

Drone/UAS Frequently Asked Questions

What is a drone or UAS?

UAS is an Unmanned Aerial System, commonly called a drone. A drone is an aerial device with an onboard computer operated remotely, generally by a pilot on the ground using a handheld controller. Small drones are battery operated, weigh less than 55 pounds, have several rotors like a helicopter, and are equipped with a video camera.

Where are UAS video and photos stored?

All video and photo evidence taken during any UAS mission will be stored in the same manner and location as Body Worn Camera (BWC) video and other investigative evidence. PPD utilizes an encrypted "cloud" service, Evidence.com, to store digital evidence. Evidence is stored and saved for a limited time (one year or less) unless categorized as evidence in an actual crime or formal investigation. Then it is stored for a period consistent with all other evidence related to that incident/investigation.

Who has access to the video and photos?

Video and photos collected by UAS are stored for the purposes of conducting police investigations and subsequent prosecutions. Accordingly, videos and photos are generally accessible to police investigators for official use only. Like all police records, video and photos may also be subject to additional release under the same rules and restrictions as BWCS video and other items of evidence. Generally, UAS photos and video are considered part of the investigative record and are not available to the public under the California Public Records Act (CPRA).

How is my privacy protected?

The intent of the UAS/Drone program is to enhance the police department's response to emergency calls for service. As such, drones are used during an active response to an emergency or other call for police assistance. The Pacifica Police Department policy prohibits drone operators from intentionally recording or transmitting images of any location where a person would have a reasonable expectation of privacy, such as private backyards or inside private buildings, except where authorized by a warrant issued by a judge or in emergency situations.

What training will Pacifica Police UAS pilots receive?

In addition to the training and study required to maintain a FAA Part 107 Remote Pilot License, all Pacifica Police Department UAS Team members will train regularly in a variety of locations and settings to ensure operational efficiency. All training will be documented, and the records are maintained by the Pacifica Police Department and are subject to review by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

What rules and regulations must UAS pilots follow?

All Pacifica Police Department's UAS pilots are subject to FAA regulations related to airspace use, and all must have a valid "Part 107" Remote Pilot License. UAS Pilots are also subject to the Pacifica Police Department Policy on UAS Operations, which will be available on the Pacifica Police Department website.

Under what circumstances will UAS be deployed?

The Pacifica Police Department will use UAS in a variety of circumstances such as documenting crime and accident scenes, searching for missing or wanted persons, cliff/water rescue missions, fires, evaluating damage after a major incident or natural disasters, and community events. UAS can also be deployed as a de-escalation tool by allowing officers to view potential hazards and develop sound strategies and tactics before rushing into dangerous situations.

How do I ask a question or make a complaint about UAS use?

Members of the public may ask a question or make a complaint by emailing police@pacificapolice.org or submitting their question or concern in writing, in person, or telephone (650) 738-7314.