

Small Unmanned Aerial Systems (Drones) Frequently Asked Questions

What are the purposes of the UAS program?

To be another resource for the department to protect lives, safeguard property, document incident, increase efficiency, and detect danger that could not otherwise be seen. To conduct UAS operations in a legal and constitutional manner as required under local, state, and federal regulations. To operate UAS in a manner that is mindful of individual privacy rights that may be affected, including the reasonable expectation of privacy in the home and areas immediately surrounding the main structure, or curtilage, as defined by case law.

What are some examples of uses?

Crime scene reconstruction and evidence gathering, traffic crash reconstruction, monitoring fleeing felons without the need for more dangerous road pursuits, locating suspects who are concealing themselves, locating missing children and vulnerable adults, monitoring crowd and traffic safety at large-scale special events like the River Bank Run, and providing real-time information during critical incidents.

Are UAS used for random or routine surveillance?

No. Each flight must have a clearly defined purpose related to the activities listed above. If a situation would require a search warrant for an officer to enter a home or other private space, a search warrant would also be required to fly a drone into that space.

What capabilities does the UAS have?

UAS operators see a live feed from the onboard camera system. They can operate in thermal mode to identify heat signatures of individuals during nighttime hours or who are otherwise obscured, for example, in forested areas or in bodies of water. The video is recorded and retained as outlined in GRPD's record retention policy. Timeframes for retention depend on the type of activity and are consistent with body worn cameras and in-car video record retention requirements.

Will the UAS be equipped with weapons or facial recognition/AI capabilities?

No.

What kind of oversight does this program have?

Every deployment is required to have:

- The reason for the flight
- Time, date, and duration
- Flight path and altitude
- Operator(s) name
- Flight summary
- Video tagged and stored

Use of this technology is governed by the City of Grand Rapids Administrative Policy 15-03, which states in part:

The Office of Oversight and Public Accountability shall annually submit to the Public Safety Committee and make available of the City's website an Annual Surveillance Report. The Annual Surveillance Report shall, at a minimum, include the following information:

- i. A summary of which surveillance technology was used and how it was used;*
- ii. Whether and how often collected surveillance data was shared with and received from any external persons or entities, and the justification for the disclosure (information shared during the course of criminal investigations are specifically exempted from this provision);*
- iii. Where applicable, a breakdown of where the surveillance technology was deployed geographically, by ward;*
- iv. Whether the reported monitoring was subject to (A) a warrant, and (B) a non-warrant form of court authorization;*
- v. A summary of complaints or concerns that were received about the surveillance technology, to the extent possible disaggregated by race, gender, age and ward;*
- vi. The results of any internal audits, any information about violations of the Surveillance Use Policy, and any actions taken in response;*
- vii. An analysis of any discriminatory, disparate, and other adverse impacts the use of the technology may have had on the public's civil rights and civil liberties, including but not limited to those guaranteed by the First, Fourth, and Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, to the extent possible disaggregated by race, gender, age, and ward;*
- viii. Total annual costs for the surveillance technology, and what source of funding was used to fund the technology, excluding personnel.*

Are there requirements for who can operate the UAS?

All pilots (operators) must be certified and in compliance with the Federal Aviation Administration's Part 107.

Who would I contact about a drone complaint or suspected violation?

There are a few options, depending on the nature of issue. If your concern is related to alleged violations of GRPD or City of Grand Rapids policy, contact the Grand Rapids Police Department's Internal Affairs Unit and/or the City's Office of Public Oversight and Accountability. You can also contact the National Traffic Safety Board (NTSB) or the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) if you believe UAS usage violates regulations that apply to all drone operators, public and private.