

Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS)

I. Purpose

To establish guidelines to promote safe, efficient, and lawful operation of the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS).

II. Policy

It is the policy of the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office that only authorized employees may deploy an agency owned UAS when appropriate in the performance of official agency business. Any deployment or use and the creation or collection of any audio/video recordings or other data generated from such use shall comply with approved procedures and applicable state and federal law.

III. Definitions

Unmanned Aerial Systems: Any unmanned aircraft, also referred to as a "drone" or other aircraft operated without direct human intervention from within or on the aircraft and associated elements, including communication links and components that control the unmanned aircraft.

Chief Pilot: A person exercising control over a UAS program ensuring that all flight operators understand applicable regulatory requirements and organizational safety policies and procedures.

IV. Procedures

A. Deployment

Deployment of a Sheriff's Office UAS must have prior authorization of a supervisor after consideration of factors including safety, weather conditions and proper legal authority. The UAS shall not be operated in any unsafe manner. UAS deployment scenarios may include:

1. Tactical Operations Support – SRT deployment to hostage or barricade situations, manhunts, support for large scale tactical operations.
2. Scene Documentation – Crime scene, accident scene or other major incident, including civil disturbances.
3. Search and Rescue – To assist in missing person cases, AMBER or Silver Alerts, or other rescue operations.
4. Situational Awareness – To assist personnel in understanding the nature, scale and scope of an incident for planning and coordinating a response.
5. Any other mission deemed appropriate by the Sheriff or a Chief Deputy.

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B. Restrictions

All use of the UAS must be in accordance with N.C.G.S§15A-300.1.

The UAS shall not be used to conduct surveillance on any person, private property, or take any photos unless the purpose is to:

1. Counter a terrorist attack
2. Conduct surveillance in plain view where law enforcement has a lawful right to be.
3. Use the UAS after obtaining a search warrant.
4. Use the UAS pursuant to an exigent circumstance.
5. Photograph gatherings to which the general public is invited on public or private land.

C. Evidence

All photographs or videos generated during any deployment of a Sheriff's Office UAS shall be downloaded and maintained as evidence in accordance with agency policy and applicable law.