATF stated that it expects to have its performance metrics formalized and approved within 90 days. As a result of the information provided, this recommendation is resolved.

This recommendation can be closed when we receive documentation that ATF has developed and implemented performance metrics to measure ADC program effectiveness.

**2. We recommend that ATF develop guidance and controls to help ensure complete and accurate performance data.**

Resolved. ATF concurred with our recommendation. ATF stated in its response that it will establish guidelines for use by state and local canine handlers to review, and when necessary, correct information they enter into the ADC reporting system. ATF stated that these instructions will be formalized and distributed to ADC canine handlers within 90 days. As a result of the information provided, this recommendation is resolved.

This recommendation can be closed when we receive documentation that ATF has developed guidance and implemented controls to ensure complete and accurate performance data is entered into the ADC reporting system.