

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 243
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Public Safety
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Under current law governing standards for law enforcement vehicles, there are no guidelines for the condition of vehicles used specifically with police dogs.

Many police departments spend thousands of dollars to train police dogs to help those departments save lives and fight crime in communities across Texas. Given that the Texas heat can cause the interior temperature of a vehicle to reach a life-threatening level, a heat alarm system is necessary to alert a police officer when the temperature inside the officer's vehicle is approaching an unsafe level for the police dog. The alarm is designed to alert the officer who is outside of the vehicle that the vehicle and air conditioning system are about to automatically start, to protect the police dog from possible death.

C.S.H.B. 243 authorizes a heat alarm system to be installed by law enforcement agencies, including the Department of Public Safety, the sheriff's department of a county, or the police department of a municipality, in any K-9 vehicle. The bill requires the heat alarm system, activated when the vehicle stops running or the temperature in the vehicle's interior becomes dangerous to a police dog in that vehicle, to activate an audible alarm, automatically lower the vehicle's rear windows, and page the K-9 officer.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 243 amends the Health and Safety Code to authorize a law enforcement agency to equip each vehicle used in a K-9 law enforcement program with a heat alarm system that is activated when the vehicle stops running or the temperature in the vehicle's interior becomes dangerous to a police dog in the vehicle. The bill requires the system, when activated, to activate an audible alarm, automatically lower the vehicle's rear windows, and page the K-9 law enforcement officer. The bill exempts an open-air vehicle used in connection with a K-9 law enforcement program from the heat alarm system requirement. The bill establishes that a vehicle used in a K-9 law enforcement program and equipped with a heat alarm system on the effective date of the bill is not required to meet the standards for such a system under the bill's provisions before January 1, 2011. The bill defines "law enforcement agency" as the Department of Public Safety, the sheriff's department of a county, or the police department of a municipality.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2009.

COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL AND SUBSTITUTE

C.S.H.B. 243 differs from the original by authorizing, rather than requiring as in the original, a law enforcement agency to equip each vehicle used in a K-9 law enforcement program with the specified heat alarm system, and removes a provision in the original requiring an agency that implements a program to comply with the heat alarm system provisions not later than one year after the program begins operation. The substitute adds a provision not in the original to establish that a vehicle used in a K-9 law enforcement program equipped with a heat alarm system on the effective date of the bill is not required to meet the standards for that system under the bill's provisions before January 1, 2011.