

DRONES OVER EMERGENCY SCENES

Aerial observation of incident scenes can provide valuable information to ground commanders. Presently in New York City the NYPD has helicopters that can broadcast video to on-scene Incident Commanders and well as centralized agency Emergency Management Centers. At 3rd alarm fires the FDNY Incident Commander can dispatch a Battalion Chief to board an NYPD helicopter to view and report from above the incident scene. These assets, however, cost millions to obtain, operate and maintain. Drones or unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) operated by police, fire, emergency management and other agencies will be coming soon to help ensure scenes are safe, determine of the size or extent of an incident, search and rescue and other operations. Right now it is writing, reviewing and properly issuing procedures, policy and regulation that's holding up implementation of the technology as the costs involved for purchase, storage, maintenance, deployment and training for small but capable drones are a relatively minor concern. With low cost there may be multiple agencies operating drones at a large scale or even minor incident and we may be treated to aerial battles of the badges for control of airspace – mini Tasers or stun guns vs. mini water cannons!

The presence of by-standers at emergency scenes can now literally reach new levels of height. First responders need to be aware that civilian operated drones may be present at incidents and plan accordingly. “Pilots” may be amateur aviation enthusiasts, photography hobbyists, freelance or professional reporters, technicians employed by news organizations or others who may have either good or bad intentions and little or no training and experience. The NY Post reports Amazon sells 15,000 drones a month with an equal amount sold through other sources. More than yellow barricade tape and sheets may be needed to restrict visual observation and shield patients and evidence. The NY Post reports Amazon sells 15,000 drones a month with an equal amount sold through other sources.

The FAA is now testing drones in six states to determine new policy and regulations. Currently the FAA bars the commercial use of drones and limits their ceiling to 400 feet and away from airports but these policies are in limbo due to a recent ruling (<http://time.com/#15502/judge-shoots-down-drone-ban/>) stating there was no law stopping commercial use of UAS and that the government's policy notes had not been written as part of a formal rule making process. However, the FAA website at <http://www.faa.gov/news/updates/?newsid=76240> states “anyone who wants to fly an aircraft - manned or unmanned - in U.S. airspace needs some level of FAA approval.” An FAA source indicated the law currently requires that private individuals flying model aircraft notify the airport operator and air traffic control facility when flying within five miles of an airport. There is a model plane area at Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn that is within 5 miles of JFK as well as the NYPD helicopter base at Flood Bennett.

Several states have more stringent laws on civilian “hobby” drone use and even stricter laws governing their use by law enforcement or others within the Emergency Services Sector.

In New York State, the City of Syracuse banned the use of drones until state and federal regulations are in place that “adequately protect the privacy of the population.” Currently no state regulations exist, however, there are bills in the NYS Assembly and Senate (A06541/S04839) seeking to regulate “the use of unmanned aerial vehicles by the state and political subdivisions thereof”.

DRONE PREVENTS LANDING OF MEDEVAC HELICOPTER

The Akron Beacon Journal reported on 4/15/14 that a 31 year old Springfield, OH copy machine repairman and videographer is facing a felony charge of obstructing official business and misdemeanor charges of misconduct at an emergency and disorderly conduct. Deputies say he was flying a video camera-equipped \$4,000 hexacopter drone that hindered the landing of a medical helicopter at an accident scene where a pickup truck had hit a tree. The man said he's been unfairly charged, would have landed it immediately if he knew the medical helicopter was en route and added he was shooting the video as a hobby and would have turned it over to local television stations, as he has done before. However, local authorities said both fire officials and a Clark County sheriff's deputy had told him to stop flying his remote-controlled aircraft because the helicopter was preparing to land and that he refused. The helicopter was able to land and depart safely from the scene once the drone was on the ground.

DRONE OVER HARLEM BUILDING EXPLOSION



In NYC in March, after learning from his roommate about the building explosion at Park Avenue and East 116 Street in Harlem, a 45 year old business systems expert jumped in a cab with his DJI Phantom 2 quadcopter and headed to the scene. He shot 30 minutes of video from about 150 to 200 feet before the battery ran down. NYPD officers questioned him about the drone but allowed him to launch. "At the end, the cops said they'd prefer if I didn't fly in the area anymore, so I stopped," he said. For pictures go to

<http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/uptown/drone-captures-e-harlem-explosion-scene-video-article-1.1719988> This model drone is available at prices ranging from \$500 to \$1,000 on Amazon.

DRONE PILOT ARRESTED AFTER MANHATTAN CRASH

In 2013 in New York City the NYPD arrested a 34 year old musician for "reckless endangerment" for "flying a remote control helicopter off a balcony, losing control, causing it to crash to the ground from an unreasonable height creating a substantial risk of serious physical injury." The incident occurred near Grand Central Terminal in Manhattan where the drone reached a height of 30 stories. In April 2014 the individual was issued a fine by the FAA for the incident.

WASHINGTON HEIGHTS DRONE VS. NYPD HELICOPTER

Two men were arrested and charged on Monday 7/7/14 with a single felony count of Class D reckless endangerment stemming from an NYPD Aviation Unit helicopter pilot saying he felt the drone endangered the helicopter. The incident occurred in upper Manhattan near the George Washington Bridge. News reports indicate the helicopter was on patrol and officers spotted a DGI Phantom 2 quadcopter drone at elevations of 800 feet and up to 2,000 feet as it flew near the bridge and also observed the unmanned aircraft as it circled the Spuyten Duyvil Bridge over the Harlem River. Washington Heights is one of the highest points in Manhattan at about 265 feet above sea level. According to news sources the NYPD helicopter pilot said that at one point he had to veer off course to avoid being struck by the drone. Another news source reporting on the incident indicated 2 drones nearly hit the helicopter. The helicopter crew followed the drone and watched it touch down at Fairview Ave. and Fort George Hill in Inwood at 12:34 AM. There, officers from the 34th Precinct arrested the men and took their drones and controllers.

The men deny the helicopter was put in danger by them as it was the helicopter that approached the drone. Alleged height may be an issue as the drone model's range is listed at just under 1,000 feet but there are optional range extenders available. A prosecutor requested

the men be released without bail and a judge agreed. A legal commentator points out that a person is guilty of reckless endangerment in the first degree when, under circumstances evincing a depraved indifference to human life, he recklessly engages in conduct which creates a grave risk of death to another person and that the risk was not merely speculative. The legal system will have to sort this all out.

For an entertaining article on drones over NYC go to the www.callthecops.com web page at <http://www.callthecops.net/amazons-drone-testing-prompts-dozens-911-calls-nyc/> Please be aware that articles on this site are fictional.