



University of Pittsburgh
Drones
Policy RI 13

Implementing Executive: Senior Vice Chancellor for Research
Responsible Unit: Office of Trade Compliance
Category: Research and Innovation
Effective Date: March 27, 2023

I. Purpose

The University of Pittsburgh (University) recognizes the ever-expanding applications to use Unmanned Aircraft Systems (Drones). The use of Drones is creating interest and opportunities for staff, faculty, and students in the areas of education, research, and public service. The use of Drones also may support University functions, such as marketing, athletics, security, and emergency management. This Policy acknowledges the benefit Drones may provide to support the University's mission and governs their use in a way that they can be operated safely, for the benefit of the University, and in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations.

II. Scope

This Policy applies to the operation of Drones on behalf of the University, as well as uses of Drones by any person or organization on property that is leased or owned by the University on any campus. This Policy applies to Drone operations in both indoor and exterior areas, as well as the use of a Drone acquired with University resources. This Policy does not apply to Drone operations by the University of Pittsburgh Police Department or other first responder operations conducted in accordance with applicable law.

III. Definitions

- A. **Unmanned Aircraft (UA)**: The flying portion of a UAS, flown by an operator via a ground control system, or autonomously through use of an on-board computer, communication links, and any additional equipment that is necessary for the UA to operate safely. (The University recognizes that the term "unmanned" is not gender inclusive but has adopted the term for clarity and in alignment with federal regulations.)
- B. **Drone**: also referred to as an Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) is an unmanned aircraft and all of the associated support equipment, control station, data links, telemetry, communications, and navigation equipment, etc., necessary to operate the unmanned aircraft.

- C. Drone operator: person(s) in direct control and command of the UAS.
- D. University property: property or facilities owned, leased, or controlled by the University of Pittsburgh.
- E. Hobby or Recreational Use: the act of flying a Drone for fun or amusement, as defined by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) (see https://www.faa.gov/uas/recreational_fliers/).
- F. Sensitive Institutional Information: means University information or data that is not generally available to the public or that is: proprietary to the University; covered by a confidentiality agreement or terms; covered by privacy laws or regulations; or subject to other access restrictions.
- G. University Directed Flights: A Drone flight for educational, research, or commercial/business activities by a University faculty, staff, student or contractor.
- H. Private University Spaces: locations or areas on University property where individuals have a reasonable expectation of privacy, for example, dormitories, locker rooms, and bathrooms.
- I. Airspace: the air available to aircraft to fly in. See the FAA [regulations and policy](#) for more information and airspace classifications.

IV. Policy

Drones may be flown for commercial, hobby or recreational, or educational purposes, provided flights strictly follow current FAA guidance for each purpose. This Policy provides a framework for the University on the acceptable uses of Drones on behalf of the University and a process for those seeking to operate a Drone (or other UAS) on a University property.

A. Regulatory Overview

UAS are regulated by the FAA. The Federal rule for operating Drones under 55 pounds in the National Airspace System (NAS) is [14 CFR Part 107](#), referred to as the Small UAS Rule. Part 107 provides the default regulations for all Drones under 55 pounds. Drone pilots who fly under Part 107 are required to become an FAA-certified Drone pilot by passing a knowledge test. In addition, all Drones must be registered with the FAA. Flights involving Drones weighing more than 55 pounds require an exemption under the Special Authority for Certain Unmanned Systems found in [49 U.S.C. 44807](#).

There is a limited statutory exception to Part 107 for those who fly for recreational, educational, or research purposes. The Exception for Limited Operation of Unmanned Aircraft, found in [49 U.S.C. 44809](#), defines how, when, and where individuals may fly Drones weighing less than 55 pounds for recreational, educational, or research purposes. Due to the

popularity of recreational Drone flights, the FAA updates its recreational flight guidance on a regular basis.

B. Authorized Flights

University directed flights (i.e., a flight by a University faculty, staff, students, or contractors) are authorized, as outlined in Sections C and D, and the Office of Trade Compliance (OTC), or designee, must receive notification of all such Drone flights scheduled to occur on a University property prior to the flight with as much notice as possible, but not less than 24 hours prior to the flight. The notification process is documented on the [OTC website](#).

There is no notification requirement for flights that are not University directed, but a third party seeking to operate a Drone on University property for commercial, educational, or research purposes must follow the requirements outlined in Section C and D, and may be required to enter into an agreement with the University as a condition to operate the Drone. If in doubt, the third party may contact the OTC, or designee, who will direct third party applicants to the appropriate contact to complete any companion agreement required.

C. Types of Flights

a. Commercial/business Drone flights (including contracted flights):

Commercial Drone flights are those that are done for non-recreational purposes, and include University directed flights done for promotional, athletic, or other business operations. These flights must follow Part 107 guidelines, directed by an FAA-certified Drone pilot, and utilize a Drone weighing less than 55 pounds that is registered with the FAA. A link to the Part 107 guidelines can be found on the Drone section of the [Office of Trade Compliance website](#).

i. University Contracted Commercial Drone flights

University departments desiring to engage the services of a commercial Drone operator or service provider must ensure the contract and scope of work comply with the law and any requirements included in this policy. In addition, contracts for Drone-related services must include specific contract terms to include additional representations, warranties, and insurance terms. University departments must coordinate with OTC before entering into these agreements.

b. Educational and Research Flights

Educational and Research Drone flights are those operated by an accredited institution of higher education as a component of the institution's curricula or research. While the University encourages all Drone flyers to follow Part 107, it recognizes that the Limited Exception is a viable option for educational or research flights. While not required, University faculty are encouraged to register classes that will involve Drone flights with the OTC, or designee, with as much notice as possible prior to the beginning of the class. Educational and Research flyers are strongly advised to read and apply current FAA guidance on recreational flights prior to flying.

c. Recreational Flights

Recreational flights are those done for purely recreational purposes. These flights may occur under either Part 107 or the Exception for Limited Operation of Unmanned Aircraft. While the University encourages all recreational flyers to follow Part 107, it recognizes that the Limited Exception is a viable option, and one that carries fewer requirements. Recreational flyers are strongly advised to read and apply current FAA guidance on recreational flights prior to flying

D. University of Pittsburgh Restrictions

In addition to the regulatory requirements articulated above, the University will not permit the following uses of Drones on a University property, unless an exception is granted as noted below:

- a. For safety and privacy reasons, Drones may not be operated inside any University owned or leased building. Exceptions must be requested through the [OTC website](#). OTC will make a determination on exception requests, in consultation with the Senior Vice Chancellor of Business Operations (SVC-BO).
- b. Drones may not be used to monitor or record areas where there is a reasonable expectation of privacy of those individuals occupying or using an outdoor or indoor space. These types of private University spaces would include but are not limited to offices, classrooms, labs, restrooms, locker rooms, individual residential rooms, dressing rooms, campus camp facilities, daycare facilities, and health treatment rooms.
- c. Drones may not be used to monitor or record sensitive institutional or personally identifiable information, which may be found, for example, on an individual's workspaces, computer or other electronic displays.

V. Noncompliance

Operation of a Drone in violation of applicable laws or regulations may subject the Drone Operator to civil or criminal penalties.

Operation of a Drone in violation of this Policy may result in disciplinary action consistent with University Policy.

VI. Governance or Responsibilities

- A. OTC is responsible for providing advice and guidance to the University and its stakeholders on appropriate use of a Drone on University property or involving the use of a University purchased Drone.
- B. Senior Vice Chancellor for Research (SVC-R) has the oversight responsibility for the implementation of this Policy.
- C. The University Police Department has the right to enforce this Policy and may intervene or interrupt any unsafe, unlawful, or noncompliant Drone operation within its

jurisdiction or at the direction of any other law enforcement authority, whether or not previously approved by OTC.

- D. Drone pilots must comply with all FAA regulations; federal and state laws; and University policies.

VII. Contact Information

This Policy is posted under Research & Innovation Policies on the Office of Policy Development & Management's website and can be found at: <https://www.policy.pitt.edu/>.

For specific questions related to this Policy, please contact Office of Trade Compliance at: ECHELP@pitt.edu.

VIII. Related Authorities and Policies

[AC 39 Guidelines on Academic Integrity – Student and Faculty Obligations and Hearing](#)

[RI 08 Responsibilities of Sponsored Research Investigators](#)

[Student Code of Conduct](#)