

June 1, 2020

Joint Statement on the Use of UAS in Public Safety

The COVID-19 Pandemic has brought our nation face-to-face with a host of unprecedented challenges that are decimating the economy and testing our resiliency. The public health and safety sector is uniquely affected by this crisis in many ways that are obvious and many that go unnoticed by most. Not only are firefighters, emergency medical services personnel and law enforcement officers classified as essential and working tirelessly throughout this state of emergency, but they are also at a significantly higher risk of contracting the virus, more likely to require quarantine, and are, in many cases, being asked to work longer hours to meet increased demand.

Though the situation is difficult in many areas of the country, as always, public safety professionals are up to the challenge. In order to best serve their communities, departments are exploring innovative ways to do more with less to meet the local needs of the public while addressing a new set of operational challenges. One method is the utilization of advanced technology, which has included Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) for a number of missions to both enhance operational capabilities while protecting the health and safety of first responders.

UAS programs have been successfully implemented by hundreds of public safety organizations around the country by enhancing safety through increased situational awareness and expanded operational efficiency. These agencies and organizations have deployed a wide variety of use cases to include search and rescue, aerial scene surveillance, training and equipment transportation which have effectively protected members of the public safety community and undoubtedly saved the lives of many members of the public. From widespread use in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey to California wildfires, this technology has become an invaluable and essential tool for first responders.

While there have been many uplifting stories in this regard through the COVID-19 pandemic, there has also been a recent increase in the amount of negative coverage in the media that threatens the ongoing success of these programs. We in the public safety community fully understand that there is some risk associated with any emergency response or operation. However, departments across the country are keenly aware of these risks and have and will continue to employ rigorous policies and procedures to account for and mitigate any potential hazards to the public. These include respecting the Constitutional rights of citizens as well as ensuring data privacy and protection.

Embracing advances in technology over time has allowed us to better serve our communities and protect our members. We have the utmost confidence that public safety agencies will make thoughtful decisions regarding which technology is required for each individual jurisdiction and that they will continue to employ policies and procedures that fully protect the safety and privacy of the public while using drones to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

