

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. The Department's use of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) technology will support a more responsive, transparent, and efficient public safety mission, enhancing the Department's 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.
- E. Drone as First Responder (DFR)** – UAS operations involving a UAV launched to arrive before or in coordination with ground units.
- F. General Surveillance** – Sweeping, non-targeted observation with no stated purpose.

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 authorized 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](#).

Pursuant to SF Administrative Code § 96I.2, the Department must not retain any public footage for longer than 30 days unless a sworn member holding the rank of Captain or higher has determined a longer retention period is necessary due to an open criminal investigation.

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.

Nothing in this policy shall constrain members operating UAS from taking reasonably necessary steps, including use of the UAS camera systems, to orient and navigate the UAS safely.

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 § 96I.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 deployed for a public safety response, to assist in an active criminal investigation, or during training.
2. Except as listed in section 10.12.04(C), UAVs may be used for community outreach purposes with the approval of a sworn member holding the rank of Captain or higher.
3. UAS Operators are authorized to evaluate and, if need be, decline any mission or portion thereof due to policy, safety concerns, or FAA requirements.
4. 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

UAS shall not be used:

1. In any manner or for any purpose 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. Solely for the purpose of monitoring activities protected by the U.S. Constitution, such as the First Amendment's protections of religion, speech, press, assembly, and redress of grievances (e.g., protests, demonstrations);
5. For conducting personal business of any type;
6. In an unsafe manner or in violation of FAA regulations;
7. As a force option;
8. For General Surveillance, as defined in this policy; or
9. Absent a warrant or recognized warrant exception, UAS Operators shall not use a UAV to intentionally focus their observation, recording, or investigation:
 - a. In the interior of a residence; or
 - b. On any enclosed yard or other area within the curtilage of a residence that is not visible from a public vantage point at ground level.

D. Program Manager

The UAS Program Manager is appointed by the Chief of Police and shall have authority over all UAS, DFR, 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 Operators document reasons for each UAS and C-UAS operation and that UAS are deployed 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 Access, Collection, and Sharing

1. UAS recordings having evidentiary value shall be retained for a minimum of two (2) years, in accordance with laws governing evidence or upon order of the Court.
2. UAS footage shall not be accessed by members unless a sworn member holding the rank of Captain or higher has determined that access is necessary for an open criminal investigation or unless otherwise required by law.
3. Footage collected during UAS operations may be shared by the Program Manager with public safety partners. The Program Manager will forward all other requests to the Legal Division to manage.
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.

Amended Proposal 10.14.26