

Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Operations

10.12.01 PURPOSE

The San Francisco Police Department (Department) is committed to embracing innovative and evolving technology to strengthen community safety while upholding the rights, dignity, and voices of all residents and visitors. Our use of Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) technology will support a more responsive, transparent, and efficient public safety mission, enhancing our ability to protect the community responsibly and effectively.

10.12.02 DEFINITIONS

- A. Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV/Drone)** – An aircraft with no onboard human pilot, crew, or passengers, controlled remotely or autonomously.
- B. Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS)** – Integrated group of ground control, communications, uncrewed aerial vehicles, and other supporting networks and equipment.
- C. UAS Operator** – A member who has completed the required training and certifications and is authorized by the UAS Program Manager to pilot UAVs.
- D. Counter-UAS (C-UAS)** – Operations focused on identifying, tracking, and mitigating unauthorized UAS activity (Pursuant to 19B Compliance).
- E. Drone as First Responder (DFR)** – UAS operations involving a UAV launched to arrive before or in coordination with ground units.
- F. Public Footage** – Footage from UAS operations with no evidentiary value.

10.12.03 POLICY

The Department's use of UAS will be in strict compliance with constitutional and privacy rights, in accordance with [Federal Aviation Administration \(FAA\) regulations](#) and [California Government Code § 7070-7073](#).

The Department is mandated to use UAS technology under [SF Administrative Code § 96I.2\(e\)](#) and shall not be subject to the requirements of [SF Administrative Code, Chapter 19B](#).

Use of UAVs is authorized for legitimate law enforcement purposes. Only authorized and certified members may use SFPD UAS technology. Sworn members should serve as the UAS operators, and the UAV shall be treated as an extension of the member during police actions.

All Airport Bureau members, including those temporarily assigned, shall review Airport written directives which may outline Airport-specific UAS procedures.

10.12.04 PROCEDURES

A. Privacy

1. All UAS operations shall consider the protection of individual civil rights and the reasonable expectation of privacy as a key component in any decision made to deploy a UAV. ([SF Admin Code § 96L.2\(e\)](#) and [CA Gov Code § 7071](#))
2. UAS operators shall take reasonable precautions to avoid inadvertently recording or transmitting images of areas where there is a reasonable expectation of privacy, unless authorized by law.

B. Authorized Use

1. Except as listed in section 10.12.04(C), UAVs may be used in any situation in which a member may be deployed.
2. UAS operators are authorized to evaluate and, if need be, decline any mission or portion thereof due to policy, safety concerns, or FAA requirements.
3. UAS operators are authorized to provide a disposition and clear calls for service without the need for a member on the ground at the scene.

C. Prohibited Use

UASs shall not be used:

1. For any manner prohibited by law;
2. For the purpose of harassing, intimidating, or discriminating against any individual or group;
3. To monitor individuals based on legally protected classes such as race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation;
4. For conducting personal business of any type;
5. In an unsafe manner or in violation of FAA regulations; or
6. As a force option.

D. Program Manager

The UAS Program Manager is appointed by the Chief of Police and shall have authority over all UAS and C-UAS operations, personnel, and equipment within the Department. The UAS Program Manager will be responsible for the following general provisions:

1. Oversee the maintenance and flight records of UAS equipment;
2. Ensure the training/certifications of members in the UAS program are current under FAA regulations;
3. Ensure UAS and C-UAS operations are employed within current regulations, policies, and MOUs;
4. Ensure data storage, video retention, and access requirements are met and maintained;
5. Ensure any audits are conducted and reported;
6. Ensure UAS data reporting requirements are met; and
7. Ensure that joint operations/incidents with partner agencies fall within Department policies and applicable MOUs.

E. Data Collection and Retention

1. UAS recordings relevant to criminal, civil, or administrative manner shall be retained for a minimum of two (2) years, in accordance with laws governing evidence, or upon order of the Court.
2. Public footage shall not be retained beyond 30 calendar days ([SF Admin Code § 96I.2\(e\)](#)).
3. Footage collected during UAS operations may be shared by the Program Manager with relevant partner agencies in accordance with laws governing evidence, orders of the Court, MOUs, Charter Authority, state, or local laws.
4. The public may submit public information requests for footage and the Department will defer to the Department's Legal Division and the Office of the City Attorney to consider the requests.

10.12.05 REPORTING

Annual reporting shall be governed by [CA Gov Code § 7072](#). Reports shall be publicly posted on the [Department website](#), and a copy will be forwarded to the Police Commission.