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Sheriff

HARFORD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE OPERATIONS POLICY

Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems

Distribution:	All Employees			Policy Number:	OPS 0728	
Responsible Unit:	Special Operations Division			Rescinds:	N/A	
Original Issued Date:	12/16/20	Revision #:	2	Latest Revision Date:	04/28/26	
Required 3-year Review was Completed:		10/23/23		Next Review Due:	06/30/26	

1. Purpose

To provide personnel who are assigned responsibilities associated with the deployment and the use of small Unmanned Aircraft Systems (sUAS) with instructions on when and how this technology and the information it provides may be used for law enforcement and public safety purposes in accordance with the law.

2. Policy

The Harford County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) sUAS shall be deployed for specific law enforcement and public safety missions in compliance with all applicable local, state, and federal laws and regulations by trained and authorized personnel. This policy is not intended to be all inclusive but shall instead serve as a supplement to other agency policies and procedures, accepted best practices, and equipment manufacturer's recommendations and guidelines. The sUAS program falls under the command of the Special Operations Division (SOD) Commander.

3. Definitions

AGENCY CERTIFIED PILOT: a pilot or other person who has completed all Agency-required sUAS training and holds a required **active** FAA certification.

ASSISTANT TEAM LEADER (ATL): an Agency Certified Pilot who assists the Team Leader (TL) in the responsibilities and oversight, planning and daily operations of the **team**, fills in as TL in his/her absence.

CERTIFICATE OF WAIVER OR AUTHORIZATION (COA): FAA grant of **current** approval for a specific flight operation which is in deviation from any regulations specified in 14 CFR Part 107 (i.e. nighttime operations and operations in certain airspace).

DIGITAL MULTIMEDIA EVIDENCE (DME): digital recording of images, sounds, and associated data.

FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION (FAA): the agency of the United States Department of Transportation responsible for the regulations and oversight of civil aviation within the U.S., as well as operation and development of the National Airspace System.

FLIGHT CREW MEMBER: a pilot, visual observer, or other person assigned to duties for a sUAS flight.

NATIONAL AIRSPACE SYSTEM: the common network of U.S. airspace; air navigation facilities, equipment, and services; airports or landing areas; aeronautical charts, information, and services; related rules, regulations, and procedures; technical information; and manpower and material.

REMOTE PILOT CERTIFICATION: issued by the FAA under 14 CFR Part 107. For the first-time pilots, the FAA requires passing of the aeronautical knowledge exam at an FAA approved testing center. Certificate holders must pass a recurrent knowledge test every two years.

REMOTE PILOT IN COMMAND (PILOT): an **Agency trained** person who holds a **current or active** remote pilot certificate with an sUAS rating and exercises control over a sUAS during flight. The Remote Pilot in Command has final authority and responsibility for the operation and safety of sUAS during operations.

SMALL UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEM (sUAS): a system that includes the necessary equipment, network, and personnel to control an unmanned aircraft weighing less than 55 pounds, consistent with FAA regulations.

TEAM LEADER (TL): an Agency Certified Pilot responsible for oversight, planning and daily operations of the **team**.

UNMANNED AIRCRAFT (UA): an aircraft that is intended to navigate in the air without the possibility of direct human intervention from within or on the aircraft.

VISUAL LINE OF SIGHT: the capability to see the aircraft with vision unaided by any device other than corrective lenses always. The pilot is responsible for knowing the sUAS location and orientation and will avoid air traffic or hazards. However, the person maintaining visual line of sight may have brief moments in which he is not looking directly at or cannot see the sUAS, but still retains the capability to see the sUAS or quickly maneuver it back into sight.

VISUAL OBSERVER (VO): a person who assists the pilot by supplementing situational awareness and assisting with identification of other air traffic, objects, or hazards. Does not need to be a member of the sUAS Team but is recommended.

STERILE ENVIRONMENT: a period during flight operations when all crew members focus exclusively on tasks directly related to the safe operation of the aircraft, minimizing distractions and avoiding non-essential conversations or activities.

4. References

FAA COA Issued to the Harford County Sheriff's Office
Code of Federal Regulations Title 14, Part 107
Code of Federal Regulations Title 49, Part 830

5. Procedures

A. Deployments

1. **All sUAS deployments should be requested or coordinated by a supervisor whenever practicable.**

- a. Deputies requesting a sUAS response should conduct a preliminary on-scene assessment to ensure that sUAS deployment is appropriate for the circumstances (e.g., missing persons, fleeing suspects, critical incidents, barricades). When an incident presents the need for a sUAS, the TL or their designee will be contacted. The TL or their designee will determine if the use of a sUAS is appropriate for the situation and whether it can be deployed in a safe manner.
- b. On duty sUAS pilots may monitor calls for service and evaluate the need for deployment. Pilots on duty may initiate a response when they determine that a drone deployment is operationally justified; however, any response or reassignment from their current duties must be coordinated with and approved by their supervisor.
- c. On scene supervisors will maintain oversight of personnel responding to ensure appropriate resource allocation.
- d. The pilot in command on scene may, at their discretion, request additional sUAS pilots based on operational needs. The sUAS TL or their designee will be notified as soon as practicable.
- e. The HCSO has adopted the use of an sUAS to provide an aerial-visual perspective in responding to emergency situations and exigent circumstances, and for the following objectives:
 - i. Search and Rescue: To assist missing person investigations, AMBER Alerts, Silver Alerts, and search and rescue missions;
 - ii. Situational Awareness: To assist decision makers (e.g., incident command staff, first responders; local, state, and federal officials) in understanding the nature, scale, and scope of an incident and for planning coordinating an effective response;
 - iii. Tactical Deployment: To support the tactical deployment of officers and equipment in emergency situations (e.g., incidents involving hostages and barricades, support for large-scale tactical operations, and other temporary perimeter security situations);
 - iv. Visual Perspective: To provide an aerial perspective to assist officers in providing direction for crowd control, traffic incident management, special circumstances, and temporary perimeter security;
 - v. Visual Inspection: To visually inspect government owned or leased infrastructure (e.g., buildings, communication towers, and HCSO property); and
 - vi. Scene Documentation: To document a crime scene, crash scene, or other major incident scene (e.g., disaster management, incident response, large scale forensic scene investigation).

2. Criminal investigations will be handled in a manner consistent with the United States Constitution and the Maryland Declaration of Rights.
3. The sUAS may be deployed upon request of any federal, state, local, or other agency in support consistent with the HCSO policies and procedures.
4. The sUAS equipment and all data, images, video, and metadata are the sole property of the HCSO.

B. Use of sUAS

1. The HCSO will obtain all applicable authorizations, permits, or certifications of waiver required by the FAA prior to deploying or operating the sUAS in the National Airspace System, and these authorizations, permits, and certificates of waiver will be maintained and current at the approved location (i.e., the HCSO network "s" drive).
2. The sUAS will be operated by Agency Pilots who have been trained in the operation of HCSO systems and certified by the FAA. The pilot has final authority for the operation and safety of sUAS operations.
3. The use of a visual observer is mandatory during night sUAS operations. At least one visual observer must be designated within the flight crew to assist the pilot with situational awareness and assist with maintaining visual line of sight. The pilot and the visual observer must always maintain effective communication with each other.
4. The use of a visual observer during daytime operations is preferred but not required. When a visual observer is present, one will be used to assist with maintaining visual line of sight.
5. The flight crew should maintain a sterile environment during operations of the sUAS. To ensure a sterile environment, the visual observer, when present, will be the only person who communicates directly with the pilot. The visual observer will be responsible for handling communications between flight crew and those not directly associated with the operation of the sUAS. Anyone needing to communicate with the pilot will do so through the visual observer. If a visual observer is not present, the pilot will designate an on-scene deputy to serve as point of contact for communications.
6. The pilot will complete a pre-flight checklist to include inspecting and testing sUAS equipment prior to each deployment to verify the proper functioning of all equipment and the airworthiness of the device. The pre-flight checklist is not a physical form, but rather represents a list of tasks the pilot must do prior to each flight (e.g., weather and wind check, rotor check, connection GPS/remote, etc.).
7. The sUAS equipment is the responsibility of the pilot and will be used with reasonable care to ensure proper functioning. Equipment malfunctions will be brought to the attention of the sUAS TL or Assistant TL as soon as possible so that an appropriate repair can be made, or a replacement unit can be procured. Damage to sUAS equipment will be documented on the HCSO Missing/Damaged Equipment Tracking Module within the Records Management System (RMS) and submitted to the sUAS Supervisor for review and approval.

8. All flights will be documented in the sUAS deployment log by a flight crew member and maintained by the sUAS TL or Assistant TL. In addition, each deployment of the sUAS will include the following information:
 - a. The reason for the flight;
 - b. The date, time, and location of the flight;
 - c. The unit requesting deployment;
 - d. The flight crew members assigned; and
 - e. A summary of activities covered, actions taken, and outcomes from the deployment.
9. Where there are specific and articulable grounds to believe the sUAS will intrude upon reasonable expectations of individual privacy, absent exigent circumstances or other exceptions to the warrant requirements -- HCSO personnel will obtain a search warrant prior to conducting the flight. If the pilot is unsure, they will consult with the Harford County Office of the State's Attorney, United States Attorney, or State's Attorney responsible for area of deployment.

C. Restrictions

1. The sUAS will be deployed with the following restrictions:
 - a. The sUAS will be deployed and used only to support law enforcement, public safety missions and training;
 - b. The sUAS will not be operated in an unsafe manner or in violation of FAA rules; and
 - c. The sUAS will not be equipped with weapons of any kind.

D. Accident Reporting

1. As required by the FAA, any operation of a sUAS involving the following will be reported online (www.faa.gov/uas/report_accident) to the FAA by the Remote Pilot in Command or his designee no later than 10 calendar days after the operation/accident:
 - a. Any occurrence where the use of a sUAS causes serious injury or any loss of consciousness to any person; or
 - b. Damage to any property other than sUAS, the value (or repair costs) of which exceeds \$500.00.
 - c. Any damage to Agency equipment will be handled consistent with HCSO policy ([ADM 0705](#)) *Lost or Damaged Equipment*.

E. Digital Multimedia Evidence (DME) Retention and Management

1. A 12-digit CC# will be the tracking method for all DME.

2. All DME should be recorded to Axon (Evidence.com).
3. DME recorded to micro-SD card due to lack of autonomous uploading/sharing, shall be uploaded to Axon (evidence.com) within three days.
4. Erased media cards will be returned to service.
5. Retention will be defined in HCSO policy OPS 1206.

F. sUAS Supervision

1. The sUAS TL will review all deployments of the sUAS on a monthly basis and ensure that deputies utilize them in accordance with policy and procedure.
2. The sUAS TL shall ensure that all sUAS deployments, usage, and reviews are accurately documented and maintained. This record shall be stored on the designated agency drive and made available for review by the SOD chain of Command.

G. Training

1. Personnel assigned as Pilots must successfully complete an agency approved training program to ensure proper use and operation of the equipment. Pilots must consistently demonstrate and possess the skills needed to navigate sUAS safely and proficiently in day and nighttime environments.
 - a. The agency approved training program will be established from current industry standards regarding equipment, laws, software and hardware.
2. To ensure continued proficiency with the equipment, program participants will be required to participate in training as required by the sUAS TL or Assistant TL. HCSO Pilots are required to attend and successfully complete at least one monthly agency approved training every 90 days. The training will include flight operations to ensure Pilot proficiency, operational procedures, proper calibration, and performance of the equipment. Failure to maintain the minimum training requirements may result in suspension of flight privileges or removal from the unit.
3. Each sUAS Pilot shall participate in callouts, which may include non-planned events or search warrants where HCSO has no pilots working that require pilot support. Each sUAS Pilot shall also participate in demonstrations and public events as assigned. The sUAS TL and Assistant TL will ensure responsibilities are distributed as equitably as practicable among available Pilots. Failure to maintain an appropriate level of participation within the established limits may result in corrective action, up to and including possible removal from the sUAS unit.
4. Each Pilot must maintain their competence in the use, operation, calibration, and performance of sUAS equipment. At a minimum, each Pilot must complete at least three successful takeoffs and landings every 90 calendar days to maintain flight proficiency (these should be completed no closer than two weeks apart). This data is captured automatically in the flight management system and reviewed quarterly by the TL.

H. Supervision and Reporting

1. Any sUAS flight documentation (including but not limited to flight logs, OnCall Records, supplements) must be completed within three days by any member of the flight crew for each operational deployment.
2. The TL shall review deployment records to ensure compliance with policy. Any identified violations or concerns will be brought to the attention of the SOD chain of Command.
3. While participating in a sUAS mission, all members of the sUAS Flight Crew will report to the designated pilot in command, and the remote pilot in command and other pilots will work closely with each other to coordinate whenever there are multiple aerial assets on scene.

I. Selection

1. Selection of pilots will be conducted through a competitive process outlined in HCSO Policy PER 0501.
 - a. All members selected must:
 - i. Already possess a current FAA Part 107 certification;
 - ii. Demonstrate basic proficiency in the operation of sUAS;
 - iii. Successfully appear before an oral interview board and receive a favorable recommendation; and
 - iv. Be approved by the Sheriff or his designee.

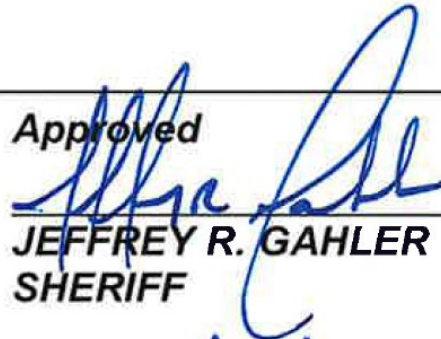
5. Summary of Changes

- A. 10/23/23 – A three-year review was conducted, and the following changes were made:
 1. Definitions were updated replacing Air Boss with Team Leader, adding Agency Certified Pilot, and Probationary Unit member;
 2. Replaced the section regarding Digital Multimedia Evidence; and
 3. Modified the reporting procedure and selection requirements.
- B. On 03/31/26 the following revisions were made:
 1. Under Section 2. Policy, revised text to clarify that sUAS shall be deployed for specific law enforcement and public safety missions in compliance with all applicable local, state, and federal laws and regulations by trained and authorized personnel, and; the policy is not intended to be all inclusive but shall instead serve as a supplement to other agency policies and procedures, accepted best practices, and equipment manufacturer's recommendations and guidelines.

2. Under Section 3. Definitions:
 - a. Clarified the REMOTE PILOT IN COMMAND is defined as an Agency trained person;
 - b. Removed the definition for PROBATIONARY UNIT MEMBER;
 - c. Clarified the definition of FLIGHT CREW MEMBER by removing the position of camera operator.
3. Under Section 5.A.1 Deployments, clarified the following:
 - a. Deputies requesting a drone response should conduct a preliminary on-scene assessment to ensure that sUAS deployment is appropriate for the circumstances (e.g., missing persons, fleeing suspects, critical incidents, barricades). When an incident presents the need for a sUAS, the TL or their designee will be contacted. The TL or their designee will determine if the use of a sUAS is appropriate for the situation and whether it can be deployed in a safe manner.
 - b. On duty sUAS pilots may monitor calls for service and evaluate the need for deployment and Pilots on duty may initiate a response subject to approval by their supervisor.
 - c. On scene supervisors will maintain oversight of responding personnel.
 - d. The pilot in command on scene may, at his discretion, request additional sUAS pilots based on operational needs. The sUAS TL or their designee will be notified as soon as practicable.
4. Under Section 5.B.2 Use of sUAS, clarified the sUAS will only be operated by certified Agency pilots;
5. Under Section 5.B.6 Use of sUAS, clarified the pre-flight checklist is not a physical form, but rather represents a list of tasks the pilot must do prior to each flight (e.g., weather and wind check, rotor check, connection GPS/remote, etc.).
6. Under Section 5.B.7 Use of sUAS, clarified that equipment malfunctions will be brought to the attention of the sUAS TL or Assistant TL as soon as possible;
7. Edited Section 5.B.8 Use of sUAS, to indicate that all flights will be documented in the sUAS deployment log by a flight crew member and maintained by the sUAS TL or Assistant TL.
10. Under Section 5.B.9 Use of sUAS, clarified that HCSO personnel will obtain a search warrant prior to conducting the flight. If the pilot is unsure, they will consult with the Harford County Office of the State's Attorney, United States Attorney, or State's Attorney responsible for area of deployment.

11. Under Section 5.D, Accident Reporting: clarified that any operation of a sUAS that causes serious injury, loss of consciousness to any person, or damage to property in excess of \$500.00 will be reported to the FAA by the Remote Pilot in Command or his designee. And, any damage to Agency equipment will be handled consistent with HCSO policy ADM 0705.
12. Clarified under Section 5.E.2 Digital Multimedia Evidence (DME) Retention and Management that all DME should be recorded to Axon (Evidence.com).
13. Clarified under Section 5.E.3 Digital Multimedia Evidence (DME) Retention and Management that DME recorded to micro-SD card due to lack of autonomous uploading, shall be manually uploaded to Axon.
14. Edited Section 5.F.1 sUAS Supervision to reflect the sUAS TL will review all deployments of the sUAS on a monthly basis.
15. Revised Section 5.F.2 sUAS Supervision to read as follows: "The sUAS TL shall ensure that all sUAS deployments and usage are accurately documented and maintained in a current record. This record shall be stored on the designated agency drive and made available for review by the chain of Command."
16. Edited Section 5.G.1 Training to clarify that personnel assigned as pilots must complete an Agency approved training program to ensure proper use and operation of the equipment; the agency approved training program will be established from current industry standards regarding equipment, laws, software and hardware; and the program will include any identified deficiencies in processes or capabilities .
17. Edited Section 5.G.2 Training to clarify that HCSO Pilots are required to attend at least one monthly agency approved training every 90 days; and failure to maintain the minimum training requirements may result in suspension or removal from the unit.
18. Added the following text at Section 5.G.3 Training: "Each sUAS Pilot shall participate in callouts, which may include non-planned events or search warrants where HCSO has no pilots working that require pilot support. Each sUAS Pilot shall also participate in demonstrations and public events as assigned. The sUAS TL and Assistant TL will ensure responsibilities are distributed as equitably as practicable among available Pilots. Failure to maintain an appropriate level of participation within the established limits may result in corrective action, up to and including possible removal from the sUAS unit."
19. Edited Section 5.G.4 Training to reflect that at a minimum, each Pilot must complete at least three takeoffs and landings every 90 days to maintain flight proficiency, and clarified this data is captured automatically in the flight management system and reviewed quarterly by the TL.
20. Edited Section 5.H.1 Supervision and Reporting to indicate that any sUAS flight documentation (including but not limited to flight logs, OnCall Records, supplements) must be completed within three days by any member of the flight crew.

21. Revised Section 5.H.2 Supervision and Reporting to read as follows: "The TL shall review deployment records to ensure compliance with policy. Any identified violations or concerns will be brought to the attention of the SOD chain of Command."
22. Added the following text at Section 5.H.3 Supervision and Reporting: "While participating in a sUAS mission, all members of the sUAS Flight Crew will report to the designated pilot in command, and the remote pilot in command and other pilots will work closely with each other to coordinate whenever there are multiple aerial assets on scene."
23. The following revisions were made under Section 5.J.1 Selection to match the following new requirements for all members:
 - a. All members selected must:
 - i. Already possess a current FAA Part 107 certification;
 - ii. Demonstrate basic proficiency in the operation of sUAS; and
 - iii. Successfully appear before an oral interview board and receive a favorable recommendation.

Approved

JEFFREY R. GAHLER
SHERIFF
DATE 7/24/20