

Go read this NY Times report about how police departments are using drones



As drones get smarter and the Federal Aviation Administration issues more waivers for its drone regulations, we're likely to see more law enforcement agencies using them in their day-to-day, including for 911 calls. The formidable Cade Metz writes for *The New York Times* about what this looks like in practice, and to be perfectly honest, it's extremely disconcerting, as Chula Vista, California officers "chase" a "suspect" using a drone:

When the man left the car, carrying a gun and a bag of heroin, a nearby police car had trouble following as he sprinted across the street and ducked behind a wall. But as he threw the gun into a dumpster and hid the bag of heroin, the drone, hovering above him, caught everything on camera. When he slipped through the back door of a strip mall, exited through the front door and ran down the sidewalk, it caught that, too.

Watching the live video feed, an officer back at headquarters relayed the details to the police on the scene, who soon caught the man and took him into custody

According to the *Times*, the Chula Vista police department uses drones on around 15 emergency calls a day, part of its Drone as First Responder program. In July, the Chula Vista PD received approval to fly its Skydio drones beyond visual line of sight in emergency situations, but with conditions: It couldn't fly higher than 50 feet above the nearest obstacle, had to stay within 1,500 feet of the pilot, and had to return to visual line of sight "as soon as practical" (however, that the drones used in the *Times*' example above were DJI drones).

Budget cuts for police departments are looming as local governments try to weather the economic downturn of the coronavirus pandemic. There's also the push toward reexamining how police departments are funded, and drones provide a more cost-effective option than helicopters and pilots, the *Times* article notes. Plus, the drones can allow for "policing" that adheres to social distancing guidelines.

But as a policy analyst with the ACLU told the *Times*, the privacy concerns are considerable. Technology like drones "could allow law enforcement to enforce any area of the law against anyone they want."

To read more about how police departments can use drones and the myriad issues involved, check out this unsettling report in the *New York Times*.

<https://www.theverge.com/2020/12/6/22156987/go-read-this-police-drones-skydio-dji-privacy>