

§4501. Regulation of unmanned aerial vehicles

1. Findings. The Legislature finds that evolving technology regarding unmanned aerial vehicles presents a potential economic driver for the State, an opportunity for research and development and a very real benefit for security, for search and rescue efforts and for disaster prevention and relief, as well as a tool for the investigation of serious crimes, but the technology also presents a potential threat to the privacy of citizens of this State if used by law enforcement in the conduct of criminal investigations without appropriate guidelines and supervision.

[PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

2. Definitions. As used in this section, unless the context otherwise indicates, the following terms have the following meanings.

A. "Law enforcement agency" has the same meaning as in section 3701, subsection 1. [PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

B. "Unmanned aerial vehicle" means an aircraft operated without a physical human presence within or on the aircraft that, in the manner in which the aircraft is used or the manner in which it is equipped, is capable of performing audio or visual surveillance. [PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]
[PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

3. Acquisition of unmanned aerial vehicles. The acquisition of an unmanned aerial vehicle by a law enforcement agency must be approved by the governing body of the governmental unit overseeing the law enforcement agency seeking to make such an acquisition or, in the case of a state agency, by the commissioner of that agency.

[PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

4. Law enforcement agency operation of unmanned aerial vehicles. A law enforcement agency's operation of an unmanned aerial vehicle must fully comply with all Federal Aviation Administration requirements and guidelines, including the acquisition of a certificate of authorization or waiver from the Federal Aviation Administration. Additionally, a law enforcement agency's use of an unmanned aerial vehicle is governed by the following provisions.

A. A law enforcement agency may not use an unmanned aerial vehicle before adopting standards that meet, at a minimum, the standards set forth in subsection 5. [PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

B. Except as permitted by a recognized exception to the requirement for a warrant under the Constitution of Maine or the United States Constitution, a law enforcement agency may not use an unmanned aerial vehicle for criminal investigations without a warrant. [PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

C. Notwithstanding paragraph A, a law enforcement agency may use an unmanned aerial vehicle for the purpose of a search and rescue operation when the law enforcement agency determines that use of an unmanned aerial vehicle is necessary to alleviate an immediate danger to any person or for training exercises related to such uses. [PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

D. Notwithstanding paragraph A, a law enforcement agency may use an unmanned aerial vehicle for purposes other than the investigation of crime, including, but not limited to, aerial photography for the assessment of accidents, forest fires and other fire scenes, flood stages and storm damage. [PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

E. In no case may a weaponized unmanned aerial vehicle be used or its use facilitated by a state or local law enforcement agency in this State. [PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

F. A law enforcement agency may not use an unmanned aerial vehicle to conduct surveillance of private citizens peacefully exercising their constitutional rights of free speech and assembly. [PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

G. Notwithstanding paragraph A, a law enforcement agency may use an unmanned aerial vehicle for an emergency use approved by the chief administrative officer of the agency or the Governor. [PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]
[PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

5. Minimum standards for law enforcement. The Board of Trustees of the Maine Criminal Justice Academy, in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General, shall establish minimum standards for written policies and protocols for use of unmanned aerial vehicles by law enforcement agencies. The standards must include at a minimum:

A. Training and certification requirements for a person operating an unmanned aerial vehicle; [PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

B. Requirements for prior authorization for the use of an unmanned aerial vehicle by the chief administrative officer of the law enforcement agency seeking to use such a vehicle; [PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

C. Approval by the Attorney General or chief prosecuting attorney for the appropriate jurisdiction for the deployment of an unmanned aerial vehicle for criminal investigation purposes; [PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

D. Restrictions on the use of night vision technology, high-powered zoom lenses, video analytics, facial recognition technology, thermal imaging and other such enhancement technology; [PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

E. Procedures to minimize the inadvertent audio or visual recording of private spaces of 3rd parties who are not under investigation; [PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

F. Procedures for destroying any unnecessary audio or visual recordings without further duplication or dissemination; [PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

G. Recommended minimum altitudes and speeds at which an unmanned aerial vehicle may be flown in order to minimize the invasion of privacy of 3rd parties who are not under investigation; [PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

H. Methods to minimize the number of unmanned aerial vehicles deployed at any one time in any one area or at any one event; [PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

I. Procedures to avoid hazards to persons and property on land and in the air due to the operation of unmanned aerial vehicles; [PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

J. Methods for tracking and recording the flight of each unmanned aerial vehicle; [PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

K. Requirements for regular statistical reporting of all uses of unmanned aerial vehicles, including the purposes, the results and the duration of such uses, to the appropriate governmental bodies; and [PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

L. Accountability of a law enforcement agency for any mistake in deployment or misuse of an unmanned aerial vehicle, including sanctions as provided in section 2803-C or section 2806-A, as applicable. [PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]
[PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

6. Data collection. On or before July 1, 2016 and July 1st of each subsequent year, the Commissioner of Public Safety shall submit to the Legislature a report containing the number of instances in which an unmanned aerial vehicle has been deployed by any law enforcement agency in the State with summary descriptions of the number of deployments for investigative purposes, the general nature of those investigations and the number of search warrants sought and the number of search warrants obtained for the deployment of unmanned aerial vehicles.

[PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 2015, c. 307, §1 (NEW).

The State of Maine claims a copyright in its codified statutes. If you intend to republish this material, we require that you include the following disclaimer in your publication:

All copyrights and other rights to statutory text are reserved by the State of Maine. The text included in this publication reflects changes made through the First Regular and First Special Session of the 131st Maine Legislature and is current through November 1, 2023. The text is subject to change without notice. It is a version that has not been officially certified by the Secretary of State. Refer to the Maine Revised Statutes Annotated and supplements for certified text.

The Office of the Revisor of Statutes also requests that you send us one copy of any statutory publication you may produce. Our goal is not to restrict publishing activity, but to keep track of who is publishing what, to identify any needless duplication and to preserve the State's copyright rights.

PLEASE NOTE: The Revisor's Office cannot perform research for or provide legal advice or interpretation of Maine law to the public. If you need legal assistance, please contact a qualified attorney.