



SACRAMENTO POLICE DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDERS



525.09 UNCREWED VEHICLE SYSTEMS 03-05-2026

PURPOSE

This policy establishes guidelines for the use and oversight of the Sacramento Police Department's (SPD) uncrewed vehicle systems (UVS).

POLICY

It shall be the policy of the SPD to utilize UVS for official law enforcement purposes to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of public safety efforts, while safeguarding the privacy of our community. Safety and privacy shall be the primary concerns in every operation. Use of a UVS will be in strict accordance with state and federal laws and in compliance with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and city regulations. For this order, the designee for the chief of police shall be the Metro Division captain or lieutenant.

PROCEDURE

A. DEFINITIONS

1. CERTIFICATE OF WAIVER OR AUTHORIZATION (COW/COA) - A waiver granted by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) giving permission to trained and certified pilots to fly within specific parameters and predetermined boundaries.
2. COMMAND SYSTEM – Remote controller, screen, and /application used to control and operate UAS.
3. DRONE AS FIRST RESPONDER (DFR)- A UAS launched from a set location, operated by a Remote Pilot in Command.
4. FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION (FAA)– The national aviation authority of the United States with powers to generally regulate all aspects of American aviation.
5. PILOT – Authorized operator of the UVS.
6. PROGRAM MANAGER – Metro Air Ops/Traffic lieutenant, or designated by the chief of police
7. RECORDED MEDIA– Video signals recorded or digitally stored on a storage device or portable media.
8. REMOTE PILOT IN COMMAND (RPIC) – A UAS operator operating a DFR drone from a location not adjacent to the UAS.
9. SMALL UNCREWED AERIAL SYSTEM (sUAS) – System consisting of an uncrewed aircraft or uncrewed aerial vehicle (UAV) weighing less than 55 pounds and equipment necessary for the safe and efficient operation of that aircraft.
10. UNCREWED AERIAL SYSTEM (UAS) – A UAS consists of an Uncrewed Aerial Vehicle (UAV) and all supporting or attached systems designed for gathering information through imaging, recording, or any other means.
11. UNCREWED AERIAL VEHICLE (UAV) – A component of an uncrewed aerial system (UAS) and an uncrewed aircraft of any type that is capable of sustaining flight, whether programmed or remotely controlled. UAVs are a component of an Uncrewed Aerial System (UAS).
12. UNCREWED GROUND VEHICLE (UGV) – A UGV is a remotely operated ground vehicle equipped with a camera system, allowing for first-person operation and viewing.
13. UNCREWED VEHICLE SYSTEM (UVS) – Any form of remotely operated vehicle system, such as UAS or UGV.
14. VISUAL OBSERVER (VO) – Secondary operator who assists the pilot during approved missions.

B. TRAINING

1. Officers assigned to the UAS unit shall complete a department-approved initial and recurring training to ensure proper use and operation of UVS.
2. Officers assigned UVS responsibilities shall be trained in local and federal laws, regulations, policies, and procedures governing the deployment and use of UVS.
3. Use of any UVS systems for training shall require approval from the UAS sergeant.
4. Any audio, video, or images captured during training flights shall be retained for at least two years. Any training video that inadvertently captures images or evidence related to a crime or other significant event shall be retained in accordance with the City of Sacramento retention schedule.
5. The UAS sergeant shall include flyaway, lost-link, and crash-landing procedures in the training



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curriculum.

6. Night operations shall comply with the applicable COA when necessary.
7. Any training conducted away from a police facility shall comply with FAA Regulations.

C. DEPLOYMENT

1. Only authorized operators who have completed the required training shall be permitted to operate the UVS during approved missions.
2. UVS shall only be deployed with the approval of a supervisor familiar with the deployment situation.
 - a. DFR operators will be given the authority and discretion to respond to all calls where visual observation may improve officer and community safety, and to provide intelligence to support a more appropriate response.
 - (1) A sergeant or above may cancel the DFR response at any time.
 - (2) DFR operations must be consistent with FAA rules and regulations and be conducted as instructed in our approved Certificate of Waiver (COW).
3. UVS deployment should be considered when an aerial or remote view could assist officers and incident commanders in the following situations:
 - a. Public safety, life preservation, or SWAT mission.
 - b. Major collision investigation and reconstruction.
 - c. Missing person or search and rescue.
 - d. Natural disaster management.
 - e. Post-event crime scene photography and documentation.
 - f. At the request of fire authorities to assist in active incidents, investigations, or prevention.
 - g. Pursuant to an approved search warrant.
 - h. 3D mapping of critical infrastructure or locations used for large-scale public events.
 - i. Situational Awareness: To assist in planning and/or coordinating effective response to incidents that have the potential to threaten public health, safety, or welfare of people or property. Potential examples include, but are not limited to:
 - (1) Large public gatherings
 - (2) Parades
 - (3) Sideshow and reckless driving activities
 - (4) Civil unrest
 - (5) The protection of critical infrastructure
 - j. Other events as authorized by the Chief of Police or their designee.
4. UVS shall not be used:
 - a. To conduct random surveillance on citizens.
 - b. To harass, intimidate, or discriminate against any individual or group.
 - c. To conduct any personal business.
 - d. In an unsafe manner or in violation of FAA rules and regulations outside of the SPD's COA.
5. All UAS flights should be verbally broadcast over the radio to ensure dispatch and employees on scene are aware of the flight. A second broadcast should be made when each mission is complete and the UAS has terminated its flight. Dispatch shall record the deployment time and flight termination time on the computer-aided dispatch call.
6. A department UVS shall only be operated by SPD employees.

CI. STORAGE

1. Employees responsible for deploying a UVS shall ensure that the assigned equipment is secured in the locking devices of their home retention vehicles to prevent physical theft or damage during transport or storage.
2. Specific consideration shall be given to the following:
 - a. A UVS shall not be left unsecured in a vehicle during off-duty hours.
 - b. A UVS shall be stored only in approved containers or cases and transported only in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations.
 - c. Every effort shall be made to protect a UVS from intense heat and direct sunlight to preserve battery life and prevent propeller warping.



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E. PRIVACY

1. The use of UVS involves privacy considerations. SPD employees shall adhere to FAA altitude regulations. They shall not intentionally record or transmit images of any location where a person has a reasonable expectation of privacy, absent a warrant, court order, or appropriate exigent circumstances.
2. Employees shall take reasonable precautions to avoid inadvertently recording or transmitting images of areas where a reasonable expectation of privacy exists.
3. Use of vision enhancement technology (e.g., thermal, or other imaging equipment not generally available to the public) is authorized in specific areas without privacy interests or pursuant to an approved warrant, court order, or exigent circumstances. In all other instances, a supervisor shall be consulted for a review of policy and legal considerations.

F. UAS DETECTION SYSTEMS

1. The FAA considers UAS as an aircraft when operating in the National Airspace System (NAS), and UAS operators are subject to the same safety and airspace rules as any other aircraft.
2. UAS detection systems may be deployed to protect the privacy and safety of the community, special events, and critical infrastructure.
3. UAS detection equipment may also be utilized to investigate crimes utilizing UAS and for investigative purposes related to airspace safety.

G. DATA MANAGEMENT AND RECORDS RETENTION

1. All flight hours and UGV deployments shall be logged and retained for a minimum of two years.
2. Deployment summaries shall be made available for public review and dissemination.
3. Video recordings shall be retained in accordance with the crime classification listing in the City of Sacramento retention schedule.
4. Digital evidence captured by UVS cameras shall be treated as official records and handled in accordance with existing department orders.
5. Any attempt to erase, alter, or tamper with UVS camera recordings, except as authorized by law or department policy, shall be a violation of department policy.
6. All recordings made using UVS cameras are the property of the SPD and shall not be released or disseminated without the express written consent of the chief of police or designee, or unless otherwise expressly required by law.

H. USE OF VIDEO FOR TRAINING

1. Recordings may be used for training purposes.
2. When a recording may embarrass an employee, consideration shall be given before the video is used for training.
3. If an involved employee objects to the use of a recording, the employee may object in writing through their chain of command to the chief of police or designee to determine if the training value outweighs the employee's objection.
4. Recordings shall not be used for the purpose of ridiculing or embarrassing any employee or person.

I. OUTSIDE AGENCY ASSISTANCE AND JOINT OPERATIONS

1. Upon request from an outside agency for the assistance of a department UVS, the following conditions shall be met:
 - a. The Communications Division shall:
 - (1) Obtain all necessary information including location, type of incident, suspect description, contact person, etc.
 - (2) Notify the watch commander.
 - (3) The watch commander will respond to the request, taking into consideration personnel availability, the availability of the requesting agency's UVS, and whether the need for the UVS is consistent with department policy.
 - (4) Prior to deployment, the UVS officer will ensure that use of the UVS is within department policy.
2. The Metro Air Ops/Traffic lieutenant (or designee) or the on-duty watch commander may approve the use of UVS as a part of mutual aid situation or planned joint operation with outside agencies.

J. COMMUNITY OUTREACH DEMONSTRATIONS AND OTHER AUTHORIZED DEPLOYMENTS

1. To encourage public trust and effectively engage our community, the use of a UVS at community outreach or special events is authorized for community demonstrations.
 - a. The UVS demonstration should be limited to showcasing the department's investigative capabilities



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- and educating the public on the UVS program.
- b. Outreach demonstrations and other authorized deployments shall be authorized by the UAS sergeant.