



GENERAL ORDER OPS-53 SMALL UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS

EFFECTIVE AUGUST 19, 2022

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I. POLICY

It is the policy of the Howard County Department of Police (HCPD) to utilize small unmanned aircraft systems (sUAS) when appropriate in the performance of official duties, and where the collection and use of any audio/video recordings or other data originating from or generated by the sUAS align with HCPD policy and all applicable laws.

II. DEFINITIONS

- A. Certificate of Waiver: Federal Aviation Administration grant of approval for a specific flight operation which is in deviation from any regulation specified in 14 CFR Part 107, i.e. nighttime operations, operations in certain airspace, etc.
- B. Digital Multimedia Evidence (DME): Digital recording of images, sounds, and associated data.
- C. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA): The agency of the United States Department of Transportation responsible for the regulations and oversight of civil aviation within the US as well as the operation and development of the National Airspace System.
- D. Pilot: The person exercising physical control over an unmanned aircraft/unmanned aerial vehicle during flight. Also known as a Remote Pilot (RP).
- E. Remote Pilot Certification: Issued by the FAA under 14 CFR Part 107 after passing the approved test.
- F. Remote Pilot-in-Command (RPIC): The person who has the final authority and responsibility for the operation and safety of a sUAS operation.
- G. Small Unmanned Aircraft System (sUAS): A system that includes the necessary equipment, network, and personnel to control an unmanned aircraft.
- H. sUAS Flight Crew: Any personnel directly involved in the flight component of a sUAS operation. This includes a Remote Pilot-in-Command, Remote Pilot, Visual Observer, Camera Operator, or any other person having a direct role in the operation of the UAV while in flight.
- I. sUAS Ground Crew: Any member involved in the ground component of a sUAS operation. This includes perimeter support members and/or any other person having a role in the operation in terms of the territory beneath the operational area.
- J. sUAS Program Administrator: Member responsible for the management of the Decentralized sUAS Unit.

- K. Unmanned Aircraft (UA) or Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV): An aircraft that is intended to navigate in the air without an onboard pilot. Also known as a Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA), Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV), or Drone, as defined by the FAA.
- L. Visual Observer (VO): A person who maintains line-of-sight and 360-degree hazard awareness around the sUAS and assists the Pilot in carrying out the duties required for safe operation.

III. GENERAL PROCEDURES

A. Operational Objectives

- 1. sUAS can be an important asset during exigent situations, large events, and complex investigations, and its use is encouraged. It provides situational awareness and an aerial visual perspective of a scene to assist in understanding the nature, scale, and scope of an incident, and for planning and coordinating an effective and safe response.
- 2. All deployments of sUAS must be authorized as detailed in this General Order.
- 3. The HCPD will utilize sUAS to provide an aerial visual perspective in responding to emergency situations and exigent circumstances, and for the following objectives:
 - a. Situational Awareness and Management:
 - i. Assist in understanding the nature, scale, and scope of an incident, and for planning and coordinating an effective response.
 - ii. Support the deployment of officers and equipment in emergency situations, including but not limited to incidents involving hostages and barricades, support for large-scale tactical operations, and other temporary perimeter security situations.
 - b. Search Operations: Assist missing person investigations and broadcast alerts, escapee searches, foot pursuit support, evidence searches, and containment of perimeter search areas.
 - c. Scene Documentation: To document a crime scene, collision scene, or other major incident scene, i.e. disaster management, incident response, large-scale forensic scene investigation, etc.
 - d. Training Support: Provide an aerial visual perspective during training scenarios to provide officers a unique and different point of view in comprehending law enforcement tactics and effectuating principal officer safety skills.
 - e. Public Awareness: Provide community outreach and assist the Public Information Office (PIO) as needed.

B. Requests for Use

- 1. Spontaneous Events
 - a. When there is an unplanned need for a sUAS, a Watch Commander or any commissioned officer may approve the deployment. If a pilot is not on duty or the on-duty pilot is unavailable, the on-call Drone Supervisor shall be contacted through the Communications Division to initiate a call-out.
 - b. The Remote Pilot-in-Command has the final authority to deny any request for use when unsafe conditions exist or when requests are in violation of operating procedures.

- c. When the Pilot determines the need for additional on-duty sUAS flight crew members, the request shall be made through the area supervisor or the Incident Commander to have one assigned.
- d. When the Pilot determines the need to call out an additional Pilot, the request shall be made through the on-call Drone Supervisor.

2. Pre-Planned Events

- a. Use of the sUAS for pre-planned events will be scheduled and coordinated through the sUAS Program Administrator or their designee.
 - i. Collection, use, dissemination, or retention of sUAS-recorded data shall not be based solely on individual characteristics, e.g. race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, age, or gender, which is a violation of the law.
 - ii. sUAS-recorded data will not be collected, disseminated, or retained solely for the purpose of monitoring activities protected by the US Constitution, such as the First Amendment's protections of religion, speech, press, assembly, and redress of grievances, e.g. protests and demonstrations.
- b. Any operational unit of the HCPD wishing to use the sUAS will make a written request to the sUAS Program Administrator or their designee.
 - i. If the request is consistent with Departmental objectives and sufficient resources are available, the request will be approved.
 - ii. The sUAS Program Administrator or their designee will notify the member making the request of the approval and schedule a qualified crew for the event.

- 3. Spontaneous events and field emergencies will have priority over pre-planned special events.

C. Use of sUAS¹

- 1. The HCPD shall obtain and maintain any applicable authorizations, certificates, or waivers required by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) prior to deploying or operating the sUAS.
- 2. The sUAS will be operated only by members who have been trained in the operation of the systems, possess a current Part 107 certification, and are designated as a pilot by the HCPD.
- 3. The sUAS-certified personnel shall inspect and test sUAS equipment prior to each deployment to verify the proper functioning of all equipment and the airworthiness of the device.
- 4. The sUAS equipment is the responsibility of individual personnel and will be used with reasonable care to ensure proper functioning. Equipment malfunctions shall be brought to the attention of the sUAS Program Administrator as soon as possible so that an appropriate repair can be made or a replacement unit can be procured.²
- 5. Any maintenance performed on the sUAS outside of routine preflight maintenance shall be

¹ CALEA 41.1.3a

² CALEA 41.1.3c

performed by the Program Administrator or their designee according to manufacturer recommendations. Any maintenance performed shall be documented.

6. The sUAS equipment and all data, images, video, and metadata captured, recorded, or otherwise produced by the equipment is the sole property of the HCPD.
7. Any deployment of the sUAS shall be conducted through the Dronesense flight application unless the flight application is inoperable or unavailable. In these cases, the flight must be manually documented in Dronesense prior to the end of the shift.
8. At the conclusion of the operation, the RPIC shall ensure that an email is sent to HCPDNews@howardcountymd.gov and HCPDdrones@howardcountymd.gov. The email shall include the purpose of the flight, IR number if applicable, location, Pilot information, Visual Observer information, if any DME was recorded, any issues that were encountered, and a brief synopsis of the incident and flight.
9. Except for those instances where officer safety or an investigation could be jeopardized, a sUAS Flight Crew member will notify Communications of a proposed operation. The PIO should be notified if the operation being conducted is likely to attract considerable attention.
10. If there is a reasonable belief that the sUAS will intrude on the reasonable expectation of privacy, a search and seizure warrant should be obtained.
11. Only HCPD sUAS and equipment shall be used.
12. No additional equipment is required to be kept in or on the sUAS. Accessories may be added and removed as needed.
13. HCPD sUAS and equipment may be used to assist other jurisdictions with the approval of the Program Administrator or a Watch Commander. ³

D. Restrictions on sUAS Use⁴

1. The sUAS shall be deployed and used only for training and missions with defined incident parameters and objectives.
2. The sUAS shall not be operated in an unsafe manner or in violation of FAA rules or HCPD policy.
3. The Remote Pilot-in-Command has the final authority to cancel or terminate a mission for any reason.
4. The sUAS shall not be used to:
 - a. Target a person based solely on individual characteristics including but not limited to race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, disability, gender, or sexual orientation.
 - b. Harass, intimidate, or discriminate against any individual or group.
5. HCPD sUAS equipment shall not be used for personal purposes.

IV. DIGITAL MULTIMEDIA EVIDENCE MANAGEMENT, RETENTION, AND DISSEMINATION

- A. All DME shall be handled in accordance with all applicable HCPD policies and retained in accordance with the HCPD retention schedule and all applicable State and local laws.

³ CALEA 41.1.3d

⁴ CALEA 41.1.3a

- B. Prior to uploading DME to the designated server, HCPD members shall not edit, alter, erase, duplicate, copy, share, or otherwise distribute in any manner any sUAS DME.
- C. DME shall only be retained and released in accordance with applicable HCPD policy, the HCPD retention schedule, and State and local law.

V. SUPERVISION AND REPORTING

- A. If the operational deployment of a sUAS is in conjunction with an incident that results in an Incident Report, the pilot shall complete a supplemental report noting if any audio or visual recording was made. Pilots shall ensure that Dispatch includes in the CAD notes that a sUAS was used.
- B. The sUAS Program Administrator shall review all deployment records to ensure compliance with policy.
- C. While participating in a sUAS mission, all members of the sUAS Flight Crew shall report to the Remote Pilot-in-Command.
- D. The Program Administrator will be responsible for maintaining flight and maintenance documentation.
 - 1. The Program Administrator will complete a monthly report documenting the agency's deployment and use of sUAS to include a brief description of significant missions flown, the total number of missions flown, to include the number of times the sUAS was used to respond to a mutual aid request.
 - 2. The Program Administrator shall complete an annual report summarizing the deployment and use of sUAS and submit it to the Chief of Police through the chain of command.
- E. The purchase of any new sUAS platform must be approved through County Administration and Risk Management, via the Chief of Police. Purchases of sUAS that are replacing existing sUAS with the same model must only be approved by the Chief of Police.
- F. Any complaints received by the HCPD for the sUAS involving privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties shall be investigated in accordance with the provisions detailed in General Order ADM-02, Internal Investigations.

VI. PERSONNEL SELECTION AND SCHEDULING

- A. All members selected for the Decentralized sUAS Unit must:
 - 1. Obtain and maintain FAA Part 107 certification;
 - 2. Successfully complete the HCPD Pilot Course; and
 - 3. Be approved by the Chief of Police or their designee.
- B. Assignment
 - 1. The priority for selection will be for Patrol officers in order to ensure sufficient sUAS coverage 24 hours a day, seven (7) days a week, absent specific unit needs determined by the Program Administrator.
 - 2. Members may be required to maintain an on-call status as determined by the Program Administrator.

C. Scheduling

1. The sUAS Flight Crew will be comprised of decentralized members who have been trained in the operation of the sUAS and members who have been appropriately briefed to fill a role as determined by the RPIC.
2. The Program Administrator will determine the availability of sUAS to best provide support for patrol activities.

VII. TRAINING⁵

- A. The Remote Pilot-in-Command shall possess a pilot certificate with Remote Pilot rating issued by the FAA. This rating must be maintained and recertified in accordance with FAA guidelines.
- B. The Program Administrator shall:
 1. Maintain knowledge of local and federal laws and regulations, as well as policies and procedures governing the deployment and use of sUAS.
 2. Ensure all pilots maintain proficiency and currency.
 - a. Each pilot shall conduct at minimum one (1) flight per month. If a pilot does not conduct a flight for three (3) consecutive months, the pilot may be required to be re-trained or may be removed from Decentralized sUAS Unit at the discretion of the Program Administrator.
 - b. All pilots shall participate in one (1) in-service training annually. Pilots may be required to attend additional in-service and training programs as required by the Program Administrator.
 3. Review this policy periodically to ensure it remains current with HCPD sUAS program objectives, technology, and applications.
- C. The HCPD utilizes non-GPS enabled sUAS systems for the use in Tactical Operations. These systems require additional training to pilot. Only members of the Decentralized sUAS unit who have been trained and approved by the Program Administrator are authorized to operate these sUAS platforms.

VIII. CANCELLATION

This General Order cancels and replaces Special Order SO 2019-01, Small Unmanned Aircraft System Field Test, issued January 6, 2020.

AUTHORITY:



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⁵ CALEA 41.1.3b