

GENERAL ORDER



Title		
Unmanned Aircraft Systems		
Topic	Series	Number
HSC	803	09
Effective Date		
June 24, 2024		
Related to:		
GO-OPS-302.01 (Calls for Service)		

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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I. PURPOSE

It is the policy of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) to use unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), commonly referred to as drones, for official law enforcement purposes to promote the health, safety, and welfare of the District of Columbia, consistent with legal and constitutional limitations, privacy concerns, and accepted ethical standards. The purpose of this general order is to establish UAS program procedures.

II. PROCEDURES

A. General

1. The MPD UAS program involves the use of drones and all associated elements (e.g., communication links and controlling components that are required for safe and efficient operation) to aid in law enforcement efforts.
2. The Homeland Security Bureau (HSB) Air Support Unit (ASU) shall manage the UAS program in compliance with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requirements, procedures set forth in this order, and the UAS standard operating procedures (SOP) manual.
3. UAS operations shall be authorized to support only the following operations:

Authorized UAS Operations
a. Locating a suspect: (1) Who is believed to be hiding in a defined area while armed,

(2) Where attempting to physically locate the suspect would put an officer or others at risk of death or serious bodily injury; and (3) Surveillance and containment are the safest tactics for apprehension
b. Locating missing persons
c. High-risk warrant service
d. Emergency Response Team operations
e. Explosive Ordnance Disposal operations
f. Harbor Patrol Unit operations
g. Major traffic crash call-outs
h. Crowd monitoring and management
i. First Amendment assemblies [Pursuant to DC Official Code § 5-333.09 , drones shall not be used to record First Amendment assemblies for the sole purpose of identifying and recording the presence of individual participants who are not engaged in unlawful conduct; it is permissible to use drones to record the presence of individual participants not engaged in unlawful conduct while performing other police functions (e.g., crowd control, maintaining the peace)]
j. Exigent circumstances approved by the HSB assistant chief
k. Training scenarios approved by the HSB assistant chief

4. MPD drones **shall not**:

UAS Prohibitions
a. Be operated in an unlawful or unsafe manner or in violation of any MPD policy or FAA regulations.
b. Be equipped or used with weapon capabilities including non-lethal or less-lethal weapon systems.
c. Be deployed for the purpose of recording a particular person or group based solely on their race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, personal appearance, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, family responsibility, homelessness status, physical disability status, matriculation, or political affiliation.
d. Use any facial recognition capabilities.

5. The HSB assistant chief shall designate an HSB member to serve as the UAS program manager. The UAS program manager shall:

- a. Ensure that department drones are properly registered with the FAA and deployed in compliance with all legal authorities; and
- b. Designate personnel authorized to perform maintenance on drones and any required periodic training.

6. Only trained members shall operate department-owned drones.

- a. The UAS program manager shall ensure that all members assigned to UAS missions have a current Part 107 license and have completed required department training.
- b. All drone operators shall possess appropriate credentials and be familiar with the relevant FAA requirements and laws including but not limited to, [14 CFR 107 \(Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems\)](#), [49 USC 40102\(a\)\(41\) \(Public aircraft\)](#), and [49 USC 40125](#)

(Qualifications for public aircraft status).

B. Deployments

1. Watch commanders shall request approval by contacting the Real Time Crime Center (RTCC) who shall put out a page to make notification of the request. Only the SOD commanding official (or other HSB official the rank of inspector or above), in consultation with the UAS program manager, shall approve deployments.
2. The UAS program manager or the remote pilot in charge (RPIC) may decline, cancel, or terminate any UAS request due to:

Declination, Cancellation, and Termination
a. Resource availability;
b. Mechanical maintenance of the drone;
c. Safety, weather, visibility;
d. Request being beyond the drone and/or crew member's capability;
e. During temporary flight restrictions (TFRs) when the FAA restricts aircraft (including drones) from operating without permission in a certain area for a limited time;
f. Request not being within the parameters of the certificate of authorization (COA) or any associated waivers issued by the FAA;
g. Determination that the use of a drone is not the appropriate resource after operational risk assessment or resource assessment is completed; and/or
h. Determination that a drone deployment is in violation of this policy or District or federal regulations.

3. All UAS operations require the participation of:
 - a. The ASU supervising official, whenever feasible;
 - b. The RPIC who maintains final authority and responsibility for operation and safety of a UAS operation; and
 - c. At least one visual observer (VO) who shall serve as the flight crewmember(s) designated by the RPIC to assist with the responsibility of identifying and avoiding other air traffic or objects in the air or on the ground. Two VOs are preferred, when practical.
4. All outdoor operations shall be conducted within line-of-sight of the RPIC or VO who shall ensure that takeoff and landing pad perimeters are established to minimize risk. Once perimeters are established, members shall, to the extent possible, ensure that the areas are clear.
5. Drone operators shall notify the RTCC prior to deploying a drone. The RTCC shall make appropriate notifications.
6. Live drone video monitoring in MPD facilities shall be limited according to the procedures outlined in [GO-OPS-603.07 \(Closed-Circuit Television Camera\)](#).

C. Documentation and Data Retention

1. The RPIC shall ensure the pre-flight checklist and details of all flights are documented on the flight log including, but not limited to:

Documentation
a. Reason for the flight including if a warrant was obtained;
b. Start and end time, date, location of the flight, and central complaint number (CCN);
c. Name of the supervisor approving the deployment and the UAS staff assigned;
d. Date, time, and name of RTCC members notified;
e. Exigency that gave rise to the need to use the UAS (when deployed under exigent circumstances).

2. UAS footage is the sole property of MPD. Upon the completion of each mission, the RPIC shall ensure all footage is downloaded, categorized, and retained in [evidence.com](#) in accordance with the category and retention schedule outlined in [GO-SPT-302.13 \(Body-Worn Camera Program\)](#). UAS footage shall only be used for official law enforcement purposes.
3. Members shall not edit, alter, erase, duplicate, copy, share, or otherwise distribute UAS footage in any manner without prior written authorization from the HSB assistant chief or his or her designee.

D. Crashes

1. The UAS program manager shall immediately notify the SOD commanding official through the chain of command of any drone crashes.
2. Crashes involving damage to the drone or other department equipment require submission of a PD Form 43 (Report of Damage to or Loss of District Government Property) prior to the end of the shift. Crashes involving intentional acts of damage or destruction committed by non-MPD individuals require a records management system (RMS) report in addition to the PD Form 43.
3. Crashes involving contact with any person, damage to private property, or where it appears negligence or misconduct may be involved require an RMS report, incident summary (IS) numbers, and investigation.
4. Pursuant [14 CFR 107.9 \(Safety Event Reporting\)](#), the UAS program manager shall ensure the FAA is notified within 10 days of drone crashes resulting in serious bodily injury and/or damage to property (other than the drone) valuing over \$500.

E. Equipment Damage and Maintenance

1. Members shall not attempt to repair defective or inoperable UAS equipment. Upon discovery of damaged or inoperable drones, members shall notify the UAS program manager who shall ensure a PD Form 43 is

completed and forwarded to the Risk Management Division director through the chain of command.

2. The UAS program manager shall ensure there is a documented maintenance program in accordance with manufacturer’s recommendations.

F. Training

The UAS program manager shall ensure that all members assigned to UAS missions:

1. Prior to any missions, have a current Part 107 license and completed required department training;
2. Prior to serving as a RPIC, have pilot training and qualifications; and
3. Stay current with proficiency training as outlined in the UAS SOP.

III. DEFINITIONS

When used in this directive, the following terms shall have the meanings designated.

	Term	Definition
1.	Aircraft	Any contrivance invented, used, or designed to navigate, or fly in, the air.
2.	Unmanned aircraft	Aircraft that is operated without direct human intervention from within or on the aircraft. Also called remote-piloted aircraft or drones.
3.	Unmanned aircraft system (UAS)	Drone and its associated elements, including communication links and the components that control the drone that are required for safe and efficient operation.



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