

Drones – five things you need to know

Published on 31 May 2023 Written by Jake Fitzsimmons, Drone Coordinator, Norfolk Constabulary

How drone technology is being used both unlawfully and to reduce crime

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1. 'Drone' refers to any vehicle that is operated remotely, rather than by an onboard pilot or controller. Drones can be aerial, land or maritime. For a policing benefit, aerial drones are primarily used.

The drone industry is developing rapidly, allowing police drones to operate for longer durations, in harsher weather conditions and while carrying more effective equipment. Drone units use multiple types and sizes of aircraft alongside bespoke response vehicles.

2. Drones can be equipped with a range of equipment, including thermal imaging cameras, high-powered cameras (up to 30x optical and 200x digital zoom), lights and speakers.

Improved drone efficiency now allows for flying indoors, during both day and night-time. Drones can cover large geographical areas safely and provide a live camera feed to commanders and control rooms.

3. Using this technology, drone units are now able to assist in numerous deployments, including:

- search and rescue
- suspect and property
- search crime scene
- policing response
- disaster response
- gathering evidence
- hazmat response
- road traffic
- collisions
- firearms incidents
- public order

4. With technological innovation also comes criminal misuse and recreational negligence. Drones may be used within protests or disruption, surveillance of property vulnerability, counter-policing or stalking.

Drone negligence can also cause collisions with aircraft, other drones, or people and property on the ground. All pilots must be aware of the airspace they are operating in, due to no-fly zones, restrictions and other safety concerns. Informing the public on how to fly them safely and legally is imperative to avoid risks.

5. Innovation within drone technology is leading us towards the ability to pilot aircraft remotely out of sight of the pilot from strategic locations, such as rooftops, enhancing responsiveness and operational capacity.

Another example of innovation includes larger drones, such as fixed-wing planes, which can cover much larger distances and carry greater payloads, such as more effective camera systems

- This article was peer reviewed by Police Constable/Detective Constable Ben Pereira, City of London Police

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