



Colorado Springs Police Department General Order

1535 Unmanned Aircraft System

Section 1500 – Police Equipment

Effective Date: 12/15/2025

Supersedes Date: 10/31/2023

.01 Purpose

The purpose of this directive is to establish the requirements, organizational structure, and operational guidelines for the use of Unmanned Aircraft Systems / Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS/sUAS) by the Colorado Springs Police Department.

.02 Cross Reference

[GO 400 Employee Conduct \(Sworn and Civilian\)](#)

[GO 600 Complaints and Citizen Concerns](#)

[GO 1703 Mutual Aid](#)

.03 Discussion

CSPD recognizes safety, reasonableness, and respect for the privacy of individuals when considering all UAS deployments. Supervisors, pilots, and UAS/sUAS visual observers will consider the reasonable expectation of privacy as a key component in any decision to deploy the UAS/sUAS. Operators evaluate the public safety necessity of each mission in consideration of the totality of circumstances surrounding the flight.

.04 Definitions

Digital Multimedia Evidence (DME): Digital recordings or images, and associated data.

Drone: Synonymous with Unmanned Aircraft, Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems (sUAS), and Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS).

Drone as First Responder (DFR): The remote operation of rapidly-deployed UAS/sUAS to provide real-time situational awareness for authorized purposes.

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA): The national authority with powers to regulate all aspects of civil aviation.

Mobile Drone Operator (MDO): A UAS pilot who physically travels to a designated location to deploy and operate a drone in support of Specialized Drone Deployments. Unlike remotely-conducted Drone as First Responder (DFR) operations, MDO missions involve on-site flight operations tailored to specific tactical, investigative, or public safety needs.

Pilot in Command (PIC): An FAA 14 CFR Part 107 certified UAS pilot, responsible for operating the UAS and responsible for all aspects of the overall mission.

Privacy Act: Means the federal Privacy Act of 1974 (5 U.S.C. § 552a) that governs the collection, maintenance, use, and dissemination of personally identifiable information within a system of records.

Real-Time Crime Center (RTCC): Specialized unit designed to enhance public safety and investigative efficiency by providing officers and detectives with real-time access to critical information during calls for service and ongoing investigations. The DFR program is operated from within the RTCC.

Unmanned Aircraft (UA): Any aircraft operating or designed to operate autonomously or be piloted remotely without a pilot on board. Synonymous with Drone.

Unmanned Aircraft System / Small Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS/sUAS): An unmanned aircraft and all equipment to control it remotely. UAS/sUAS is synonymous with drone.

UAS Visual Observer (VO): Any licensed or unlicensed department member designated to assist the pilot in command with the safe completion of the mission.

.05 Policy

UAS/sUAS operations will be conducted in a constitutionally sound manner in accordance with FAA regulations.

CSPD pilots will not conduct random surveillance activities. Each operational flight, except those conducted for official training purposes, will have a specific, objective public safety nexus.

The UAS/sUAS will not be equipped with and will not use weapons of any kind.

UAS/sUAS operations will comply with applicable state/federal laws and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations.

If any department member observes or has knowledge of an unsafe, dangerous, or inappropriate UAS/sUAS deployment, they must immediately notify the UAS/sUAS lieutenant or sergeant so corrective action may be taken.

The department UAS/sUAS will only be operated by personnel who are certified FAA Part 107 licensed pilots and trained in the use of department UAS/sUAS. When pilots have been fully trained, a RTCC/DFR Supervisor will sign off on their Department Certification.

.06 Privacy and Authorized Use

This policy and any other directives related to UAS/sUAS will be reviewed at least once every three years. Directives will be updated and new directives issued as necessary in accordance with GO 1770 Written Directives.

Authorized Purpose & Use

Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems and Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS/sUAS) are authorized for use during crimes in progress, fugitive apprehension activities, public safety actions (such as evidence collection, traffic collision reconstruction, warrant service/tactical operations, traffic management, crime scene reconstruction), response to terrorist threats and acts of terrorism, structural, open area, and wildland fires, disaster response and assessments (flood, fires, earthquakes, etc.), critical infrastructure monitoring, environmental terrorism, wildlife enforcement, and hazardous materials (HAZMAT) incidents.

UAS/sUAS are also authorized to be used in other circumstances when there is a public safety risk.

UAS/sUAS may be used to provide an aerial visual perspective to assist personnel in providing direction for public safety events, traffic incident management, special circumstances, and temporary perimeter security.

Data Collection and Retention

Data collected during UAS/sUAS operations will be used in a manner consistent with and relevant to its authorized purpose. Any data collected during UAS/sUAS-operations that is not maintained in a system of records covered by the Privacy Act shall not be disseminated by the department unless dissemination is required by law or fulfills an authorized purpose and complies with established requirements for data release.

Information collected by the UAS/sUAS that may contain PII shall not be retained for more than 180 days unless retention of the information is determined to be necessary to an authorized mission of the Department, is maintained in a system of records covered by the Privacy Act, or is required to be retained for a longer period by any other applicable law or regulation.

The Department utilizes Axon evidence.com and related systems (e.g. – Skydio DFR Command, Axon Air) to transmit and store data from UAS/sUAS operations. This is to limit data privacy, data breach, and cybersecurity concerns. Use of systems not authorized by the department and City IT to store UAS/sUAS data and information is prohibited.

.07 Civil Rights/Civil Liberties

UAS-recorded data will not be collected, disseminated, or retained solely for the purpose of monitoring activities protected by the U.S. Constitution, such as the First Amendment’s protections of religion, speech, press, assembly, and redress of grievances (e.g., protests, demonstrations).

Collection, use, dissemination, or retention of UAS-recorded data should not be based solely on individual characteristics (e.g., race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, age, or gender), which is a violation of the law.

The department will receive, investigate, and address potential complaints or issues involving privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties received from the public regarding the use of UAS/sUAS. The complaint process will be in accordance with GO 600 Complaints and Citizen Concerns.

.08 Accountability

The Technical Operations Lieutenant and Technical Operations Sergeants are responsible for providing oversight to the UAS/sUAS program to ensure adherence to all applicable written directives, laws, and regulations. An annual audit will be completed by the Technical Operations Lieutenant to ensure compliance with existing policies and procedures. This audit will be completed and forwarded to the Management Services Commander before the end of each calendar year.

All pilots and personnel directly involved in the UAS program shall adhere to the conduct standards outlined in this policy and shall meet and maintain the department’s standardized training and certification requirements.

The Technical Operations Lieutenant and Technical Operations Sergeants will provide meaningful supervision of individuals who have access to sensitive information (including any PII) collected during UAS/sUAS operations. Supervision shall be in accordance with department policies outlining the expectations of leadership, supervision, and data and records access.

All department members must promptly report suspected cases of misuse or abuse of UAS/sUAS or any data collected during UAS/sUAS operations to the next higher level of authority in their chain of command or to Internal Affairs, in accordance with GO 400 Employee Conduct (Sworn and Civilian).

The Technical Operations Lieutenant will ensure UAS/sUAS data-sharing agreements or policies, data use policies, and record management policies conform to applicable laws, regulations, and policies.

The department may support other response agencies using UAS/sUAS in accordance with GO 1703 Mutual Aid. Supervisors and Pilots will ensure department policies, laws, and regulations are followed during any mutual aid requests or support of other response entities with department federally purchased UAS/sUAS.

.09 Transparency

The department will keep the public informed about its UAS/sUAS program, as well as changes to the program that significantly affect individuals' privacy, civil rights, or civil liberties, by conducting a public outreach campaign, or writing a media release. The current version of this policy will be continuously available on the department's public facing policy webpage.

The department will provide public notice when planned UAS/sUAS operations, such as for public events or exercises, are going to be conducted. Public notice may include one or more of the following: department website, media releases, or CSPD social media.

The Technical Operations Lieutenant will draft an annual public report of CSPD's UAS/sUAS operations including at a minimum, a brief description of types or categories of missions flown and the number of times the department used the UAS/sUAS to respond to mutual aid requests. The department's Public Information Office will be responsible for publishing the report.

.10 Organization

CSPD possesses several different types of UAS/sUAS to complete a variety of missions. Generally, Pilots/UAS Operators are assigned to the Technical Operations Division and report directly to Technical Operations supervisors; however, additional UAS/sUAS are also operated by certified pilots assigned to the Metro Division, as well as the Major Crash Team (MCT). This policy governs the use of all department UAS/sUAS.

.25 Operations

Department UAS/sUAS will only be operated by FAA Part 107 licensed pilots. The only exception is an unlicensed individual participating in approved UAS/sUAS training.

Sworn personnel or the Communications Center may request the deployment of a UAS/sUAS in any of the authorized circumstances; however, the PIC is solely responsible for determining whether to deploy on the requested mission based on the totality of the circumstances.

The PIC will ensure the use of the UAS/sUAS is in accordance with FAA regulations, applicable federal and state laws, and department policy.

For Mobile Drone Operations or within Visual Line of Sight operations, the PIC will inspect and test UAS/sUAS equipment prior to each deployment to verify the proper functioning of all equipment and the airworthiness of the device. The UAS/sUAS and associated equipment is the responsibility of the PIC and will be used with care to ensure proper functioning. Equipment malfunctions will be brought to the attention of a Technical Operations Sergeant as soon as possible.

The PIC will ensure any digital media is properly processed based on the needs of the investigating officer/detective and in accordance with department policy. It is imperative any data cards or storage devices necessary to record digital media gets returned to the UAS and formatted, to ensure operational readiness for the next UAS deployment.

In the interest of safety, both the PIC and VO (if in use) must be comfortable with any decision made while working together during a flight. The VO should voice any concerns to the PIC who is responsible for the flight.

At the conclusion of the mission, the PIC will ensure all flight logs are accurately recorded in the flight software database.

For Remote Flight Operations (Dock Drones), a daily inspection of each UAS will take place via the command and control station. Each dock unit will be inspected every thirty (30) days or sooner. Additionally, flight software and diagnostics will be used to ensure airworthiness of each UAS.

Use of UAS Thermal Imagers

Use of thermal imagers is passive and non-intrusive. In most circumstances, the use of this device is not considered a search and does not require a search warrant. However, a 2001 U.S. Supreme Court decision (*U.S. v. Kyllo*), held that using sense-enhancing technology to obtain any information regarding the interior of a home that could not otherwise have been obtained without physical intrusion into a constitutionally protected area constitutes a search.

Officers will not use thermal imagers to scan a private residence for heat characteristics without first obtaining a search warrant absent exigent public safety circumstances that are an exception to the search warrant requirement. Statutes and case law do not prohibit their use on structures, or other areas not protected under the Fourth Amendment.

.30 Training

All operators will receive additional department approved training on the specific equipment, procedures, regulations, and operations of department UAS/sUAS after obtaining their FAA Part 107 license. Upon successful completion of the department's training requirements, the pilot shall be certified as documented in the CSPD Drone Pilot Certification Letter and records stored within the flight software.

Additional training will be required at periodic intervals to ensure the continued effective use, operation, proper calibration, and performance of the equipment and to incorporate changes, updates, or other revisions in policy and equipment.

UAS/sUAS pilots who fail training, fail to maintain FAA status, or do not maintain department requirements will be grounded until all deficiencies are corrected.

.40 Restrictions

The UAS will be deployed only to support official law enforcement missions documented in section .06 Privacy and Authorized Use. The UAS will not be operated in an unsafe manner or in violation of FAA regulations.

If any UAS PIC, VO, or department supervisor has concerns regarding the appropriateness of a request for a UAS, the Technical Operations Sergeant and/or Lieutenant may be contacted for consultation prior to flight.

.50 Digital Multimedia Evidence (DME) Retention & Management

Evidentiary video retention: UAS pilots will archive all evidentiary video recordings of flights in the official CSPD evidence repository for the appropriate duration in accordance with digital evidence storage procedures.

Non-evidentiary video retention: Non-evidentiary video retention will be subject to the limitations described in section .06 Privacy and Authorized Use.

Department members will not edit, alter, erase, duplicate, copy, share, or otherwise distribute DME without official authorization.

Any data collected during UAS/sUAS operations that is not maintained in a system of records covered by the Privacy Act may only be disseminated in accordance with section .06 Privacy and Authorized Use.