



PRESSRELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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Firefighters and Sheriff's Deputies prepare to fly Drones over Redding on Friday to officially document the damage from the air using new technologies

Multiple Drones will be flying over the burnt out and damaged areas of the City of Redding and Shasta County starting on Friday and over the weekend, but not the kind that so often cause Firefighting Aircraft to be grounded and has local Police Officers looking for the culprits.

Instead, they will be Public Safety Drones operated by professional Firefighters and Sheriff's Deputies who are specially trained to operate Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) or Drones, under 50 pounds during emergencies. A new phenomena, as Drones gain acceptance and a broader understanding of their critical value to first responders.

The Menlo Park Fire Protection District and Alameda County Sheriff's Department have once again partnered their Drone Programs together to assist with aerial damage assessments, mapping and documentation of the City of Redding and Shasta County areas affected by the Carr Fire.

Both programs are certified under the Federal Aviation Administrations (FAA) and have achieved a Certificate of Waiver or Authorization (COA). The group last worked together in the City of Santa Rosa and Sonoma County during the 2017 Tubbs Fire, doing similar aerial documentation work.

The Fire District's UAS/Drone Program was started in 2014 and Firefighters have used Drones during hazardous material incidents, grass, timber and structure fires, along with missions above the San Francisco Bay, or flooded areas, and in direct support of water rescues or recoveries. Most notably during the South Fork Fire in Yosemite last year, they were flown at night, or in the early morning, to monitor fire behavior and to determine if the fire had jumped containment lines, and to provide real time aerial imagery that was shared directly with fire crews headed into the field for improved situational awareness and to help pinpoint suppression efforts.

The Alameda County Sheriff's Department started their Drone Program in 2014 and Sheriff's Deputies have used Drones to document crime scenes, monitor emergency incidents, help locate and apprehend

suspects and for wilderness search and rescue. Most notably, they assisted the Oakland Fire Department with the documentation of the Ghost Ship Warehouse fire and tragedy.

Unlike last year's Tubbs Fire, the Teams will be directly working with City representatives who specialize in Technology and Information Management. The eight member Fire District Team arrived Thursday to prepare for Drone Operations on Friday. Those preparations included the review, or establishment, of temporary flight restrictions (TFR) for other aircraft and the coordination with the Carr Fires Air Boss, to establish an air anti-conflict plan and to then preview the impacted areas to be flown for familiarity and approach.

Menlo Park Fire Battalion Chief Tom Calvert, who leads the Team said "we've learned from our previous experiences above Coffee Park and Fountain Grove last year that we only need to fly between 150 – 200 feet in elevation to capture high resolution photography and video imagery. Using special mapping software, we can then create a zoom-in, zoom-out, 360 degree, stitched together aerial mosaic of the damaged and destroyed areas".

The Teams will also be experimenting with several new mapping software products and will be using a new counter-drone product called Aeroscope, produced by DJI, and owned by the San Francisco Police Department, which will allow them to detect and find any Drone that is unlawfully within seven miles of their operations which could compromise their efforts.

The eight member Alameda County Sheriff's Team will arrive Friday morning and coordinate with the Menlo Fire Team. Both Teams will then be assigned to specific areas and grids that will need to be flown, documented but not duplicated, wasting time. Both Teams believe this effort could take two or three full days to accomplish.

Menlo Park Fire Chief Schapelhouman said, "It's important to understand that we are once again breaking new ground here. The use of Public Safety Drones to properly document damaged and destroyed areas from the air using Drones, that then creates a high resolution interactive map, or a before and after the incident mosaic, is extremely helpful to the homeowners who can then actually find and see their neighborhood and/or property. That also gives them the ability to send that information to their insurance company, or have it be used for reference by the State or Federal Government (FEMA) for claims by residents or the City and County themselves. That's essential and could potentially speed up repopulation efforts because you can focus, or re-focus, your priorities using this helpful intelligence".

The Fire District is currently participating in a State wide effort that will fully integrate UAS/Drone operations into the California Fire Service by typing their specific use case or benefit, establishing corresponding training and operational standards and then conducting an annual resource inventory or list of who has what capability with the appropriately certified personnel available for mutual aid requests within California.

Within the next few weeks, the Fire District will be advertising for a newly created 'Technology Specialist' civilian analyst position and later in the year the District will take delivery of a specialized van that will be used to support and maximize UAS/Drone operations in the Fire District or region. The 17 member Drone Team operates 12 different multi-functional platforms and trains regularly.

The Fire District currently has five other firefighters and an Engine assigned to the fire lines on the Carr Fire and Fire Line Paramedics assigned to the Ferguson and Mendocino Complex Fires. All local Fire District Stations continue to be fully staffed and equipped.

The Fire District provides essential fire and emergency services to over 100,000 District residents who live in the Town of Atherton, Cities of East Palo Alto, Menlo Park, and Unincorporated San Mateo County, and is on contract to the SLAC National Accelerator Laboratories.

The District is located along the San Francisco Bay in an area that is termed “Silicon Valley” and is also the home of Facebook.

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