

BLM Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Program Update – Incident Operations

Firefighter/Flight Crew Safety

UAS (drone) incursions are a primary concern regarding firefighter and flight crew safety for the 2016 season. An incursion protocol (decision tree) has been developed as a decision support tool for personnel when a UAS is spotted on/near an incident. Crews are encouraged to follow the guidance provided in Safety Alert IA SA 15-01 published on 7/1/15.

An interagency public information campaign is in place to promote awareness of hobbyist/commercial UAS (drone) operations in the vicinity of wildfires. Key components of this effort include:

- Know Before You Fly - <http://knowbeforeyoufly.org/>
- BLM UAS Public Service Announcement (PSA)
- USFS “If you fly, we don’t” posters

Contact the appropriate external affairs/information offices for more information.

Contract and Agency Operations

BLM is evaluating the potential benefits of UAS in support of fire/incident operations. The two focus areas are large incident and crew level support. **Limited** testing will occur this fire season. Operating UAS in conjunction with manned aircraft poses a significant challenge and will be done in a manner to maximize safety of flight.

Large Incident Support (contract)

1. Strategic Situational Awareness:
 - a. Pre-planned reconnaissance missions to determine general incident characteristics. Command/Overhead personnel will have the ability to view a live feed at the Incident Command Post (ICP) or other known location
 - b. Pre-planned data collection missions to provide near real-time data utilized by qualified personnel to develop incident planning products (maps)
2. Tactical Situational Awareness:
 - a. Aircraft will be over the incident during the operational period (typically 0900-2000) and provide real-time information to firefighting personnel
 - b. Aircraft will be available for sensor tasking to a specific location on the incident to support tactical decision making by firefighting personnel

Crew Level Support (agency owned)

- BLM is evaluating a micro system (<4.4 lbs.) to provide situational awareness at the crew level (IHC, SMJ, engines, other ground based firefighters)
 - Low cost/complexity system
 - Simplified airspace authorization
 - Daylight/infra-red camera
 - Easily transported, set up, and operated
 - 2016 fire season targeted for limited testing
 - 2017 is targeted for a micro UAS purchase contract accompanied by crew training
 - The BLM Fire Operations Group (FOG) has provided two SME’s for input
- **REMEMBER:** Flying personally owned drones on incidents is not permitted!

Additional BLM UAS Program information: www.aviation.blm.gov or gdustin@blm.gov

Attachments: UAS Incursion Protocol and Safety Alert IASA_15_01