

# I Want to Be a . . . Bomb Squad K-9 Officer



Officer Ming Chung's badge shows that he is a certified bomb technician. He had extra training to learn how to deactivate a bomb.

He carries a baton, handcuffs, a pager and a flashlight on his tool belt. But he says his best tool is Boomer.



Chung wears a special suit when handling a bomb. It takes two people to help him put on the suit, which weighs 60-80 pounds.

## About the Job

**\$45,000**

Typical annual salary for a police patrol officer in 2004.

**842,000**

Approximate number of police (including detectives) working in the United States in 2004. Eighty percent worked for local governments.

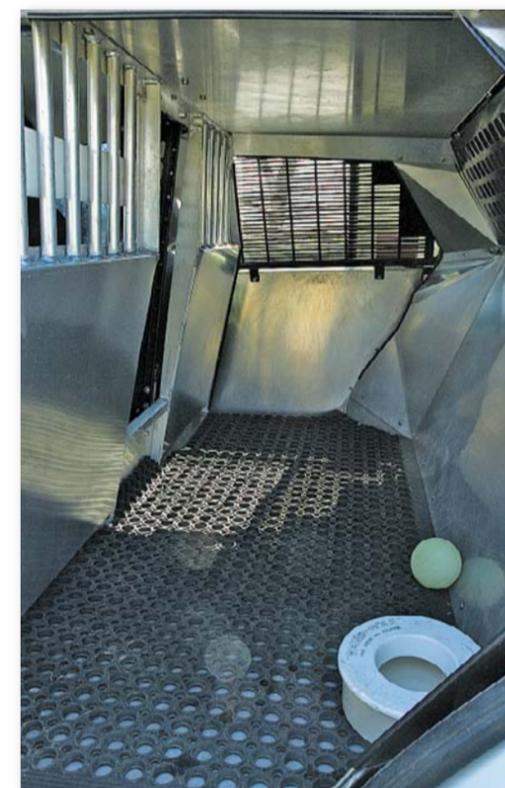
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Minimum age for police officers in most departments. Candidates must be U.S. citizens.

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics



This display of defused bombs at a Southeast police station is used to remind visitors never to touch bombs. Instead, call the police.



Police dogs get a water dish and a ball to play with when riding in the back seat of a D.C. cruiser.

PHOTOS BY BILL WEBSTER — THE WASHINGTON POST

When District police officer Ming Chung searches a building for a bomb, he always has his partner by his side — on a leash. His partner is a 6-year-old, 80-pound chocolate Labrador retriever named Boomer.

Chung knew as a kid that he wanted to become a policeman. His family ran a restaurant, and officers would often come in to eat. In his 17 years with the Metropolitan Police Department, he has been a patrolman, K-9 (patrol dog handler) officer and dog trainer.

"I have always loved animals . . . so my main thing was to try to work with dogs," said Chung, 41. He has worked with Boomer for three years.

Dogs are able to help in police

work because of their amazing sense of smell, which is 50 times better than a human's. The District police department has 64 dogs: About half are patrol dogs, and the rest sniff for drugs, bomb parts or bodies.

Boomer is one of 31 dogs on the bomb squad. Before a dog can join this unit, it spends four weeks at obedience school and eight weeks learning to identify scents. Once on the squad, the dogs are tested every four to six weeks to make sure they haven't forgotten what they learned.

Police dogs also are trained to communicate with their actions.

"The dog doesn't just say, 'Look, I found a bomb,'" said Sergeant Frank Edwards, Chung's boss.

Boomer knows to sit if he smells the components of a bomb.

"My job as a handler is to understand what the dog is saying," Chung said.

Every dog is different, so officers bond with their canine partners by taking them everywhere they go. Boomer has his own seat in the back of Chung's police vehicle. At home, Chung's two young sons treat Boomer like their pet.

Play is important in getting police dogs to do their job. Chung makes a game of bomb-sniffing. If Boomer performs well, he gets to play with a special toy. That way, he knows what the reward will be for a job well done.

Most of the dogs on the bomb squad are German shepherds that came from breeders. Boomer is an exception. Before his bomb-sniffing

career, he was the pet of a police dog-handler.

Boomer and Chung stay busy. The city's bomb squad gets about 800 calls a year. Most are false alarms, but officers respond to each one.

"A majority are prank calls," Chung said. "But since they called it in, we can't take that for granted."

The officers are responsible for the health of their canine partners. Dogs retire if they have a medical problem or get tired of working.

When a police dog leaves the force, the human partner may keep the animal as a pet. Chung has two pet dogs that he used to work with. He said he likely will adopt Boomer, too, when the time comes because "he is one of the family."

— Amy Orndorff

## CAREER TIPS

Want to partner with a police dog? Here are some things you can do to prepare for a life of fighting crime:

### Learn about dogs.

Whether it's your pet or one that you dog-sit for, knowing how to care for a dog and being comfortable around one are essential.

### Take part in National Night Out.

On Aug. 7 people across the country will spend time outdoors with their neighbors and local police to learn about preventing crime in their neighborhoods.

### Do well in school.

Police officers must have good grades. And the officers selected for the bomb squad have to accomplish even more.

### Volunteer in the community.

D.C.'s police department has a program for teens (ages 14 to 18) to help find creative solutions to local problems. For information, go to [www.mpdc.dc.gov](http://www.mpdc.dc.gov), click on "Programs & Resources" and then "Youth Problem-Solving Program."