

Fact Sheet: recognising Disability Assist Dogs in emergencies

BACKGROUND

Following the earthquakes in Canterbury in 2010 and 2011, civil defence centre staff found it difficult to identify whether an accompanying dog was a certified Disability Assist Dog or not. At that time, there was no nationally recognised system to identify a certified Disability Assist Dog in an emergency.

The Disability Assist Dog identification tag is a standardised and easily recognisable identification tag for all certified Disability Assist Dogs, which will assist in emergency response and recovery.

The organisations involved in this initiative are the Department of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Civil Defence & Emergency Management, Ministry of Social Development, Office for Disability Issues, ACC, New Zealand Veterinary Association, The Blind Foundation (formerly Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind) Guide Dogs, and the New Zealand Institute of Animal Control Officers.

To find out more about getting a Disability Assist Dog identification tag, contact an authorised Disability Assist Dog certifying organisation. The organisations are listed below.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a Disability Assist Dog identification tag?

The Disability Assist Dog identification tag is a unique tag worn by a certified dog to provide easy identification of Disability Assist Dog status.

Is the tag mandatory?

The Disability Assist Dog identification tag is not mandatory. However, the tag will provide easy recognition of a Disability Assist Dog, allowing access to civil defence centres in an emergency, and will also support rapid reunification if the dog and owner/handler become separated.

Will it mean that an owner/handler of a Disability Assist Dog with an identification tag can expect someone to check on them in an emergency?

No. Individuals and households still need to personally prepare for emergencies. The Ministry of Civil Defence & Emergency Management's [Get Ready Get Thru website](#) includes information to help to get prepared, including specific information for people with disabilities.

What will the tag look like?

The tag is a round disc made from brass. The front of the tag depicts the Civil Defence logo including the words "Civil Defence" and also the words "Disability Assist Dog". The back of the tag will be blank when manufactured but will be engraved with information specific to the Disability Assist Dog and the certifying organisation.

Will the identification tag be nationally recognised?

Yes, however the identification tag does not replace the annual coloured dog registration tag issued by local authorities. A dog must still wear its local authority administered annual registration tag and can be deemed unregistered without one. Failing to register a dog is an offence under local authority Dog Control Bylaws and will incur a \$300 infringement.

Should the dog not be wearing their annual registration tag, local authority Animal Control/Services can still find the information required by scanning for the unique microchip number and entering this into the National Dog Database.



Disability Assist Dog identification tag

How are Disability Assist Dog identification tags allocated?

Dogs need to be microchipped and certified as Disability Assist Dogs by an organisation certified to do so. The certifying organisation will issue tags to existing Disability Assist Dog owners/handlers including dogs in formal training.

Will this information be recorded on the National Dog Database?

Yes. Disability Assist Dogs are classified in the National Dog Database as working dogs. The Disability Assist Dog certifying organisation notifies the local authority when a tag is issued; the local authority is then responsible for updating the National Dog Database.

It is strongly recommended that Disability Assist Dogs are also entered on the New Zealand Companion Animal Register (NZCAR). The NZCAR only accepts animal entries from approved animal entry officers e.g. at veterinary clinics or the SPCA. The online register is a reunification database managed by the New Zealand Companion Animal Council. Only approved animal entry officers have 24-hour access to the full register. Further information on the register can be found at <http://www.animalregister.co.nz/>.

Will there be a fee?

A small fee may be charged by the authorised Disability Assist Dog certifying organisation to offset the cost of the identification tags.

If an owner/handler receives a disability allowance from Work and Income, can they get help paying fees?

Disability Allowance cannot help with one-off fees. However if an owner/handler has no means of meeting the fee they should contact Work and Income to discuss whether they are eligible for hardship assistance (such as a Special Needs Grant, Recoverable Assistance Payment or Advance Payment of Benefit) to help with the costs.

ACC clients should talk with their ACC Case Manager about assistance with these costs.

If an owner/handler lives in one district and their Disability Assist Dog certifying organisation registers the dog in another, how does this affect things?

It does not matter where the dog is registered. The Disability Assist Dog identification tag will be valid nationally, regardless of which local authority the dog is registered with.

Will owners/handlers need to renew their Disability Assist Dog's status each year?

No, the tag is issued for the working life of the Disability Assist Dog (until the dog retires or dies).

What if a Disability Assist Dog retires or dies?

The owner/handler of a Disability Assist Dog will need to inform the Disability Assist Dog organisation that certified the dog of any change that may alter the dog's status such as if the dog dies, retires, returns to a domestic life or has a new owner.

Owners/handlers are required to let the Disability Assist Dog certifying organisation know of any changes in circumstances within 14 days.

What if an owner/handler loses their Disability Assist Dog identification tag?

They will need to apply to their Disability Assist Dog organisation for a replacement identification tag. There may be a small fee for replacement.

Will the identification tag be protected?

Yes. The Civil Defence logo on the identification tag is protected and use without permission would be in breach of the Civil Defence Emergency Management Regulations 2003. Misuse would include the identification tag being worn by a dog which is not certified as a Disability Assist Dog.

Will the identification tag be transferable?

No. The Disability Assist Dog identification tag is not transferable.

Where can more information be found?

To find out more about getting a Disability Assist Dog identification tag contact an authorised Disability Assist Dog certifying organisation.

DISABILITY ASSIST DOGS

What is a Disability Assist Dog?

The Dog Control Act 1996 defines a Disability Assist Dog as a dog certified by one of the listed organisations as being a dog trained to assist (or as being a dog in training to assist) a person with a disability.

Disability Assist Dogs are dogs that are trained or qualified to provide vital assistance to: the Deaf/hearing impaired, blind/vision impaired, people with physical impairments, autism spectrum disorder, neurological or psychiatric conditions, or in seizure alert and seizure response.

What are the organisations that can certify a Disability Assist Dog?

The following organisations are authorised under section 2 of the Dog Control Act 1996 to certify Disability Assist Dogs:

Hearing Dogs for Deaf People New Zealand

Mobility Assistance Dogs Trust

New Zealand Epilepsy Assist Dogs Trust

Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind

Top Dog Companion Trust (*not operating at this time*)

Assistance Dogs New Zealand Trust

Perfect Partners Assistance Dogs Trust.

Who authorises a new organisation to certify Disability Assist Dogs?

Under section 78D of the Dog Control Act 1996, the Governor-General, on the Minister of Local Government's recommendation, can specify further organisations that may certify dogs as Disability Assist Dogs.

The Minister of Local Government must consult with the Minister for Disability Issues before making a recommendation.

Who recommends new organisations to the Minister of Local Government?

The Department of Internal Affairs has developed guidelines to assist new organisations that wish to certify dogs as Disability Assist Dogs under the Dog Control Act 1996. Further information on the guidelines can be found at <http://www.dia.govt.nz/> (key words: Disability Assist Dog). This factsheet can also be found there.

What exemptions do Disability Assist Dogs have?

Disability Assist Dogs have exemptions from various provisions of the Dog Control Act 1996. Section 75 in the Dog Control Act allows Disability Assist Dogs to enter and remain in premises registered under section 120 of the Health Act 1956 (for example eating places, and food preparation businesses), or any public place. This includes areas from which dogs might otherwise be restricted generally, or through local authority bylaws.

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