MILWAUKEE POLICE DEPARTMENT

STANDARD OPERATING INSTRUCTION

AIRBORNE ASSESSMENT TEAM

ISSUED: December 19, 2025	**EFFECTIVE:** December 19, 2025	**REVIEWED/APPROVED BY:** Assistant Chief Steven Johnson **DATE:** November 13, 2025
ACTION: Amends SOI (April 7, 2025)		**WILEAG STANDARD(S): 6.1.2**

I. PURPOSE (WILEAG 6.1.2)

The purpose of this directive is to establish program parameters governing the management and use of all Uncrewed Aerial Systems (UAS) technology deployed by the Milwaukee Police Department.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the department to utilize UAS technology to enhance public safety for all residents. Only department owned UAS shall be used by trained and authorized personnel in accordance with the United States and State of Wisconsin Constitutions, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations, Wisconsin State Law, and department policy.

III. DEFINITIONS

A. DRONE AS FIRST RESPONDER (DFR) OPERATIONS

A police response strategy which utilizes pre-positioned drones launched from stationary launch points to enable rapid, remote deployment to calls for police service, often prior to uniformed squad response, in order to enhance civilian and officer safety by increasing situational awareness.

B. FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION (FAA)

The FAA regulates U.S. civil aviation; U.S. commercial space transportation; operates control towers; builds, installs, and maintains electronic aids to navigation; and registers all pilots and aircraft in the United States.

C. PATROL LED OPERATIONS

A police response strategy which utilizes forward deployed remote pilots with drone equipment to enable rapid deployment, from areas out in the patrol field, to calls for service in order to enhance civilian and officer safety by increasing situational awareness.

D. REMOTE PILOT IN COMMAND (RPIC)

A person who holds a remote pilot certificate with a UAS rating and has the final authority and responsibility for the operation and safety of a UAS operation conducted under Code

of Federal Regulation (CFR) 14 Part 107.

E. UNCREWED AERIAL VEHICLE (UAV)

A powered aerial vehicle that uses aerodynamic forces to provide vehicle lift, can fly autonomously or be piloted remotely, and be expendable or recoverable. Refers more specifically to the vehicle itself and must be used in conjunction with a pilot, controller, and wireless signal.

F. UNCREWED AERIAL SYSTEM (UAS)

A small uncrewed aircraft and its associated elements (including communication links and the components that control the small uncrewed aircraft) that are required for the safe and efficient operation of the small unmanned aircraft in the national airspace system.

G. VISUAL OBSERVER (VO)

A person who is designated by the RPIC to assist the RPIC and the person manipulating the flight controls of the small UAS to see and avoid other air traffic or objects aloft or on the ground.

IV. PERSONNEL ORGANIZATION (WILEAG 6.1.2)

A. The Airborne Assessment Team (AAT) is administered by the Specialized Patrol Division (SPD).

1. The commanding officer of the SPD shall designate an SPD lieutenant to serve as the team commander and provide managerial oversite.

2. The team commander shall designate an SPD sergeant as the team supervisor.

3. Since the AAT is a “Team of Teams” with centralized management operating throughout the city, the SPD sergeant, or designee, shall be assigned as team coordinator.

4. Embedded department AATs shall consist of at least one sworn RPIC and may include trained VOs or other support personnel.
(WILEAG 6.1.2.2)

B. SELECTION OF AAT MEMBERS

1. The commanding officer of the SPD will make final decisions related to assignments to the AAT for the purposes of this pilot project.

2. Selected members will be required to complete all training.

C. TEAM COMMANDER

1. The AAT commander will command and supervise all members assigned to the team.

They will be responsible for approving planned missions, procuring equipment, and assisting the Office of Management, Analysis, and Planning with developing policy and procedures.

2. The AAT commander is responsible for ensuring all training materials are submitted to the commanding officer of the Training Division for approval.

D. TEAM SUPERVISOR / COORDINATOR

1. The AAT supervisor/coordinator will prepare and coordinate staffing, coordinate planned missions, and conduct administrative and operational reviews.

2. The AAT supervisor/coordinator shall serve as the team's community liaison and the centralized point of contact between teams. The team supervisor/coordinator is responsible for the following:

   a. Initial development and deployment of the department's UAS program.

   b. Coordination and communication with community stakeholders to afford all the opportunity to contribute to the AAT program. The team coordinator shall work with the Office of Community Outreach and Engagement to coordinate this communication.

   c. Development and implementation of the UAS training curriculum.

   d. Development of the UAS maintenance program.

   e. Research and demonstration of potential UAS use cases.

   f. Primary SPD RPIC. Support RPIC for embedded teams.

   g. Coordination between embedded teams.

E. REMOTE PILOT IN COMMAND

1. RPIC's shall be experts in the respective areas of operation. After selection by the commanding officer of the SPD, RPIC's must successfully complete initial department training and attend all subsequent training. All training must be in accordance with FAA regulations and the department shall abide by operational guidelines set by the FAA. Upon completion, trained RPIC's will be deployed to their respective areas of operation to meet the mission of the AAT.

2. Additional qualifying training is required before any flight operations can be conducted in Class B, C, D, or E airspace that starts at ground level. Qualifying training can be obtained during actual flight missions in the presence of a qualified RPIC. Qualifying training must be obtained before an AAT member may act as RPIC and should be flown in Class G airspace

3. Minimum Qualifications for Appointment

   a. A FAA Remote Pilot Certificate (14 CFR Part 107).

   b. Demonstrated ability to safely operate a UAS under normal conditions.

   c. Demonstrated ability to land a UAS under simulated emergency conditions as described in Emergency Landing Procedures.

4. Qualifying Training upon Appointment

   a. A minimum of five (5) qualifying hours of training, including commensurate flight time, is required before acting as RPIC for general UAS operations.

   b. A minimum of twenty (20) takeoff and landings are required to act as RPIC for any operations.

   c. Requires a minimum of three (3) take-offs and landings of the type of UAS being used within one month of a mission flight.

   d. Advanced police tactics and search and seizure laws related to UAS use.

5. To ensure safe operations and effective integration into the National Airspace System (NAS), department UAS will only be piloted by sworn members who have obtained Remote Pilot Certifications from the FAA. All members assigned to UAS operations will adhere to Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations, section 107.12. (WILEAG 6.1.2.2)

F. VISUAL OBSERVER

1. A VO will be required for situational awareness. The VO's primary responsibility is the safety of the RPIC during flight operations. The VO will also assist the RPIC with identification and mitigation of flight hazards and serve as primary for all communications. Ideally the VO will also be a certified RPIC.

2. Qualifying training is required before any observations can be conducted in class B, C, D, or E airspace that starts at ground level. Qualifying training can be obtained during actual flight missions in the presence of a qualified VO.

3. Minimum Qualifications for Appointment

   Successful completion of a department approved VO training course.

4. Qualifying Training upon Appointment

   a. A minimum of five (5) qualifying hours of flight or observation time.

   b. Advanced police tactics and search and seizure laws related to UAS use. (WILEAG 6.1.2.2)

G. SUPPORT PERSONNEL

To enhance the level of safety and promote the appropriate use of UAS, command, supervisory and team presence at any mission may also include officers in training and other support staff deemed necessary by the team commander.

H. SAFETY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (SMS)

The objective of the department's aviation-based safety management system is to promote safe, efficient, and effective UAS operations. This is accomplished by identification and mitigation of UAS operational risks and hazards to as low a level as possible. All operations shall adhere to the SMS. The AAT personnel management structure ensures proper planning, implementation, and maintenance of emergency response procedures. SMS based team training, communication, and education will be utilized to create an organization-wide safety culture.

V. PROTECTIONS AND PROHIBITIONS (WILEAG 6.1.2)

A. UNITED STATES CONSTITUTIONAL PROTECTIONS

The department prohibits the collection, use, retention or dissemination of UAS collected information in any manner that violates a person's reasonable expectation to privacy. That expectation may be applicable when an area is not open to public use, is privately owned and access is lawfully controlled, or in instances an owner has taken normal precautions to maintain privacy. There is no reasonable expectation to privacy in public or openly accessible places, or in places viewable with an unaided eye.
(WILEAG 6.1.2.5)

B. STATE OF WISCONSIN PROTECTIONS

The department prohibits the collection, use, retention, or dissemination of UAS collected information in any manner that would do the following:

1. Gather evidence or other information in a criminal investigation from or at a place or location where an individual has a reasonable expectation of privacy without first obtaining a search warrant contrary to Wis. Stat. § 175.55(2). This statute does not apply if the UAS camera is used:

   a. in a public place or to assist in an active search and rescue operation;

   b. to locate an escaped prisoner;

   c. to surveil a place or location for the purpose of executing an arrest warrant; or

   d. when there is reasonable suspicion to believe that the use of the camera is necessary to prevent imminent danger to an individual or to prevent the imminent destruction of evidence.

2. Utilizes a weaponized drone contrary to Wis. Stat. § 941.292.
(WILEAG 6.1.2.1, 6.1.2.5)

C. The department prohibits the collection, use, retention or dissemination of UAS collected information in any manner that would harass, coerce, or discriminate against any person in violation of SOP 001 Fair and Impartial Policing.

D. The department prohibits the collection, use, retention or dissemination of UAS collected information in any manner that would utilize facial recognition software.

VI. OPERATIONS (WILEAG 6.1.2)

A. AUTHORIZED USE OF UAS

Qualified, trained, and command authorized department personnel may conduct UAS operations in the following areas when approved by the team supervisor, or designee (unless the operation requires the approval of the team commander as delineated below):

1. Land and waterborne search, rescue, and recovery operations.

2. Port and critical infrastructure security.

3. Active threat response.

4. Planned and unplanned event management in accordance with SOP 910 Civil Disturbance and Crowd Management.

5. Investigative evidence collection (e.g., crime scene, crash reconstruction).

6. Drone as First Responder (DFR) operations.

7. In support of department operations with authorization of the team commander.

8. Counter UAS operations with authorization of the team commander.

9. In support of other City of Milwaukee departments with authorization of the team commander.
(WILEAG 6.1.2.1)

Note: Prior to remote launch or upon arrival at a scene, the RPIC shall make the final decision whether to deploy UAS technology.

B. PATROL LED OPERATIONS

1. Police members should contact their dispatcher when on the scene of an incident that may benefit from the use of UAS technology in accordance with subsection A. The dispatcher will then dispatch the closest available patrol led drone team recommended by the CAD system to the scene.

2. If it is determined that no patrol led drone team is on duty, a supervisor shall respond to the scene to assess whether a team call out is warranted. The on-scene supervisor shall contact their shift commander who in turn shall contact the Specialized Patrol (SPD) at extension [redacted] to relay information and request a team. SPD personnel shall gather facts surrounding the request before contacting the AAT commander to determine if personnel shall be assigned to the call.

C. DRONE AS FIRST RESPONDER (DFR) OPERATIONS

1. Deployment

   a. RPIC's assigned to DFR operations shall monitor incoming calls for service and police radio frequencies to determine when deployment of DFR technology could potentially save lives, enhance civilian or officer safety, or positively impact the efficiency of department operations.

   b. RPIC's assigned to DFR operations shall have full discretion when determining whether to respond to a call for service.

2. Safety

   a. All DFR operations shall comply with the Certificate of Waiver governed by 14 CFR Part 91 issued to the department by the FAA.

   b. RPIC's assigned to DFR operations shall utilize web-based applications for the detection and monitoring of crewed air traffic in the vicinity of DFR operations. These applications shall rely on automatic dependent surveillance broadcast (ADS-B) information providing real time telemetry data of flights. DFR RPIC's shall give way to any crewed aircraft.

   c. During flight, DFR RPIC's should make reasonable efforts to avoid hovering over civilians and non-essential personnel.

D. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

1. Deployment of the AAT is an opportunity to positively engage with the community by enhancing public safety, streamlining services, and promoting innovative use of UAS technology.

2. Members assigned to the AAT are responsible for engaging with the community to promote collaborative partnerships and solve problems in accordance with SOP 003 Community Oriented Policing. Opportunities to engage with the community include, but are not limited, to the following:

   a. Proactive response to calls for service involving UAS use.

   b. Active participation in community events and displays.

   c. Outreach to relevant government entities, organizations, and businesses prior to

training or scheduled flights to share information and answer questions.

d. Follow up post scheduled and emergent flight to share information and answer questions.

e. Utilization of community orientated policing techniques to identify issues UAS operations may be uniquely equipped to solve.

E. COLLABORATION WITH CITY OF MILWAUKEE GOVERNMENT ENTITIES

1. Leveraging UAS technology will maximize efficiencies and increase cost savings throughout the city via enhanced service delivery. It is the goal of the department to collaborate with all city departments to develop and coordinate UAS teams focused on enhancing safety, streamlining operations, and reducing service costs to benefit all residents.

2. The team commander will coordinate with other city departments to show how UAS can be effectively utilized during this pilot project so that other city departments can determine if they would like to establish their own UAS program.

F. All UAS collected digital evidence shall be imported into Evidence.com no later than the end of the RPIC's tour of duty.

G. Any complaint alleging inappropriate use of a UAS or a violation of a person's civil rights with sUAS shall be investigated in accordance with SOP 450 Personnel Investigations.

VII. EQUIPMENT, MAINTENANCE, AND REQUIRED LOGS (WILEAG 6.1.2)

A. EQUIPMENT

1. All efforts will be made to utilize UAS platforms that are National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) compliant.

2. Mission ready UAS cases shall include the department approved aircraft with fully charged battery, two supplemental fully charged batteries, fully charged controller, necessary cables, lens cleaning cloth, and one complete set of spare propellers. (WILEAG 6.1.2.3)

B. MAINTENANCE

1. All UAS aircraft and control systems are required to be regularly serviced and in operational condition prior to operational flight. At a minimum, maintenance is required to follow the equipment manufacturer's recommendations. Any UAS requiring mechanical, firmware, or software maintenance or updates shall be function tested and deemed airworthy prior to mission deployment.

2. RPIC's will be responsible for the maintenance of their issued UAS. All equipment shall be stowed mission ready and capable of deployment when not in use. (WILEAG 6.1.2.4)

C. REQUIRED LOGS

1. Pilot Logs

AAT pilots are required to maintain flight records by entering the following information into the department approved database no later than the end of their tour of duty:

a. the reason for the flight;

b. the aircraft utilized,

c. time, date, location, and duration of the flight;

d. the names of the supervisor approving the deployment and staff assigned; and

e. a summary of the activities covered, actions taken, and outcomes from the deployment.

2. Maintenance Logs

a. Every UAS requires a detailed maintenance log which documents scheduled and unscheduled maintenance, to include mechanical repairs and firmware or software updates.

b. The log shall include the date and time of the maintenance and a description of the work done.

c. Log entries shall also note date and time of the functions test to deem the UAS airworthy prior to mission deployment.

d. The RPIC shall be responsible for ensuring the maintenance log is completed and kept up to date.
(WILEAG 6.1.2.4)

VIII. TRANSPARENCY AND DATA PROTECTION

A. PUBLIC NOTICE

For pre-planned events, the department will make every effort to notify the public when it is likely UAS will be deployed. The team supervisor shall notify the department's Public Information Office so that this information can be disseminated via a press release or through the department's social media channels.

Note: During emergency response and proactive Port of Milwaukee and critical infrastructure security patrols, it will not be possible to make public notifications prior to UAS deployment.

B. DATA COLLECTION AND USE

All data collected via UAS deployment will be used for official department purposes only.

C. DATA PRIVACY / RETENTION OF RECORDINGS / RECORDS REQUESTS

1. All digital media that is captured with a UAS is the property of and will be retained by the Milwaukee Police Department for a minimum of 130 days following the date it is recorded. Captured video may be retained for longer periods in the event the video is the subject of a litigation hold, a criminal case, part of discovery, etc. Captured video that is retained shall be retained in accordance with the provisions of SOP 747.25(G)(2).

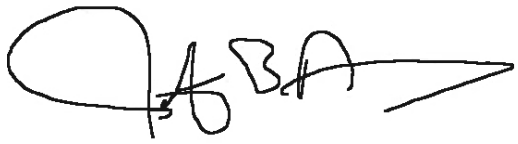
2. Unauthorized accessing, copying, or releasing captured video without the approval of the Chief of Police, or his/her designee, is strictly prohibited. Members are prohibited from making copies of a UAS audio/video recording by using another recording device such as a cell phone.

3. With the proper Evidence.com permission level, recordings may be duplicated or shared with criminal justice agencies or when otherwise authorized by the Chief of Police, or his/her designee.

4. Members will not allow civilians to review video captured by a UAS. Members shall advise civilians that they may request a copy of the recording through the public records process.

5. The release of video requested through a public records request will be handled in accordance with existing policy and public records laws. Reproduction fees for duplication of recordings will be established by the City of Milwaukee. See SOP 265 Open Records for additional information.

6. Prior to the release of any UAS recording to the public, the Open Records Division will ensure that proper redactions have been made in accordance with state law.



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