



LAW ENFORCEMENT OPERATIONS POLICY AND PROCEDURES

7.3.1p20. Chapter 20: Unmanned Aerial Systems

Revised:

Last Reviewed: March 26, 2024; and February 15, 2023;

Adopted: June 1, 2023.



I. PURPOSE:

This policy aims to describe the use of, limitations, and authority to operate an Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) for law enforcement and public safety purposes.

It is the policy of the TCSG, that trained and authorized personnel may use/deploy a UAS when such use is appropriate in performing their duties. The deployment of a UAS will be in accordance with Federal, State, and municipal law and as the needs of the department dictate.

II. DEFINITIONS:

- A. **Unmanned Aerial System (UAS)**: A UAS is an unmanned aircraft and all associated support equipment necessary to operate the unmanned system. The UAS is flown via a ground control system or autonomously through use of an onboard computer, communications links, and any other equipment necessary for the UAS to operate.
- B. **UAS Supervisor**: The UAS supervisor will be assigned by the Chief of Police or his designee and will have overall control of any maintenance, records, and deployment of the UAS. The UAS supervisor will also be responsible for any necessary licensing or approval required by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and ensuring all UAS operators are aware of and comply with FAA regulations.
- C. **UAS Operator**: UAS operators will be assigned by the Chief of Police or his designee.

- D. **UAS Observer**: Observers are trained officers who act as spotters for the UAS operator to assist in navigating the UAS and avoiding hazards.
- E. **Certificate of Authorization (COA)**: A COA is an authorization issued by the FAA for the public operation of UASs.

III. **AUTHORIZED USES (GLECP 6.26):**

Deployment of the UAS must only be for law enforcement purposes and shall not be done in a manner that will violate FAA guidelines or regulations. It is the operator's responsibility to inform any requesting supervisor or command staff of those guidelines if they feel that the requested deployment violates any federal regulation. The UAS use is to provide an aerial visual perspective that will further the department's mission and enhance the safety of the public and law enforcement officers. Such deployments include but are not limited to:

- A. **Public Relations**
The UAS may be used to record, document, and display its use at department-sponsored events.
- B. **Area Searches**
The UAS may be deployed when conducting an area search where a ground search may pose a danger to officers or the public.
- C. **Security Checks**
The UAS may be deployed while conducting Security Checks of businesses or private lots in furtherance of the department's goals.
- D. **Crime Scene/Area Documentation**
The UAS may be deployed to assist in documenting crime scenes that cover large areas or are located in areas that may be unsafe for personnel. The UAS may also be deployed to document any scene where an aerial perspective is needed, including to document police training/operations for later analysis.
- E. **Search and Rescue**
The UAS may be deployed during search and rescue operations to assist in locating lost persons, subjects of AMBER Alerts, Mattie's Call, or other search and rescue operations.
- F. **Tactical Situations**
The UAS may be deployed during certain tactical situations such as hostage/barricaded gunman, active shooters, warrant services, or any other situation where an aerial or remote view is necessary.

IV. **DEPLOYMENT OF UAS:**

Prior to deployment of any UAS, the operator will ensure that all permits and authorizations (COA) from the FAA are in place.

- A. Only authorized approved personnel will be permitted to deploy the UAV.

Personnel deploying the UAS will be trained and authorized by the department.

- B. The UAS operator will inspect all equipment including the unit, controller, batteries, and display, prior to deployment. Any malfunctioning equipment will be reported to the UAS Supervisor and/or Chief of Police.
- C. Each UAS will be the responsibility of the officer assigned. The UAS operator is authorized to decline to fly the UAS when they feel the flight would be unsafe or against FAA regulations.
- D. Each deployment of the UAS will be documented. When deployed in conjunction with a large operation, the UAS Operator will complete a supplemental report.
- E. When available, the UAS Operator will deploy the UAS with the aid of a UAS Observer. The observer can be collocated with the UAS Operator or positioned at a ground site to give a better line of site. All UAS Observers will be ground-based and should not be deployed from a moving vehicle. The UAS Operator can request additional observers if needed. All UAS Observers will be properly trained. At no time will a second UAS be used as an observation platform for the primary UAS.
- F. The UAS is equipped with forward-looking cameras. These cameras transmit to the control station. This image is to be used for reference and to further the mission. The forward-looking camera is not to be used as an instrument to move and control the UAS out of VFR. The UAS should always be flown utilizing VFR (Visual Flight Rules), emergencies notwithstanding.

V. TRAINING:

The UAS Supervisor will coordinate training. Each training session will be documented including all course materials.

- A. Training will include a written test to document the operator's knowledge of FAA regulations and departmental policy.
- B. Training will include a flight course that will measure the operator's ability to fly the UAS.

VI. RESTRICTIONS:

The UAS and equipment are only approved for uses that support legitimate law enforcement functions of the department.

- A. The UAS will only be used in a manner that is safe and in accordance with departmental policies and FAA regulations.
- B. The UAS will not be weaponized or used to transport any weapons, explosives, or incendiary devices.
- C. The UAS will not be used or deployed for personal use.
- D. The UAS will not be used to surveil private areas such as inside buildings, through windows, or any other areas where a search warrant would be needed. If a request

for deployment does not meet one of the search warrant exceptions, then the operator must request a search warrant prior to deployment.

VII. LAUNCHING/RECOVERY:

- A. When the UAS is deployed to meet an approved mission task, it shall be recovered within the same general area if possible.
- B. A designated safe area of at least 25 feet shall be maintained during lift-off between UASs and personnel.
- C. UASs should not be flown within unsafe distances to any object or persons.
- D. Weather – The PIC shall verify the weather conditions in the immediate area of operations. A local source of weather may be utilized, the internet, phone application or may be observed on site. The UAS will not be flown outside the weather minimums identified by the manufacturer or the approved Certificate of Waiver/Authorization (COA) by the FAA. The PIC shall have the final determination of risk due to weather and authority over any mission
- E. Hazards to the public –The PIC shall make every effort to ensure that flight operations will not pose any undue risk to the public not directly involved with the effort. The UAS OPERATOR shall have the final determination of risk to the public and authority over any launch of their aircraft. In all cases, the UAS will not be flown over persons that is in violation of the FAA-approved COA.
- F. Hazards to property – The UAS Operator shall make every effort to ensure that flight operations will not pose any undue risk to any property in the area involved with the effort. The UAS Operator shall have the final determination of risk to the property and authority over the launch of their aircraft. In all cases, the UAS will not be flown over property that is in violation of the FAA-approved COA.
- G. Hazards to personnel – The UAS Operator shall make every effort to ensure that flight operations will not pose any undue risk to the personnel directly involved with the effort. The UAS OPERATOR shall have the final determination of risk to the public and authority over any launch of their aircraft.
- H. Proximity to controlled airspace – Operations inside any controlled airspace shall only be performed under the approval of the FAA COA.
- I. Launch site selection shall be driven by safety first. Selection of launch sites will be considered based upon:
 - a. Ability to maintain adequate buffer zones between aircraft and personnel- The UAS Operator shall maintain a buffer of at least 25 feet for VTOL aircraft between aircraft operations and all non-essential personnel. A designated individual can be identified as a safety officer to ensure the safety of the launch and recovery area.

- b. Environmental Assessment- launches shall occur once all environmental assessments have been considered. The UAS Operator has the final authority to abort any launch based upon hazards to the environment, themselves, or other personnel in the area.
- c. The UAS Operator shall select a launch site that ensures UAS departures are not overpopulated areas.
- J. Primary Landing Site – Typically, the primary landing shall be the same as the launch site. The UAS Operator has final authority for any approaches to the primary site and may wave off any approach deemed unsafe.
- K. Alternate Landing Site - The UAS Operator shall designate at least one alternate landing site. If the primary landing site is deemed unsafe, procedures to utilize the secondary site will be invoked.
- L. Mission Abort Sites -The UAS Operator may optionally designate an “abort site” whereby the aircraft may be “dumped” in an emergency. The abort site shall be so far removed as to provide absolute minimal risk should the aircraft be required to vacate airspace in an emergency. Should the UAS Operator deem it necessary, the UAS may be flown to this site and inserted without regard to the safety of the aircraft or flight equipment.

Landing Safety & Crowd control - All landing sites shall be maintained and operated as the launch sites. Personnel shall maintain a buffer of at least 25 feet for VTOL aircraft between aircraft operations and all non-essential personnel.

VIII. EMERGENCY PROCEDURES:

- A. Emergency Landing
If, during a flight, the operator has an emergency, the operator will take every step to ensure that no persons or property is damaged. If, in the event of a catastrophic failure such as a broken rotor or battery fire, the UAS operator will guide the UAS to a safe location. If the UAS makes an uncontrolled landing, the operator will announce it to all personnel. The UAS operator will request any necessary equipment be brought to the landing site (fire extinguisher).
- B. In the unlikely event that the UAS interacts with a person on the ground during a flight or during an uncontrolled landing, EMS will be immediately summoned and units on the ground, will render first aid. All officers are trained in First Aid, CPR, and AED.

VIX. NIGHT OPERATIONS:

- A. Night operations will only be conducted when a UAS Operator can provide a safety case to mitigate and avoid any collisions with hazards.
- B. Night operations are any operations that occur 30 minutes after sunset and 30 minutes before sunrise.

- C. Only UAS operators with previous daytime flight experience will conduct nighttime UAS operations.
- D. All night operations will be conducted at the minimum necessary altitude to avoid ground hazards not exceeding 400 AGL.
- E. All night operations will be conducted with an observer to assist in navigation and hazard avoidance. The observer will place themselves in a location that allows for compliance with VFR flight and allows for constant scanning of the flight area for any hazards. In addition, the observer will notify the UAS operator immediately if they lose sight of the UAS or observe a possible flight hazard.
- F. The navigational lights on the UAS will be always used. The lights will be visible 360 degrees from the UAS. At no time will an operator attempt to cover or disguise the aircraft status indicators located on the UAS.
- G. Maintenance
 - a. The UAS operator is responsible for the maintenance of the UAS assigned to them. The maintenance will be continued and ongoing. A pre-tour inspection will be conducted of the UAS. Pre-flight inspections will be completed prior to launch using the pre-flight checklist located in this policy. Additionally, a post-flight inspection will be completed at the conclusion of the flight using the same methodology with noted exceptions for battery usage.
 - b. If at any time the UAS operator observes any condition that would prevent the UAS from flight or pose a possible hazard, the UAS operator will immediately move to a stand-down status until the problem is resolved.
 - c. If repairs are needed, only factory-approved parts will be used.
 - d. All noted discrepancies will be recorded.

This policy is for the Law Enforcement Agencies of the Technical College System of Georgia use only and does not apply to any criminal or civil proceeding. The policy shall not be construed as creating a higher standard of safety or care in an evidentiary sense concerning third-party claims. Violations of this policy will form the basis for departmental administrative sanctions only. Violations of law will form the basis for civil and criminal sanctions in a recognized judicial setting.