

ALBANY COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE			
General Order	Date Issued 01/25/2023	Effective Date 01/25/2023	Order Number 28-SO-23
Subject: Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) Drone Unit		Distribution: All Personnel	
Reference: Reviewed June 2025			

PURPOSE: To establish policy and procedures for the operation of the Albany County Sheriff's Office Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) Drone Program.

DEFINITION: The Albany County Sheriff's Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) Drone Unit is composed of members of the Albany County Sheriff's Office. The Drone Unit is to provide state-of-the-art aerial technology to support ACSO operations and to requesting municipalities and/or public safety agencies.

STANDARDS: This General Order reflects accepted standards of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations, aircraft manufacturers approved flight manual as defined by national response protocols as supported by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) all statutes which relate to the safe and efficient provision of such a service. The following procedures are intended to promote safe, efficient and lawful operation of the Albany County Sheriff's Office Unmanned Aerial System (UAS). Safety, above all else, is the primary concern in each and every operation, regardless of the nature of the mission.

MISSION: It shall be the mission of those personnel of the Albany County Sheriff's Office who are trained in the use of the Unmanned Aerial System (UAS), to use this resource to protect the lives and property of citizens and first responders in a constitutionally and legally sound manner. Use of the aerial system can be utilized in circumstances which would save life and property, as well as being able to detect possible dangers that could not otherwise be seen.

UAS's can support any responder in many types of hazardous incidents that would benefit from an aerial perspective. Additionally the UAS would have suitable uses in missing persons, search and rescue operations, accident scene reconstruction and documentation as well as many tasks that can best be accomplished from the air in an efficient and effective manner.

It shall be the intent of every UAS operator to make every reasonable effort to not invade a person's reasonable expectation of privacy when operating the UAS. UAS unit Commander, operators and observers will have the protection of citizens civil rights and reasonable expectations of privacy as a key component of any decision made to deploy the UAS. Agency UAS/UAS data is to be used for official purposes only and in accordance to Agency policy. Misconduct or failure to comply with Agency policy may result in disciplinary action pursuant to Agency policy and applicable collective bargaining agreements. The Sheriff's Office of Professional Standards shall investigate such matters; review this UAS/Drone Unit policy annually as part of the Agency's General Order review, but no loess than every three years; and coordinate with the Chief Pilot as needed to conduct audits or otherwise ensure compliance with Agency policy a minimum of once a year or as needed. (Rev. 06/2025)

I. Authorized Missions

- A. Hazardous Material Responses.
- B. Search and Rescue missions.
- C. Accident scene investigation, reconstruction and documentation.
- D. Fire scene safety and investigations.
- E. Rail train emergencies.
- F. Scene reconnaissance, damage assessment and documentation of natural and man-made disasters.
- G. Crime scene investigations and documentation.

II. Organization

- A. The following shall be the Chain-of-Command for the Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) Drone Unit:
 - 1. Unit Crew Member
 - 2. Chief Pilot
 - 3. Undersheriff
 - 4. Sheriff

III. Structure

- A. The Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) Drone Unit shall have a number of members, as directed by the Sheriff.
- B. The unit shall have a Chief Pilot, trained and certified FAA pilots, trained observers, trained camera operators and safety officers.
- C. The Chief Pilot shall appoint a unit training officer(s). Unit training officers, in consultation with the Chief Pilot, will develop, prepare and keep records of training initiatives for the unit. They will further ensure annually that all members are in compliance with the certification and training needs established by this policy and FAA regulations. The Chief Pilot shall forward

copies of all training records to the Training Unit for inclusion in Agency training files. (Rev 05/2025)

- D. The Chief Pilot shall appoint unit equipment technician(s). Unit equipment technicians will be responsible for ensuring and coordinating the upkeep of equipment, identification of equipment in need of repair, and maintenance of the equipment maintenance log and unit equipment inventory. Any member issued a UAS/drone shall be responsible for the care of said equipment in accordance with Agency policy. They shall advise the equipment technician in writing/email of any warranty, maintenance, compliance, or damage related issues relate to their issued drone. The equipment technician will determine the necessary solution/repair, ensure the issue is rectified, and/or direct the member accordingly.

- 1. Any injury or loss or damage to property or equipment as a result of an Agency Drone Unit operation shall be documented in a standard incident report.

(Rev. 05/2025)

- E. The Chief Pilot shall ensure that a report noting total drone operations per jurisdiction along with the reasons for the operations shall be sent to the Sheriff's office of Professional Standards annually as part of the Agency's annual report. (Rev. 05./2025)

IV. Member Selection

- A. Members are selected from the complement of the Law Enforcement Division.
- B. Any member of this department interested in the FAA Part 107 Commercial Drone Certification or Crew Member position and has an interest in participating in the drone program as a: Remote Pilot in Command, Controller Operator, Visual Observer or Camera Operator is requested to send an electronic letter of request to the ACSO Chief Pilot. Applicants should include in the letter any previous drone operation experience, photography / videography or special skills you possess that would enhance the drone program.
- C. A list of recommendations will be forwarded to the Sheriff for final determination.

V. Qualifications

UAS operators / unit members must be certified in the operation of the UAS by successfully completing training conducted by ACSO Chief Pilot.

Unit members must meet the standards required by the FAA and must pass the required knowledge test for a remote pilot certificate and must keep their

aeronautical knowledge up to date.

A. Pilot in Command (PIC):

A person operating a small UAS must hold a remote pilot airman certificate with a small UAS rating by successfully passing the FAA Part 107 Airmen Knowledge Test.

The PIC will function as team leader and the operator of the UAS. The PIC will be ultimately responsible for the operation and solely responsible for input of commands/piloting of the UAS during flight.

The PIC will be responsible for UAS assembly, UAS Flight Preparation, UAS Post Flight Procedures, and UAS Disassembly/ Storage.

Additionally, the PIC will appoint the observer and safety officer at his discretion. FAA Part 107 certified pilot must be Pilot in Command for any flight mission.

B. Visual Observer:

The observer will maintain a visual observation of the UAS while it is in flight and alert the PIC of any conditions (obstructions, terrain, structures, air traffic, weather, etc.) which affect the safety of flight.

Additionally, the observer will be responsible for all aviation related communications required by FAA.

To accomplish this effectively, the observer will be in close proximity to the PIC to ensure instant relaying of information. The observer will also assist the safety officer in completing his functions.

C. Personnel Manipulating Controls:

Must be under the direct supervision of a person who does hold a remote pilot certificate (remote pilot in command). To qualify to be a Control Operator pilot, a person must be trained and vetted by the ACSO Chief Pilot.

D. Camera Operator:

To qualify to be a Camera Operator, a person must be trained and vetted by the ACSO Chief Pilot.

E. Safety Officer:

The safety officer will complete all ground operations regarding the UAS to include assembly, and launch preparations.

During flight, the safety officer will ensure that the operations area remains secured and both PIC and observer are not interrupted.

VI. Training Proficiency

Initial UAS training will be accomplished by the Chief Pilot.

Recurrent UAS training will be conducted on a monthly basis by all unit personnel. The training will consist of a minimum of 2 take-off and landing events and 8 hours of ground training in order to meet the proficiency and currency requirements.

FAA Part 107 Pilots must recertify every 24 months to maintain a current certification.

VII. Team Activation

A. Request for Emergency Activation

1. Request for activation of the Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) Drone Unit shall be made through the 911 Communication Center.
2. The Telecommunicator shall immediately notify the Chief Pilot or his designee. Prior to the activation of any member, the Undersheriff shall be notified and approve such activation, in his absence the Sheriff shall make such determination.
3. The Chief Pilot or his designee will advise if further unit member notifications are required.
4. The Communication Center staff shall make concurrent notification to the Undersheriff and the Sheriff.

B. Non-Emergency Activation

1. Request for non-emergency activation of the Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) Drone Unit shall be made through the Chief Pilot in a timely manner.
2. The decisions concerning the response will be made by the Undersheriff in consultation with the Chief Pilot.

VIII. Response

- A. The Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) Drone Unit shall respond to all other Albany County municipalities requesting assistance.
- B. They shall respond to municipalities outside Albany County as requested and approved by the Undersheriff or the Sheriff.
- C. All team members shall respond, when requested, to any unit activation.

Unit members (preferably the Chief Pilot or designee and/or PIC) will be contacted and advised to report to the call out location. The UAS unit members that respond to the scene will determine the response necessary from unit personnel in order to support the request. The Chief Pilot or designee along with the UAS unit members will determine if safe operation of the UAS can be accomplished as requested. The decision will be contingent upon several factors to include the ability of the UAS unit to operate within a secure perimeter, physical features of the area, and obstructions to flight, terrain, and the weather.

A minimum two man crew is required for all flights unless authorized by the Chief Pilot, Undersheriff or Sheriff.

- D. Unless it would compromise the safety of members or operational success, the public shall be notified of Agency drone operations via social media or press release by the Sheriff or his designee. (Rev. 05/2025)
- E. When sufficient personnel and equipment arrive, appropriate steps should be taken to complete the mission. This should include, but not be limited to:
 - 1. Establish a safe working area.
 - 2. Plan the mission with the aid of the ACSO UAS Mission Check List (Appendix A).
 - 3. Fly the mission with the aid of the ACSO UAS Operations Checklist (Appendix B).

All UAS activations will require the designation of a safety officer. The safety officer is empowered to immediately stop any activity when he or she observes such as being dangerous to the life and health of persons or property.

IX. Safety of Operation

- A. Safety of the UAS operations (including persons and property) is the responsibility of the entire team. UAS team members should bring to the

attention of other members any condition which they feel is a safety concern.

- B. Except as required by the mission, all UAS team members will ensure that no persons are in the vicinity of the UAS during operations to avoid flying over uninvolved persons or vehicles.
- C. Under no circumstances shall the UAS be utilized directly over large gatherings of people, as a chase vehicle in a vehicle pursuit or operated from a moving vehicle unless otherwise stipulated in the COA and/or FAA Part 107 waivers.
- D. Except for the purpose of training or with UAS supervisory approval, only UAS unit members who meet the requirements set forth in Section V (QUALIFICATIONS) will be permitted to act as a unit member.
- E. UAS team members will comply with the UAS Operator Manual, warning, limitations, placards, and/or checklists at all times unless an emergency dictates otherwise.
- F. UAS PICs are authorized to evaluate and accept or decline any mission or portion thereof which affects the safety of operations.
- G. All UAS operations will be conducted in Day Light Visual Meteorological Conditions only, unless otherwise stipulated in the COA and or FAA Part 107 waivers.
- H. All UAS team members will be familiar with the COA and/or FAA Part 107 waivers which relate to operation of the UAS and comply with same.

X. Normal Operations

A. Operations Area

The operation area selected by the UAS team shall be located within a secure perimeter whenever possible. The area should be evaluated for adequate space and clearances in order to safely assemble, launch, and recover the UAS. Attention should be given to overhead obstacles and obstructions that may pose a risk to the UAS during operation. The site selected and utilized by the UAS team should be restricted and access granted to personnel for operational purposes only.

B. UAS Assembly

The UAS will be assembled on site by the UAS team as described in Section IV. ORGANIZATION, C. DUTIES.

C. Flight Procedures

A pre-flight check of the UAS will be completed in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendation and applicable FARs utilizing the ACSO Operations Checklist (Appendix A)

XI. Flight Operations

- A. The UAS shall be operated in accordance with manufacturer specifications and applicable FAA limitations and restrictions.
- B. A copy of the current valid COA and/or FAA Part 107 waivers shall be present whenever UAS operations are conducted.
- C. The lost link response shall be set to rally point and the maximum altitude set in accordance with the altitude limit of the COA and/or FAA Part 107 waivers.
- D. For all operations, the observer shall utilize a distance from the UAS that will adequately permit them to maintain a visual observation of the UAS and maintain officer safety.

All UAS team members will comply with all limitations, restrictions and requirements as enumerated in the COA and/or FAA Part 107 waivers.

XII. Statement to comply its safeguarding privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties as provided by NYS DHSES and FEMA:

"This agency shall only collect information using UAS/sUAS or use UAS/sUAS collected information to the extent such collection or use is consistent with and relevant to an authorized purpose. UAS/sUAS collected information that is not maintained in a system of records covered by the Privacy Act shall not be disseminated unless dissemination is required by law or fulfills an authorized purpose and complies with agency requirements. Information collected using UAS/sUAS that may contain personally identifiable information shall not be retained for more than 180 days unless it is determined to be necessary to an authorized mission or is equipped to be retained for a longer period by any other applicable law or regulation.

UAS recorded data will not be collected, disseminated or retained solely for the purpose of monitoring activities protected by the U.S. Constitution, such as First Amendment's protections of religion, speech, press, assembly, and redress of grievances (e.g. protests, demonstrations).

Collection, use, dissemination, or extension of UAS/sUAS recorded data should not be based solely on individual characteristics (e.g. race, ethnicity,

national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, or gender), which is a violation of law.”

A copy of this Agency’s Drone/Unmanned Aerial Systems policy has been published to the Agency’s webpage for public viewing. It is located along with other policies in the Complaint/Suggestion Online Portal section of the website designed to facilitate easier public review, comment, or contact.

(Rev. 06/2025)

General Order

28-SO-17

Ordered By:

Craig D. Apple, Sr.
Sheriff