

Frequently Asked Questions

Chula Vista Police UAS Operations

What is a drone or UAS?

UAS is an Unmanned Aerial System and is commonly called a drone. A drone is an aerial device with an onboard computer that is 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.

What is Drone as First Responder (DFR) operations?

Drone as First Responder (DFR) operations is an innovative and transformative use of UAS developed and implemented by the Chula Vista Police Department and CAPE, a private UAS teleoperation company. DFR is the public safety Concept of Operations use-case of the San Diego City IPP Team. The concept is to utilize a UAS to fly to any reported incident and arrive prior to first responders on the ground. The video feed from the UAS is viewed at the police department by a trained first responder (teleoperator or TO). The TO is able to operate the UAS remotely and communicate with field personnel via radio immediately. The TO is able to evaluate the scene and circumstances before those in the field arrive and provide necessary tactical information that help them stay safe and increase efficiency. The video feed is also immediately available to every officer in the field via a smart phone application. Officers and fire personnel can see for themselves what they are responding to. The ability to evaluate the resources needed, prepare the proper tactical response, and increase the safety of the first responders and the public is the intent of the project and the mission of Chula Vista Police Department.

When do Chula Vista Police use UAS (drones)?

The Chula Vista Police Department uses UAS in a variety of circumstances such as documenting crime and accident scenes, searching for missing or wanted persons, fires, and evaluating damage after a major incident or natural disasters. These can happen anywhere in the City and the CVPD UAS Team will respond to those on an as-needed basis. The Chula Vista Police UAS Team is also part of an FAA initiative (UAS Integration Pilot Project, or IPP), that encourages public agencies and private companies to partner in using UAS in innovative ways to serve the community and evaluate the integration of UAS into the National Air Space (NAS). Since October 22, 2018 CVPD in partnership with CAPE and other companies has been utilizing UAS to respond to emergency calls or reported incidents in the area around the police department building (roughly 1-mile radius). The UAS are launched from the roof of the police department and fly toward the scene of incident such as a crime in progress, serious accident, officer in need of assistance, or any other incident where having advanced knowledge of what is happening at the scene before police and fire first responders arrive may add to safety and efficiency. This program is called Drone as First Responder (DFR) Operations (see above).

Where is the video and photos taken by the UAS stored?

All video and photo evidence taken during any UAS mission is stored in the same manner and location as Body Worn Camera (BWC) video and other investigative evidence. The Police Department utilizes a private "cloud" service, Evidence.com, to store all digital evidence. The service is authorized and certified under both state and federal regulations for the security and protection of confidential information, and is available only for official law enforcement purposes. Evidence is stored and saved for a limited time (one year or less) unless it is categorized as evidence in an actual crime or formal investigation. Then it is stored for a period of time consistent with all other evidence related to that incident/investigation.



Frequently Asked Questions (cont'd)

Chula Vista Police UAS Operations

Who has access to the video and photos?

Video and photos collected by UAS are stored for the purposes of conducting police investigation 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 BWC 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) or Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). For more details, please refer to the Chula Vista Police Department [Policy on Portable Audio/Video Recorders](#).

How is my privacy protected?

The intent of the DFR 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. CVPD 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 do UAS pilots undergo?

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

What rules and regulations must CVPD's UAS pilots follow?

All CVPD 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 [Chula Vista Police Department Policy on UAS Operations](#), which is available on the CVPD website.

Why does CVPD use UAS rather than helicopters?

Helicopters and other manned aircraft (air support) are very expensive to operate. Currently, CVPD relies on the San Diego Police Department and the San Diego Sheriff's Department for air support. UAS can be used in a variety of ways that supplement mutual aid air support requests in a cost-effective and efficient manner, like the Drone as First Responder (DFR) aerial intelligence-led emergency response.

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

Anyone may email the UAS Team directly at UASTeam@ChulaVistaPD.org. Also anyone may make a service complaint to the Chula Vista Police Department in person, via phone (619) 691-5151, or fill out the [complaint form here](#). For more FAQ related to UAS, please see FAA's link here: <https://www.faa.gov/uas/faqs/>

