RESPONDING TO DRONE CALLS:
Guidance for Emergency Communications Centers

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PURPOSE

As drone activity continues to increase in the United States, Emergency Communications Centers (ECCs) or Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) may experience an increase in drone-related calls. ECCs should understand the distinctions between proper and improper drone activity and collect the information needed to inform potential law enforcement response. This guidance provides an overview of safe and suspicious drone flight activity and a suggested script that may be used during a drone-related call. In addition to this guidance, ECCs should refer to relevant state or local laws to inform their drone response.

HOW SHOULD DRONES FLY?

National airspace safety and security depends on proper drone handling and operation. This includes abiding by Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations while in flight and engaging in safe landing procedures. Safe drone operators will:

FAA #12345 — **Register their drone with the FAA if required,** carry proof of registration, and externally display registration ID on the drone.

Fly at or below 400 feet above the ground or in airspace above a structure not overseen by air traffic control.

Fly in their visual line-of-sight or within the visual line-of-sight of an observer who is physically next to and in direct communication with the operator.

Not interfere with any type of accident or disaster relief reponse, law enforcement activities, firefighting, or other emergency operations.

Fly at night in compliance with FAA regulations, such as having visible anti-collision lighting.

Comply with airspace restrictions as depicted in the B4UFLY mobile application.

Fly over people and moving vehicles only if in compliance with FAA regulations.

Never fly under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Avoid interfering with manned aircraft.

WHAT DOES SUSPICIOUS DRONE FLIGHT LOOK LIKE?

Careless or malicious drone operators may exhibit suspicious flight behavior that could indicate unsafe or illegal activity. The indicators below should be considered in context, including behavioral patterns and violation of FAA regulations. The presence of a single indicator does not presume illegal activity is taking place.

Erratic, uncontrolled, or other unsafe flight patterns over people or vehicles.

Consistent flight patterns or hovering around a fixed site, suggesting surveillance or reconnaissance.

Taped-over lights or other visual masking attempts.

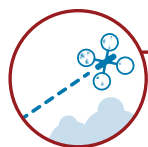**Suspicious payloads** such as oddly-shaped items, weapons, or contraband.

Drone flight without a visible operator in the vicinity.

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RESPONDING TO A DRONE-RELATED CALL

When receiving a call about drone activity, it is vital to ensure the caller's safety. Once the caller is safe and out of danger, it is important to focus on obtaining a detailed record about the drone, its activity, and any impacts.
Consider adding the following script to supplement your procedures:

If the drone is in flight

- Do not take any action to 'down' the drone or interfere with its flight. Such actions could endanger you and others and violate federal/state/local laws.

- What is your location?

- When did you first see the drone?

- Where is the drone now in relation to your location?
  - What direction is it flying? What direction was it flying when you last saw it?

- Is the drone doing something that appears to be reckless, dangerous, or suspicious?

- Can you describe the drone? How big is the drone? How many blades/rotors does it have? What is its shape? Color? Does it have any markings? Does the drone have any attachments (e.g., video equipment)? If so, please describe.

- Is there just one drone or are there several drones?

- Are other people in the vicinity of the drone? If so, is the drone flying directly over the people?

- Staying where you are, can you identify who is operating the drone? This person might be looking up and watching the drone while holding a controller. If so, please describe them.

- If you happen to have videos or photographs of the drone, its flight, or the operator, please preserve the evidence. *If you do not,* do not approach the drone or attempt to take photos or video.

If the drone landed or crashed

- Do not approach or tamper with the drone; treat it like a potentially explosive device and wait for first responders to render it safe.

- Did it strike a person or cause an injury?

- *If it landed:* Where did it land?

- *If it crashed:* Where did the drone crash?
  - If you do not know an exact location, do not approach the drone. Wait at a safe distance for first responders to arrive.

- Did you witness the crash?
  - How was the drone flying prior to the crash? Hovering? Flying erratically? Flying above 400 feet or about 36 stories?
  - Did you see anyone interfere or take action to intentionally 'down' the drone? If so, please describe them.

- Did the drone strike an object? If so, was the drone and/or the object damaged?

- Does the drone appear to be abandoned?

- Did you see anyone operating the drone, or do you see anyone approaching the drone, now that it is grounded? Without moving, please note any distinguishing characteristics of the person (e.g., what they look like and the location from which they are approaching the drone).

- Do you have a physical description of the drone? While keeping a safe distance from the drone, please describe the estimated size, shape, cargo, and any distinctive physical markings.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) UAS Website
cisa.gov/uas-critical-infrastructure

CISA Office for Bombing Prevention (OBP) Recognize Suspicious UAS Poster and Postcard
cisa.gov/publication/recognize-suspicious-unmanned-aircraft-systems-uas-poster-and-postcard

CISA Exercises
cisa.gov/critical-infrastructure-exercises

Interagency Legal Advisory
cisa.gov/publication/advisory-application-federal-laws-acquisition-and-use-technology-detect-and-mitigate

National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) Current Unmanned Aircraft State Law Landscape
ncsl.org/research/transportation/current-unmanned-aircraft-state-law-landscape.aspx

FAA Notice to Airmen Back to Basics
www.faa.gov/about/initiatives/notam/what_is_a_notam/

FAA B4UFly Application
www.faa.gov/uas/recreational_fliers/where_can_i_fly_b4ufly/

FAA Contacts for Law Enforcement
www.faa.gov/uas/public_safety_gov/contacts/

FAA Drone Operations Over People
www.faa.gov/uas/commercial_operators/operations_over_people/

FAA Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR) Map
www.tfr.faa.gov/tfr_map_ims/html/

FAA Regulations for sUAS
www.faa.gov/uas/media/Part_107_Summary.pdf

FAA Drone Registration Guidance
www.faa.gov/uas/getting_started/register_drone/

FAA Public Safety and Law Enforcement Toolkit
www.faa.gov/uas/public_safety_gov/public_safety_toolkit/