

MEDIA ADVISORY

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NIFC URGES NEWS MEDIA TO FOLLOW FAA POLICY & RECOMMENDED BEST PRACTICES

WHEN SEEKING TO FLY UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS (UAS) NEAR WILDFIRES TO ENSURE

SAFE, EFFICIENT, AND SUCCESSFUL OPERATIONS

The National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) is urging news media seeking to fly UAS (also known as drones) near wildfires to follow Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) policy and best practices to avoid mid-air collisions, risks to firefighter/public safety, and hampering the effectiveness of wildfire suppression operations.

Unauthorized UAS flights over or near wildfires by members of the public is a significant problem throughout the United States with more than 100 documented instances since 2015. News media outlets should not use UAS footage of wildfires shot by members of the public to discourage unauthorized flights over or near wildfires.

Aerial firefighting aircraft, such as air tankers, lead planes’ and helicopters, fly at very low altitudes; Typically just a couple of hundred feet above the ground and in the same airspace as unmanned platforms. This creates the potential for a mid-air collision and pilot distraction that may result in a crash that could harm aerial/ground firefighters. If an unauthorized, unannounced, or unidentifiable drone is detected flying over or near a wildfire, fire managers may have to ground all Airtankers, helicopters, and other aerial firefighting aircraft until they can confirm that the drone has left the area and they feel confident that the airspace is safe. This can cause wildfires to become larger and more costly and to unduly threaten lives, property, and valuable natural and cultural resources.

NIFC recommends that the news media adhere to the following to ensure safe, efficient, and successful flights:

* News media must adhere to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requirements of their Section 333 grant of exemption or the Small UAS Rule (Part 107). News media must have a waiver under Part 107 to fly over people. News media may not fly under FAA rules for recreational or hobby use of a UAS. Additional information is available on the FAA website at <https://www.faa.gov/uas/faqs/> in Question 4 in the Flying for Work or Business (non-recreational) section.
* News media that seek to fly near a wildfire should contact the Public Information Officer or Incident Commander assigned to the wildfire or a Public Affairs Officer or a Fire Staff or Management Officer of the unit the wildfire is burning on. Contact information for wildfires is available on InciWeb, <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/> and contact information for units is available on agency web pages. Assistance with finding contact information is available by calling 208-387-5050.
* Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFRs) are typically put in place during wildfires. News media must fly UAS outside of TFRs unless all of the following conditions are met:
	+ - There is a valid need to fly a media UAS within the TFR;
		- News media outlets are required to apply for and obtain a Special Government Interest Waiver (SGI) with System Security Operations Division of FAA Headquarters, and;
		- News media UAS flights must be coordinated with the Incident Air Operations Branch Director and Incident Air Attack.
* The Public Information Officer assigned to the wildfire or the Public Affairs Officer on the unit can put news media in contact with staff. Assistance with finding contact information is available by calling 208-387-5050.
* Information to apply for an SGI waiver can be found here; <https://www.faa.gov/uas/getting_started/emergency_approval/>
* News media UAS flights outside of TFRs should also be coordinated with the Incident Management Organization so Incident personnel are aware of the mission. The Public Information Officer assigned to the wildfire or the Public Affairs Officer on the unit can put news media in contact with staff. Assistance with finding contact information is available by calling 208-387-5050.
* News media assistance in informing the public about the risks posed by unauthorized UAS flights over or near wildfires to firefighter and public safety and effectiveness of wildfire suppression operations is greatly appreciated. Additional information is available at <https://www.nifc.gov/drones/index.html> and graphics that can be used by news media at no charge are available at <https://www.nifc.gov/drones/outreach.html> Additional information and interviews are available by calling 208-387-5050

Timely communications are the key to a safe, efficient and successful outcome for all parties involved. Thank you for your cooperation!