



NEWS RELEASE

HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF POLICE OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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Howard County police to launch one-year drone field test

Five months after the Howard County Police Department formed a workgroup to evaluate the possible use of drones in police operations, the agency is following the group's recommendation to purchase three drones for a one-year field test.

The workgroup examined various issues related to drone use in law enforcement, including usefulness, transparency, training and privacy issues.

"Law enforcement agencies across the nation have adopted aerial drones for a variety of uses, like locating lost children and seniors, providing real time information in crisis situations, reaching remote crime scenes, and aiding search-and-rescue operations," said Police Chief Lisa Myers. "We are taking a measured approach to using the technology with three drones to start the year-long field test."

The HCPD will follow guidelines from the ACLU to ensure the community can benefit from drone technology without privacy concerns. The department plans to use drones in situations when life and safety are at risk, or when there are specific and articulable grounds to believe that the drone will collect evidence relating to criminal activity. They will not be used for mass surveillance that could violate First Amendment-protected activities.

Images taken by the three new drones, which together will cost \$38,400, will not be retained unless there is reasonable suspicion that they contain evidence of criminal activity or are relevant to an ongoing investigation or pending criminal trial. All other images will be deleted.

The field test will start with up to 10 officers who will stay in their current assignments and respond to incidents when a drone is needed. They will be trained and certified remote pilots, as required by the FAA.

"Howard County is known throughout our state and nation as one of America's safest communities. The implementation of drones by the Howard County Police Department will improve our abilities to be quicker, more agile, and more effective at protecting our residents," said Howard County Executive Calvin Ball. "I want to thank Chief Myers and the Howard County Police Department for researching, planning, and deploying forward-thinking, innovative drone technology. We are committed to using best practices that will improve safety for our officers while protecting the civil liberties of all of our residents."

The workgroup is comprised of approximately 20 members, representing police operations and administration, union leaders, risk management, policy development, training and public information. The group also includes the HCPD Citizens' Advisory Council and Police Foundation, the Howard County Office of Law and the Sheriff's Office.

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