

Police Aviation News

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Special Edition

September 2026



Commercial UAV Expo, Las Vegas, Nevada



Emergency Services Show, Birmingham, West Midlands



DRONE *show* **SPECIAL**
Las Vegas Birmingham

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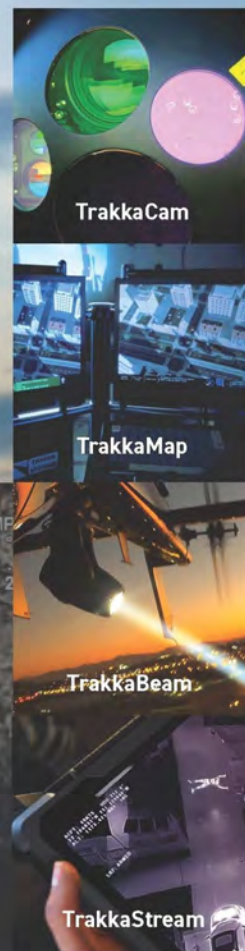
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TRANS-ATLANTIC SHOWTIME

It has been a busy month with emergency service content in drone events on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. As a result, the shows have been extracted for their own special report to enable comprehensive coverage. In the event only two drone shows are covered – one in the USA and the other in the UK – as a further event planned for the end of September in the UK called Drone X will miss the slot by being on the final days of the make-up of the main magazine. You may remember that was connected to the long-lost cause called Helitech.

First the American report from Mark Colborn – once a helicopter pilot for the Dallas Police Department who morphed over in drones as he retired. Mark still has connections with the Dallas UAS Squad, USAR and is a USHST Safety Analysis Team Member. Although he missed the UAV event in Las Vegas last year he has reported in depth on the American scene for several years now.

Las Vegas is a great city, and you can survive it without gambling, frankly the slots and such bored me rigid. The spectacle of place more than made up for the disinterest in gambling and in the past I have made many visits – purely on business of course!.

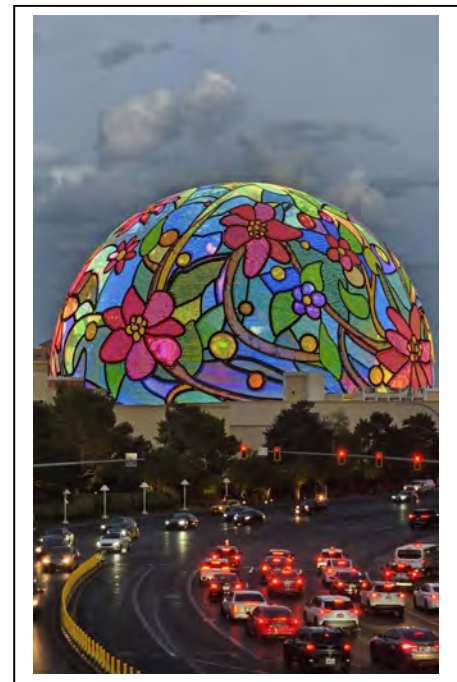
I have retained his US punctuation and spelling – I am sure you will understand it!

LAS VEGAS

Commercial UAV Expo 2026

September 1-3, Las Vegas, Nevada

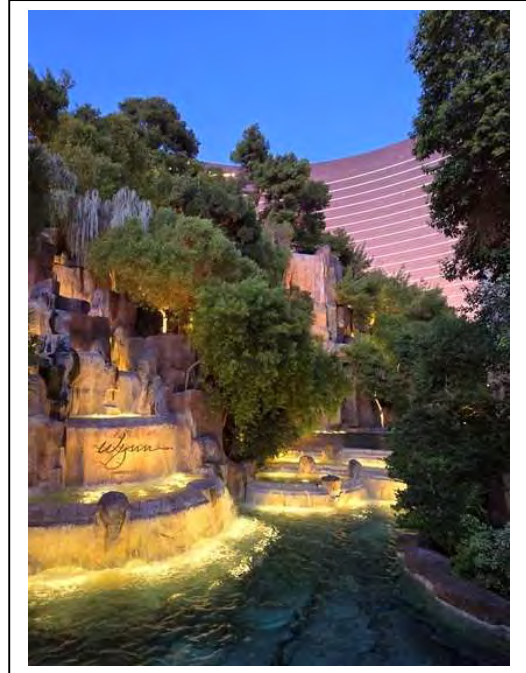
Words and most pictures by Mark Colborn



The FAA continues to delay releasing new Beyond Visual Line-of-Sight (BVLOS) rules, and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) plans to ban, over time, all currently approved and licensed foreign-made drone imports into the United States. These two topics dominated the keynotes and panel discussions this year at the Commercial UAV Expo at Caesar's Forum in sunny Las Vegas, Nevada (its 12th year). In past years, Sundance Media hosted live flight demonstrations on the morning of the first day (Tuesday). Unfortunately, the event was not on the schedule this year. Perhaps the logistics of bussing hundreds of attendees to a park outside of Harry Reid International Airport's Class B surface area, in the suburb of Henderson southeast of the Strip, became too cumbersome. It was a sweltering hot experience

that I will miss! Nonetheless, the event organizers, who did an excellent job this year, scheduled morning and early-afternoon presentations to fill the void.

I missed last year's conference but was pleased to see that Vegas is still hopping, despite what the naysayers on YouTube keep saying. The casinos, unfortunately, have perfected the art of squeezing every possible dollar out of visitors. Sin City used to be famous for cheap buffets, but expensive eateries sponsored by some of the biggest stars in the culinary arts have replaced them. Every time you turn around, you see a full-sized image of Gordon Ramsay, Bobby Flay, or Guy Fieri. It's mostly boomers like me (pensioners) at the electronic slots in the casinos. Young people were out walking the Strip at night, soaking in the mist at the Bellagio fountain and enjoying the rotating motif at the Bellagio Conservatory and Botanical Garden. They were also enjoying the faux canals at the Venetian, or the totally unnecessary and massively evaporative waterfall at the Wynn. The blackjack tables all have a \$10 US minimum bet. Gamblers love their Craps, and every casino I walked through had tables always occupied!



According to *Commercial UAV News*, this year's Expo is the biggest yet, attracting 3,800 attendees, 140 speakers in more than 50 sessions, and 250 exhibitors. It was great to see and network with old friends in the industry, and that's really what attending these gigs is all about. Vic Moss of Moss Photography in Denver, Colorado, commented on Facebook that it was a great show as always, even if the mood was subdued by the idiocy promulgated by the Federal Communications Commission (much more on that issue to follow)!

Drone Responders (DR) returned this year with several presentations and panel discussions each day, attracting over 300 participants overall. DR hosted a two-day course for UAS program managers covering leadership responsibilities, program development, safety management systems, developing unit training programs, addressing funding issues, tracking emerging technologies, and showing the brass the return on investment of a successful drone program. The course focused on many of the challenges facing public safety agencies in modern policing and firefighting and drew on lessons learned.

The first presentation on Tuesday morning during the regular session was entitled "*What the FCC's Covered List Decision Means for Commercial Drone Operators.*" If you are unfamiliar with the terms "NDAA" or "Covered List" and the history behind the U.S. government's move to implement a total import ban on all (unless waived) foreign-made drones, then please read my separate editorial segment entitled: "*The NDAA Covered List, the History Behind the Move to Ban Chinese Drones in America.*" It is a contentious and complicated issue, and this segment adds context to my descriptions of what was on everyone's mind and what was discussed at the Expo.

The comment period for the FCC Covered List proposal expired September 2nd during the Expo, which is why this proposed action was such a hot topic. The room was packed for the first session. Erin Williams, Content Specialist at Commercial UAV News, moderated the session. Speakers included Will Dawson,



President of the Agricultural Drone Initiative, Ben Hance, SVP, Transactions and Legal at DroneDeploy, and Jared Janacek, Founder of Texas Drone Company. Williams (W:) asked the panelists how they reacted to the FCC's total ban on non-waivered foreign imports. Janacek said he was expecting something like this from the FCC. The other panelists said they were surprised and angry. Dawson said, "The FCC said this is what we are going to do, which is not usually the way the government approaches an issue." He went on to explain that this is a low-pressure issue for legislators in the grand scheme of governance and passing bills. In other words, he said, the issue is not that important to them. He said the industry could have done a better job of trying to head off this kind of action. W: What does the covered list really mean, and what does it change? Hance replied that we won't be able to buy replacement parts. "It's a phase-out over time," he said. Janacek said they'll have to raise prices because of this rule. "We need to get the customers on our side by explaining why we have to charge more," he added. W: What happens to the current fleet? Janacek said his company has already tried to adapt by buying American-made drones. "Can we get what we have fixed? It has already been a challenge with DJI because of Customs holding up shipments," he replied. W: Is it a slow squeeze or a problem over time? Hance said it poses serious questions, especially for larger companies. Janacek said they used to be able to send a drone in and get a replacement (DJI Refresh Program - which DJI eventually canceled because Customs delayed imports of replacements), but that stopped and turnaround time increased. In addition, he added, "Procurement processes increased, especially for American-made drones. We need a long-term plan." **Correspondent note: It took over six months (March to August 2024) for a repair facility in Texas to repair, replace, and return my DJI Mavic 3. After it was sent to a DJI repair facility in Fort Worth for an error code they couldn't fix, I eventually received a brand-new replacement model. I was lucky and probably received one of the last replacements DJI had on the shelf before they officially ended the refresh/replacement program.* W: What does procurement of fleets look like in the future? Janacek said the struggle is in evaluating each new system. It takes time and must be evaluated based on workflow. Is the drone reliable enough? "Two is one, and one is none," he said, adding that he was approached about three different jobs needed in the next week, and each customer wanted a different type of drone. He had to determine whether the \$150,000 investment was worth it. W: What is missing from American-made alternatives? Janacek said reliability – training costs go up because controllers and systems are different – need to build rote memory – error creeps in. He said the adoption process is time-consuming, especially as jobs roll in. Lastly, he said Drone Service Providers (DSPs) can shine by becoming experts in individual use cases with a drone that fits the job. W: What are the gaps between need and what manufacturers can deliver? Hance said American drones have been characteristically fragile and expensive. In the air, he said, this will cause issues. He remains cautiously optimistic and suggests that leasing drones might be an answer to this dilemma. Building manpower, distribution, and repair facilities will take time. He said there will be a transition period. Janacek mentioned that there is currently a six-to-nine-week lead time for some drones. "This is unacceptable in the DSP world, when you need it, you need it now," he said. Dawson said the market is there, demand is there, and he is optimistic the industry will step up. **Of note: Dawson's demeanor and tone during the entire discussion appeared to lean in favor of the domestic drone market.* W: What about the long term, any advice for new entrants? Janacek asked, "What do we buy? Don't under- or overbuy. Buy a drone that fits the mission. Don't buy a bunch of drones first and expect them to fit the mission or contract. Buy what you need. If Chinese drones are banned, not everyone will be able to break into this industry. It used to be easy, but now it will take a large investment," he said. Dawson offered, "The time to jump in is during this period of transition. Everything worth doing is hard. It's an amazing time to jump in." Hance added, "It is a much more exciting time than it was five years ago." W: If domestic companies can't scale, what is the cost to the industry? Janacek said, "We will have to adjust our price points and determine what the appetite is for the customers." Hance offered, "It will impact different segments of the industry in different ways." He believes the margins exist to absorb the increased operating costs. W: What should colleges concentrate on? Hance (with Janacek agreeing) said, "Develop an overall curriculum-then let students branch off into individual specialties." W: What is the future of the industry? Hance suggested the industry standardize



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controllers and data processes across models. And, obviously, being the consummate salesman, he suggested that his company, DroneDeploy, could do this!

Event organizers used a great segue to pull attendees from the morning FCC-covered list debacle into the afternoon program by bringing Greg Reverdiau, co-founder of Pilot Institute, on stage to discuss: *"The View from the Field: What Operators, Pilots, and Fleet Managers are Saying About the Commercial Drone Industry."* Commercial UAV News Content Manager Matt Collins fielded the questions. The two men shared results from a recent survey that Commercial UAS News and Pilot Institute conducted before the Expo. The survey was intended to gauge the industry's reaction to the current state of the drone industry. They received 885 responses. 36% were from pilot/operators, 22% from program managers, 18% from Drone Service Providers (DSP), 10% from Survey/Mapping, 8% from public safety, and 6% from government/regulatory. The mix of verticals was fairly even, but by business size, 56.8% were sole operators or independent. The second largest was small operators (2-10 employees) at 22.8%. Most interestingly, 62.8% of operators report 76-100% of their active fleet is DJI or other foreign-manufactured hardware. Cost, not policy, is the biggest obstacle (46.5%) to transitioning away from foreign-made drones. When asked whether the FCC Covered List action has changed fleet procurement plans, Greg said only 13.8% have begun transitioning to National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) compliant alternatives. 45.8% of respondents are still taking a "wait and see" approach. Clients are not concerned if the drone is NDAA-compliant, and only 7.1% of respondents say most or all clients require NDAA-compliant drones. When asked about their feelings about Part 108 (BVLOS regs), 39.9% of respondents said Part 108's impact is neutral or unclear, and 43% said they haven't even begun to prepare for Part 108. The biggest workforce challenge is not headcount, but data/software skills gaps. 28.7% of businesses across all size tiers reported increased drone revenue or contract volume in 2025. 68.5% of businesses describe their two-year outlook as cautiously optimistic or very optimistic, versus 15.3% who are pessimistic. Greg said the most interesting thing about the survey is that it validates what they expected, not surprises them.



Greg also conducted an AI analysis of the 3824 comments received by the FCC on their "military-grade" Chinese drone import ban proposal: <https://flightdeck.pilotinstitute.com/FCC-26-189-analysis>. The analysis was published on their website on the last day of the Expo, and the results were not surprising either: 98.6% opposed the proposal outright. Only 16 supported it. 99.4% of respondents called it overbroad. Most rejected the security case, as I did in my comments. 779 stated flatly that no domestic alternatives exist for what they fly. Another 549 said, "an alternative exists but costs more or performs worse." 439 asked for a longer runway than the proposed 180-day cutoff, through a phase-in, grandfathering, or sell-through. Only two respondents called the timeline adequate. The proposal asked eleven questions in five clusters. Pilot Institute found that most respondents answered one or two questions that directly affected their individual operations. It is an interesting analysis, and I encourage everyone to read the full report at your leisure.

Moving along to subjects that are more upbeat. Jason Day, Deputy Director of DR, led a panel discussing "The State of Public Safety UAS Operations" on Wednesday morning. Panel members included Matt Dargan, UAS Manager/Flight Officer, Sacramento Metro Fire Department, Lance Infanger, UAS Program Manager, Phoenix PD, and Justin Brannon, UAS Supervisor, Alameda County SO, California. Day started the program by reminding attendees that DR conducts a comprehensive survey of the public safety UAS community every year and that this year's study is being compiled and will be released soon. DR has also created a pilot training program and a two-day unit manager's course. The unit manager's course ran concurrently with the Expo. He also announced UNITED 27, a major public safety drone conference to be held in Kansas City in July 2027 (more information will be posted soon). Attendees will get two full days of hands-on drone training on specific scenarios, including indoor ops. All panel members expressed concerns about the possible FCC ban when asked their opinion of the current state of public safety UAS. Infanger said his department has experienced nonstop growth and that drones are a game changer for Phoenix PD. Brannon said drones have gone beyond a questionable tool and are now an integral part of Alameda's daily operations. Dargan said Sacramento is in a good place but is concerned about staffing and long-term planning. He said his pilots need more training. Day asked about funding. Brannon said Alameda's fleet is currently all DJI, and their funding comes from the county's general fund. He mentioned

grants, and the discussion shifted to the realization that most cops receive no training at all in grant writing. Dargan said very few grants are currently available for fire departments, and they leverage public/private partnerships with the community for equipment. One panelist mentioned that his department is prohibited from accepting donated equipment from the public. Some departments have grant writers on staff, but most officers must learn grant writing on the job. Infranger reminded everyone in attendance that grants often come with reporting procedures that must be met to keep receiving funds. As an alternative to grants, Infranger suggested subscription services to spread out the cost of new equipment and services. He said departments can better manage upfront costs but may be on the hook for several years. Day asked how to find grant opportunities. One panelist suggested networking with other departments, especially smaller ones who tend to discover more opportunities by word of mouth. They also warned that finance departments may or may not forward grant prospects, so they need to do a lot of research. Day also mentioned outside grant or funding opportunities and referenced a fire department program in Austin where they work with a solid waste conversion company. Apparently, they worry about the waste they convert spontaneously combusting, so the company funds Austin FD's drone program in exchange for firemen flying the plant once a week with a thermal drone to check for hot spots. Day asked the group why FDs are slow to adopt DFR programs. Dargan said the first 20 minutes of a fire are critical; it's all hands on deck. Most departments don't have enough money or manpower, and they would have to prove the cost-benefit to city or county officials. He mentioned interesting statistics regarding the third and fourth apparatus responding to a fire. These engines or trucks are the most likely fire vehicles to get involved in an accident. With these statistics, could departments prove that a DFR drone could arrive on scene first and slow down or disregard a response if there is no fire or only a small fire, and thus reduce accidents? It was an interesting discussion and sounds like a great topic for a master's thesis. The conclusion, however, was to combine police and fire DFR programs, and send DFR drones to fire calls and share the cost somehow. Day asked whether any cost sharing was happening now, and all the panelists said, "not yet."

The discussion moved to airspace deconfliction, which everyone agreed will be vitally important as delivery drone operations expand around the country. Panelists agreed that collaboration with drone delivery services and public safety will be vitally important. They agreed that the capability doesn't exist yet, but eventually they must have the ability to exchange position information with other drone operators.

Wednesday afternoon, Drone Responders held two sessions to discuss lessons learned from the FIFA World Cup counter-UAS (C-UAS) response. I missed part one, but recently listened to a similar presentation by Captain Aaron Fitch of the Texas Department of Public Safety at a North Texas Council of Governments UAS Safety and Integration Task Force meeting on counter-UAS coordination at FIFA events. Fitch said unauthorized and malicious UAS are among the most significant security threats to 2026 FIFA World Cup events. All host cities had a federal agency designated as the lead for C-UAS operations.



F.I.F.A.

The Department of Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection (CBP) was designated as the lead agency for the Houston and Dallas (Arlington AT&T Cowboy Stadium) sites. For Fan Fest sites, local and state resources covered C-UAS in coordination with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Ground Intercept Teams (or GIT teams), consisting of local, state, and federal public safety UAS assets, handled detection and mitigation equipment. Across the 11 United States FIFA World Cup venues, roughly 1,600 drones were detected in restricted airspace. The FBI seized more than 700 drones, and more than 300 drones were mitigated. Soft cyber mitigation is the preferred method (i.e., taking control and safely landing the drone). The alternative is to electronically force the drone out of the sky (i.e., hard kills or kinetic mitigations). No hard kills occurred during any of the events. Since this was one of the largest C-UAS deployments to date, the preferred method is soft cyber to prevent collateral issues that could set the program back. C-UAS personnel (those who have received mandatory training at the FBI National Schoolhouse (NCUTC) and earned both a Detection and Warning Certification and Mitigation Certification) are able to take control (intercept the command-and-control link-C2) of some drones and land them safely, where they are then intercepted by GIT teams and confiscated by the FBI. In the North Texas venues, 127 drones were detected in restricted airspace. GIT teams contacted 94 drone operators, and the FBI seized all the drones. 21 drones were mitigated. No nefarious intent was discovered by GIT personnel, just clueless and careless operators flying their drones to get photos and video. Of concern to the industry is the number of Part 107 certified Remote Pilots caught violating these FIFA Temporary Flight Restriction areas. I haven't heard the exact numbers, but even one is too many, and these pilots should know better. Plus, they have no excuses. As Greg Reverdiau says every Friday during his weekly Pilot Institute UAS news update, "Don't be that guy!"

I did make it to “*Part 2, Lessons Learned from FIFA World Cup.*” D.J. Smith, a retired Virginia State Police Unmanned Aerial & CUSA Systems Program Coordinator and now a Physical Security Industry Specialist on the Special Testing Team for Amazon Prime Air, started the session by saying early team integration is paramount to success. Interagency integration leads to better coordination. Real-time intelligence is also paramount, and streaming video to command staff is essential. In most departments or agencies, although C-UAS duties are a full-time job, they are treated as an additional duty. He related that a common operating picture is also essential, and that communication is key. GIT teams have less than 15 minutes to locate a drone pilot violating airspace before the drone runs out of battery, so coordination and communication are key to getting boots on the ground. Going forward, the focus will be on coordinating the use of available C-UAS federal grant funding across agencies. Who should buy what, and where the equipment will be stored between events. He also spoke about training and how it is essential to run scenarios to train GIT teams for better responses. At that point, I had to leave to attend Pitch the Press at the Forum Theatre.

Pitch the Press – Forum Theatre

This year’s Pitch the Press featured 14 companies presenting their product to a panel of four judges. Each presenter had two minutes to make their sales pitch. Judges then asked at least one follow-up question. This year’s best presentation winners were UtopiaCompression Corporation, Harris Aerial and Skyline Nav AI. UtopiaCompression introduced its Aether detect-and-avoid perception system for BVLOS operations. The software package, programmed into the drone’s flight control computer, calculates collision avoidance using on-board cameras and sensors, and sends signals to the drone’s flight control system for evasive maneuvers. This will be handy for all drone operations as traffic in the national airspace increases. Harris Aerial is building an NDAA-compliant, 4-kilogram drone called the H4C Quad (comparable in size to a DJI M-400). It will have a 50-minute flight time, an agnostic payload, be manufactured in Florida with injection-molded thermoplastic parts, and retail for about \$31,000. The company expects to scale up to manufacturing 10 drones per day. Skyline Nav AI introduced its Pathfinder Edge, a lightweight, plug-and-play hardware box that provides autonomous GPS-independent navigation for drones. The system uses cameras and inertial sensors when GPS signals are lost and only needs one IMU to operate. The Pathfinder Edge will retail for around \$2,000.

Even though they didn’t win their pitch, I was impressed by a U.S.-based company called UAS Sentry. CEO David Burritt introduced their new BVLOS V4 Drone Detection Unit. It is a fully self-contained (13-hour internal rechargeable battery) dual-band (2.4G and 5.8G) Remote ID receiver in a metal box with a large touchscreen. This receiver has two antennas and will pick up all drones transmitting RID, even those beyond visual line of sight. If you’re looking for a better RID solution than you can find in a cell phone App (most only receive drones transmitting on 2.4G), the unit retails for \$1,595.00.



Some of the more interesting items on the floor this year included a new drone to spray sealant on roofs, a fight-drone simulator from Ukraine, and new gimbal tech featuring non-magnetic piezoelectric motion.

A new subsidiary of Texas Roof Rescue, a Texas roofing company, is developing a purpose-built spray drone to apply coatings, washes, and treatments from the air. The subsidiary, called Roof Hawk, will build their drone with American-made and blue-listed components. The plan is to manufacture a drone large enough to carry 5 gallons of roof sealant product. I’ve been assured this isn’t just another drone company looking for investors to sell drones, but a company with a specific mission. The founders enlisted several highly experienced retired police drone pilots as advisors. These former officers started and managed drone programs in their respective agencies and understand the investment and commitment required to bring a better-than-acceptable, mission-capable drone to market. The mapping software that will be integrated into the drone’s system, with the push of a button to autonomously deliver product evenly to a roof, has already been developed. If you’re in the roofing business and want to spray sealant on a home’s roof without climbing a dangerous ladder, or wash solar panels, this is a company to watch.

Vladyslav Plaksin, co-founder of Ukrainian Fight Drone Simulator, was on hand in the Emerging Technologies section of the exhibit hall to introduce their new FPV flight simulator for PC. The simulator offers a realistic combat drone experience built by instructors, engineers, and drone pilots for effective

training. Ukrainian drone pilots train on a military version of this Simtech Solutions-developed product. Vladyslav let me give it a spin on his laptop, and it is almost scary how realistic it is. If you already use FPV drone flight simulators, their starter version (a public version) of this ultra-realistic FPV drone trainer, built on lessons from the Ukrainian frontline, is available for \$29.99 on STEAM. "Fly combat drones in true-to-life conditions, take on challenges, and feel the adrenaline of modern warfare," says the STEAM website! As a bonus, you can even learn how to ram Shahed 136 fixed-wing drones, which might come in handy someday!

Another interesting start-up displaying their ideas in the emerging tech section is MTOW Labs. They have developed a new class of UAV gimbals powered by non-magnetic piezoelectric motion. Using a U.S. built supply chain, MTOW Labs, in conjunction with PMC Piezo Motor Company, claims their patented direct-drive principle delivers exceptional angular precision, ultra-fast response, and high torque in a miniature, lightweight form factor – without permanent magnets or electromagnetic coils used in conventional motors. The stats are impressive, and their gimbals can lower payload mass and reduce inertia to help preserve useful flight time.

When will the industry finally see the delayed FAA Beyond Visual Line-of-Sight (BVLOS) regulations? The industry has been waiting nearly a year, making this the second area of most concern amongst Expo participants. FAA Part 108 will regulate BVLOS drone flight operations, and Part 146 will regulate reporting and set standards for drone separation services (or Unmanned Traffic Management – UTM providers). In a session at the end of the second day, entitled *"Flying BVLOS in the New Regulatory ERA, Making UTM work in the real world,"* Nathan Ruff, Head of UTM and Strategy with AirWise Solutions, moderated a panel of specialists. Carmen Simboli, Airspace Integration Specialist with Amazon Prime Air, Josh O'Leary, CTO & Co-Founder of AirWise Solutions, Gabriel Graveline, Founder of RespondAir UAS, and Kerry Flemming, retired FAA UAS Integration Office and now Senior Partner with UAS LLC, rounded out the panel. Ruff started the session by stating, "Part 108 will be out soon." Flemming wasn't so sure and said, "There are a lot of things in the original program (speaking of the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking for Part 108) that simply won't work." He didn't say it outright, but I suspect he was referring to the issue of how to handle uncooperative crewed aircraft that aren't broadcasting altitude, airspeed, or position, i.e., aircraft without Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B Out) or alternative electronic conspicuity equipment. Everything that flies must squawk or talk. This quickly shifted the discussion to collision avoidance, the lack of a cohesive UTM infrastructure, and who gets priority in the airspace. One panelist quipped, "Helicopter pilots are complaining that they will have to telepathically tell drone pilots where they can't operate!" None of the panelists had a good answer to any of these questions because the final rule is still speculative. Ruff then asked the panel their thoughts on the electronic conspicuity portion in the proposed rule. Flemming said it doesn't make sense and isn't ready. He complimented first responders by stating that they have made the most advancements in BVLOS, especially with operations below 200' AGL using parachutes, and conducting operations over people. Graveline stated that the industry will need to prioritize responses so public safety operations don't shut down the airspace unnecessarily. Ruff then posited that we might need a two-tiered response policy. He said filing flight plans, ostensibly with a UTM service, is painful and time-consuming, and may not be realistic in an emergency. He posited that if it's not an extra burden, it can be done; but if it's to save a life, probably not. Flemming was very frank in his assessment. He said that we can't have one segment of the industry not participating in UTM; everyone must be involved. "So don't be surprised if Part 108 may be delayed," he said. Simboli, with Amazon Prime Air, attempting to soften the mood, stated, "Public safety operations will definitely take priority over ours."

The keynote on Thursday morning was entitled: *"Two Skies, One Conversation – Comparing FAA and EASA Approaches to BVLOS Drone Operations,"* and was moderated by Julie Garland, CEO & Vice Chair of Avtrain/JARUS ISB. She facilitated a discussion between Robert Reckert, Acting Division Manager of the Emerging Technologies Division, FAA (formerly the UAS Integration Office), and Daan Dousi, Head of Department, Innovative Air Mobility, European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA). Reckert is new to the job, less than a week in, and began by saying, "We are very, very close to finalizing that [Part 108/146] rule." He expects the rule before the end of the year. "We received over 4000 comments on the rule and take all of them seriously," he said. Much of the conversation focused on different fundamental approaches to achieving the same goal: an integrated and safe airspace system for crewed and uncrewed aviation. Dousi, regarding EASA, explained how the more risk-based SORA approach works in Europe. It is a complex system, he said, but also enables a lot of flexibility. The FAA, on the other hand, is adopting a more performance-based and non-segmented approach to the airspace issue, clearly expecting the industry to, as Reckert put it, work together through grassroots efforts and collaboration. He said, "We just

can't write enough regulations to cover all kinds of operations." The conversation then shifted to public acceptance, especially of drone delivery. Dousi was less upbeat about this issue, saying the public in Europe is more apprehensive about the technology. Reckert is also concerned about acceptance, but in the broader context of the entire aviation industry in America, not just drones. He then quipped, "There are a lot of operators complaining about other operators!" Americans, he said, are an on-demand society, and that may raise the bar for acceptance of drone delivery. "We will find out over time how society feels," he said. Dousi said they need to better educate the public, and that services could become more accepted as people recognize the environmental benefits. "An operator can get approval for BVLOS in an area, but it doesn't mean residents will be accepting," he said. "The burden is on the operator to educate the public." Will the two agencies ever come together on their approach to managing the airspace? Probably not, but they do agree that a common safety outcome is the desired goal.

The last session I attended was at 10:30 am Thursday morning, hosted by DR, and entitled, "*Drones on Demand vs. Drones in Emergencies – Who Has the Right-of-Way.*" Representatives of Amazon Prime Air, Zipline, and Wing, plus DroneSense, sat on the panel. The conversation boiled down to several points: drone delivery companies are willing to give public safety drones priority in the NAS. They want to allow public safety to operate without worrying about delivery drones. The Amazon representative said that if they get a conflict alert, they may cancel the flight or divert their aircraft to a different route.

I finally received an answer to a question that has been burning in me since I attended an Amazon Prime Air presentation in Richmond, Virginia, at the Richmond Raceway in early August. The Amazon Prime Air machine is huge. It has six motors with massive three-bladed props, weighs 83 pounds, and carries a 5-pound payload. Its cruise speed is 60 to 74 mph, and it has a 7.5-mile operational range. It has built-in detect-and-avoid capabilities, and Amazon says it will detect and avoid crewed aircraft. It's unclear if it will avoid a small drone, however. They obviously can't avoid cranes! Of most concern, however, is that these behemoths travel at 200' AGL at around 70 mph, and that doesn't give public safety, DSP, or recreational drone pilots who are flying visual line-of-sight much reaction time to get out of their way. The Wing representative said each drone delivery company has its own UTM system and uses it for conflict resolution with crewed aircraft and internal avoidance of their own drones. I asked whether they were willing to share that information with other delivery companies, but especially with public safety operators, DSPs, and recreational flyers. Carmen Simboli at Amazon Air said absolutely. Eventually, he said, all traffic information in UTMs will be shared with a federated UTM system that will then share that positional information with other UTM service users. The FAA will eventually define all these system requirements in the Part 146 final rule.



The next edition of Commercial UAV Expo returns to Caesars Forum in Las Vegas September 7-9, 2027. It will be interesting to see where the industry is a year from now. I believe Parts 108 and 146 will be

The advertisement features a black tactical mission display unit with a screen and various buttons. The screen shows flight data including altitude, speed, and fuel. The unit is set against a background of a blue sky with white clouds. The Macro-Blue logo is prominently displayed at the top, and the Technisonic logo is at the bottom right. The website address www.macro-blue.com is at the bottom.

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significantly delayed because, ultimately, the FAA knows the program won't work unless it mandates ADS-B Out or an alternative electronic conspicuity device in ALL flying machines, regardless of the class of airspace. However, they have stubbornly and consistently refused to do so.

EDITORIAL

The NDAA Covered List and the History Behind the Move to Ban Chinese Drones in America By Mark Colborn

Our esteemed Editor unknowingly laid the groundwork for this editorial in the September issue of *PAN*. So please allow me to clarify and partially dispel a "cause for concern" statement he made on Page 29 of that issue: "It is noteworthy that the London DFR project makes use of Chinese-manufactured and supported DJI drones. Many express disquiet at the security concerns relating to that – the USA has banned Chinese drones from large swathes of the public services based on security fears. Even if they are being overly cautious, there may be a 'cause for concern' out there."

Technically, only federal agencies and the Department of War (DoW) have been prohibited from using DJI or Autel drones in the USA. And Drone Service Providers (DSP) can't use them on government contracts either. During COVID in 2020, the federal government began restricting federal agencies' use of foreign-manufactured drones because of alleged security concerns.

And by 2021, these restrictions had put a huge damper on many federal drone programs. Federal LE agencies immediately had to cease operations, shelve their foreign-made drones, and buy American-made equivalents. At the time, equivalent drones for certain types of operations simply did not exist. The technology then was at least five to seven years behind what was coming out of China. When I helped start a drone program for the Dallas Police Department's Air Support Unit in 2020, the Department of Homeland Security came to us for help with conducting building searches and to run search warrants because their small, fragile, difficult to fly, extremely loud, and very expensive American-made

drones were absolutely useless for indoor flying. Other federal agencies with nothing to do with protecting or securing critical infrastructure, but that used drones for environmental studies, mapping, and wildland fire surveys, essentially had to cease operations for a significant amount of time. There were simply no decent American-made alternatives. Eventually, federal agencies with seemingly endless budgets could purchase expensive American-made drones to replace their fleets; in many cases, however, with inferior, less reliable products. None of us in the industry agreed with the government's decision, but we eventually accepted the Fed's action. We all assumed that the federal government's appetite for safeguarding the country's national security would stop there. We were wrong.



DJI Matrice 10

Congress kept pushing the security issue at the behest of American drone manufacturers' lobbyists and enacted the American Security Drone Act of 2023, which prohibited contractors and recipients of federal funds from operating, or using federal funds to procure or operate, certain foreign-manufactured UAS. Congress signed the bill into law on December 22, 2023. But it wasn't until H.R. 2670, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2024, that the hammer really started dropping on the commercial, recreational, and state and local public safety side of the drone industry. On December 22, 2025, following a provision included in the 2024 NDAA, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) added DJI and Autel (and other Chinese companies) to the NDAA Covered List. Simply put, the Covered List compiles communications equipment and services deemed to pose an unacceptable risk to U.S. national security.

Without allowing public comment, the FCC immediately stopped issuing licenses for any new Chinese drone models and other electronic devices. According to an April 2026 Yahoo Finance article, DJI estimated they would lose \$1.5 billion in 2026 by being shut out of the United States market. The \$1.5 billion figure accounted for \$700 million in regulatory payments for devices that were never launched, and \$860 million for new products (a total of 25) that could not be sold.



The Great Wall of China US style

This FCC action also essentially pulled the plug on Anzu Robotics, an American company based in Texas. Anzu was started by a very intelligent friend who has been in the drone sphere for many years. He made a move I thought was brilliant: he licensed drone technology from DJI and manufactured two drone models called the Raptor series (essentially a copy of the DJI Mavic 3 Enterprise and Enterprise 3T) in Malaysia. Final assembly and firmware installation took place in the United States. And to give them a unique look, painted them John Deere green! He contracted another very intelligent friend whom I met during my service on the FAA's Drone Advisory Committee for the flight control software. This individual co-wrote the replacement version of the FAA's flight awareness program called B4UFLY. The original App was full of glitches, hard to use, and rated about 1.2 stars on the App Store! The replacement version, called Aloft Air Aware B4UFLY (currently rated at 4.1 stars) and co-sponsored by Pilot Institute, has become an indispensable awareness tool for U.S. drone pilots. Aloft has since grown into a much larger company that provides integrated fleet and airspace management services – a UAS Service Supplier, or USS. Aloft's flight control software was a perfect match for the Raptor series. Although the drone was manufactured in Malaysia and the flight control software was all American, supported by American servers, Anzu's principles came under intense scrutiny. The Texas Attorney General sued the company for deceptive practices because of its licensing affiliation with DJI. Members of the House Select Committee in the US Congress accused it of being a "pass-through company" for DJI. Sadly, Anzu eventually had to discontinue the Raptor series of drones because of the regulatory challenges the company faced. The sad part is that the drones are excellent performers and were reasonably priced.

All of this nonsense and persistent China bashing can be traced back to identified security issues with DJI software in 2017/18 that were purported to send data (and video, which was a stretch to believe because of the immense bandwidth needed to send video over a cell phone at that time period didn't exist) to company servers back in China, and then, ostensibly, it was claimed, to the Chinese Ministry of State Security. DJI has since closed that security gap and recently commissioned a study by independent security experts to prove it. Yet every report you read from U.S. security agencies references only these past instances. They never mention or provide proof of any recent breaches or leaks. In a seemingly endless parade of reports from every alphabet-lettered federal security agency office in existence, they try to justify their security concerns, but they keep using words like "could," "may," or "believe" and stop short of offering actual cases or proof. And don't even get me started on the alleged DJI's role in the persecution of Uyghurs in China. The hypocrisy of using the Uyghurs as an argument for an import ban is beyond the pale, especially considering the terrible treatment our own indigenous peoples right here in America continue to endure at the hands of our politicians in Washington, D.C.

This issue is strictly political. The current regime in the White House, their Congressional lackeys on Capitol Hill, and sycophants in cabinet positions, and directors leading federal agencies (i.e., the totally incompetent and unqualified Brendan Carr at the FCC) are complicit in assisting the so-called American manufacturers (many are owned by foreign interests and the parts are assembled in America) in their quest to limit their competition and increase investor and shareholder profits. There isn't a single individual in our government, or any of our 18 individual security agencies, that has provided a single shred of evidence to the public that consumer- and enterprise-level Chinese drones are still a threat to our national security. When asked, they all say the information is "classified."



Another reason I take this position is that Congress, in the FY2024 National Defense Appropriations Act, set a process in which an appropriate national security agency "should perform" a security review of certain foreign vendors (the action was mainly aimed at DJI but affected others). If an audit was not conducted by the deadline (December 22, 2025), the FCC would add them to the Covered List. No agency stepped up and conducted an audit, even though it had close to a year to do so. The question is why? Were they afraid they wouldn't find anything and thus could not defend the regime's narrative for a ban? Again, where is the evidence? If it exists, show us. Interestingly, as a police officer testifying in court many times over my 37 ½ year career, I had to provide evidence to get a conviction. My "belief" that a suspect was guilty carried zero weight with the court.

As in London, most state and local Drone as First Responder (DFR) programs in America still use DJI. Patrick Egan of UASNEWUS (yes, everyone knows Patrick; he is very outspoken about the industry, probably because he's been in it for over 25 years) in a recent post on social media said that for years DJI claimed they only enjoyed a 60%-70% market share in the U.S. He figures, and I agree, that number is

closer to 95%. Over time, he says, politicians relied on those lower figures and concluded that domestic manufacturing could pick up the slack if they banned Chinese drones. It's a good theory. Nonetheless, numerous public safety agencies across the country are buying as many DJI drones as they can, anticipating more bans. Why? Because when you throw a DJI drone into the air, you can depend on its capability, reliability, dependability, and ease of use. You can't say the same for domestically produced drone models. The extensive list of American drone companies that have run out of money, filed for bankruptcy, or been absorbed by larger companies in the past five years proves my point. Also, 30 to 40 years ago, America sent the majority of its manufacturing capability to China. We still get over 40% of all the goods we consume each year from China. To coin a phrase I heard recently on a television show: "That's a marriage, and divorces can get ugly." Drone manufacturers in America are having a hard time scaling. The production capacity just isn't available yet. And contrary to the "belief" of our current administration, we can't just snap our fingers and bring all this manufacturing capability back to America. It is going to take decades.

Drone Responders surveyed public safety organizations that fly drones in 2021, and 90.3% of respondents said they use DJI, while 18.84% use Autel. Only 11% were using Skydio. That, of course, has changed somewhat in the past 5 years in the U.S., with all the increased pressure (amplified by the media and echoed by Congress) to abandon Chinese-manufactured drones. When the FCC stopped issuing licenses to new models of Chinese drones (specifically DJI) late last year, they assured the industry that they had no plans to rescind licenses for existing models and that we could continue to purchase and fly already approved models until they were no longer produced and the stock ran out, the drones either wore out, crashed, or became obsolete.

They told us a little white lie, of course...and are now proposing to do (in 180 days) exactly what they said they would not do.

On July 21, 2026, two security offices (their names are long and unimportant) within the FCC released a federal notice in which they propose to prohibit the continued importation and marketing of certain previously authorized equipment that has been determined to "pose an unacceptable risk to the national security of the United States or the security and safety of United States persons" (covered equipment). Apparently frightened by what is happening on the battlefield in Ukraine, and afraid that this evil technology could spread to our shores, the FCC essentially wants to prohibit the importation and marketing of certain foreign-produced "military-grade" UAS and "UAS critical components" for non-U.S. government (aka: civilian use), including drones with "swarming capabilities." The FCC considers military-grade UAS and UAS critical components to be any of the following: drones equipped with thermal imagers and LiDAR, drones over 55 pounds, drones capable of dispensing "economic poison" (agricultural spray drones), UAS "specially designed to incorporate a defense article" (whatever that means?), and UAS designed for "swarming" (say goodbye to drone light shows). This list basically covers every foreign-made drone in existence, excluding the toy drones you can pick up for a song at Costco in America or Currys in England!

And here's the kicker: "These prohibitions would not apply to any UAS or UAS critical components produced domestically." Apparently, they don't think the systems on these drones can be hacked or compromised.

The FCC again references the endless list of alphabet-lettered security agency reports purporting that foreign-made drones "pose unacceptable risks..." They claim this determination of "unacceptable risks" was based on an assessment of "threats from unauthorized surveillance, sensitive data exfiltration, supply chain vulnerabilities, and other potential threats to the homeland." They go on to say, "We tentatively accept this determination and give [it] particular weight...and have now decided that this determination necessarily includes already-authorized foreign-produced 'military-grade' UAS and UAS critical components." And this is the statement that positively drips with hypocrisy: "We also *believe* that military-grade foreign-produced UAS and UAS critical components might pose even particularly acute national security or related risks, given their military-grade capabilities." Not a solid "we know," or "we have evidence to prove it," but just a simple and inadequate "we also believe."

In the section describing the implementation of this ban, the language gets shiftier. "We clarify that, if this prohibition is adopted, the continued use or operation of previously authorized military-grade UAS and UAS critical components that are already in the hands of users would remain authorized." They seem to be telling us they won't immediately yank the FCC licenses for drones they have already approved. Can we

trust them to keep their word? If the decision is made, the FCC says, "all parties must cease all importation and marketing activities regarding such previously authorized military-grade UAS and UAS critical components within 180 days after publication in the Federal Register."

The FCC's naivety about the drone industry and feigned altruistic desire to protect the U.S. public becomes truly apparent in this statement: "We tentatively conclude that our proposed action would not have substantial economic and supply chain impacts." They claim so-called military-grade UAS and UAS critical components represent a minority of the remaining UAS and UAS critical component market. They reference a Commerce Department website that claims that recreational consumers comprise the majority of individual drone operators and are unlikely to fly military-grade UAS. As a certified Remote Pilot who has been flying drones since 2012, I seriously question this statistic. The FCC conveniently fails to mention the adverse effects this action will have on individual commercial drone operators (especially DSPs) and public safety agencies, which I know fly many more hours consistently than recreational drone flyers.

As you can imagine, this proposal has not been well received in the industry. The term "military-grade" to describe tools like thermal imagers and LiDAR, which have been in commercial and public use for years, is not only, in legal terms, arbitrary and capricious and an abuse of the agency's discretion, but also a transparent intent to lock out foreign competition. Unless a particular foreign-made drone manufacturer has the requisite cash to buy off a politician and receive a Covered List waiver, it's a power cut to their production facility.

If the FCC carries through with this action and fully applies the Covered List to American consumers, state and local government agencies, and commercial drone service providers, it will devastate existing and future drone programs. Lives will be lost. And again, I reiterate: if the FCC succeeds with this action, what will prevent it from eventually rescinding FCC operational licenses for existing drones that we already own and are flying right now?

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UK Editor: I hope you are still with us because now it is my turn to write up on the British event that carried a significant element of police aviation into a mixed audience of police, fire, ambulance and other organisations. I can promise you it will be shorter but I cannot necessarily be sure the readers will stay awake long enough to soak up the update on UK police drone use.

An advertisement for A&R able&rush. The background is a photograph of a group of business professionals in suits, with their hands clasped together in a supportive gesture. On the left, there is a black square with the A&R logo and the text 'able&rush'. In the center, under the heading 'People Solutions', is a bulleted list of services: Transformation Management, Crew Resource Management, Organisational Development, Psychometrics, Talent Management, Coaching, and Facilitation. On the right, there is a quote: 'Helping you to realise and release the talent potential that sits within your organisation, developing your people and ensuring that you safely thrive and fly'. Below the quote is the name 'David Howell, Director' and the website 'www.ableandrush.com'.

EMERGENCY SERVICES SHOW REPORT

Just days after the dust settled at the UAV event in Las Vegas, the varied emergency services and their charity and voluntary elements gathered together at the National Exhibition Centre in mid-September for their annual conference and product promotion bash. In the shadow of Birmingham's International Airport, the event is usually seen as perfectly located for access by organisations across the country but for the last couple of years extensive roadworks has conspired to tarnish that assumption. They cannot last forever, can they?

For the readership of PAN there were two major presentations of interest, one on drones led by the NPCC and the other on the NPAS. Manned aviation.

DRONES

The twenty or so minutes set aside to provide an insight into UK police use of drones amounted to a period crammed with information. *Drones as first responders, evolving the eyes in the skies* was engaging and raised as many questions as there had been answers. The minutes after the official time slot filled in some very important detail that went a long way towards making sense of the now understandable enthusiasm those involved with the programme have.

Even meeting and taking in the credentials of the five on the stage bit deeply into the time slot, but for the sake of completeness here they are again.

On stage were Superintendent Tarynn Evans NPCC Drone Programme lead Metropolitan Police. Tarynn was termed 'Boss' by her colleagues (probably a far better option than the older term that ladies were plastered with in my day - 'Marm')

- Tom Joyce Chief Drone Pilot – North Yorkshire Police
- Vince Saunders, Police Sergeant – Nottinghamshire Police
- Jim Le-Bon Olive, Metropolitan Police Inspector and Operational Lead NPCC Drones
- Chris Stagg, Pilot and currently serving as the NPCC Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) Lead for Hampshire & Thames Valley, helping to shape the future of advanced drone operations



Above: Evans, Joyce, Saunders, Olive, and Stagg are leading the project to embrace more UK police drones

Each has a role in the process of moving forward the development of drone technology but they are just representatives of a far larger team. If you can spare five leading lights for the day on promotional work at the ESS just how big is the team!

Of the 43 police forces in England and Wales around half are already operating drones and of those a handful are engaged with the ever expanding DFR 'experiment.' I still call it an experiment but it is clearly moving beyond that as more forces finance the setting up of systems.

There is little point in simply reciting what each individual brings to the project, that would be too many words, no matter how important they are, so I will simply explain where they are with the project.

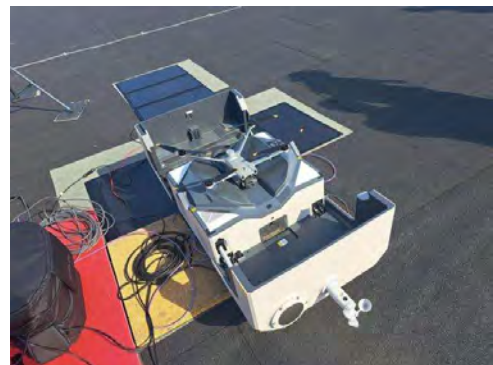
At the moment they are focussed on Drones as First Responders (DFR), the fixed base, centrally controlled machines that survey the scenes of incidents to assess the need for other resources, but either side there is work on the traditional drones brought to the scene in the back of police vehicles and the still elusive long range drones (BVLOS) that might one day seek to replace manned air support. Overall, the impression given is that the drone teams are driving manned police aviation into defending itself against the upstart but despite this a manned resource still offers far more flexibility and the ability to put the best sensor of all – the human eye - in the sky.

Several locations are now operating the DFR drones in support of police operations in towns and cities. There is by no means full coverage of the individual locations yet but there is an aspiration to grow each of them over time. So far, the operations have been a spectacular success in local terms. A call comes into the control room and the DFR is launched to the location to reconnoitre the incident before other resources are despatched. The range of the drones is limited by ambient conditions to around 3km to give a decent time on station and a safe return to base. They can work in light rain and wind but these need to be factored in to ensure the craft returns to base with sufficient electric charge in reserve. They are then recharged in about 20 minutes. The units can work in pairs to allow for the first drone to be relieved by the second to maintain continuous coverage. This relief action is currently the only activity that is autonomous, all other flights are currently undertaken by pilots with two located together in the control room. There may be several DFR units under the control of pilots but they are limited to flying one at a time.

Most control facilities are simply an addition to the existing force control room, but others, including North Yorkshire, have a separate facility that controls the drones over York and Harrogate whilst being located 40 miles from the action in the case of York.

In the past *PAN* has commented on the assumed extortionate cost of setting up the DFR system. Well *PAN* was slightly off beam as it appears that the equipment is relatively cheap when set against the cost of a manned helicopter. The box and drone unit cost around £17,000 each which is peanuts in the aviation world.

To that cost needs to be added the variable logistics of setting the equipment up - the hardstanding, roof strengthening or thermal protection, wiring cameras to look after the wellbeing of the remote unit etc etc and of course the labour to undertake all that work. Even with all that effort a single unit will usually be around £50,000 which is again relatively cheap – until you start the multiplication game adding more and more towns and city centres to the network. No one has claimed that the whole country will be divided into thousands of 3km circles but the numbers will be high and there might be some planning battles ahead.



A typical self contained launcher



Control facilities

(PCC)

The system's greatest ongoing expense is its operators. As with crewed helicopters, pilots and operators account for most costs, and this will remain so until more of the technology becomes fully autonomous. When that will happen is still unclear. Moreover, these costly operators are experienced police officers taken off the streets, which is already a concern as officer numbers decline.

They might replace some of the millions of CCTV cameras lining our streets. Although my law-enforcement outlook was shaped between the 1960s and 1995, I recognise that DFR could offer a better alternative to both CCTV and the long-vanished officer on the beat. That depends, however, on Britain's notoriously poor weather: in heavy rain or strong winds, there may be no aerial view at all. The fallback—and the person who must deal with any trouble DFR detects—remains “Mr Plod” on foot. If everyone is indoors flying drones, the response force will be neither effective nor proactive.

In the distance there are other matters of concern. Somehow all these height limited drones will be mixing it with other drones and light aircraft that are not currently obliged to fly in any other form than “see and avoid.” As PAN has previously reported that was a plan for “sense and avoid” an electronic version of ‘see’ that has so far failed to meet its task. Amazon and others will tell you that they already have it but they are far less able to explain their little crashes, failure to see static crane jibs and, of course, that deliberate dropping of a delivery parcel into a Texas swimming pool.

Briefly talked through was a need for some form of lower airspace National Air Traffic System (NATS) to control the interface between the drones we know, the drones yet to fit into our dreams, Amazon drones, light aircraft and kit aeroplanes. I am unsure how much that will cost to develop but currently NATS costs around £500M each year – and every year. I note that Mark Colborn reflects on a similar quandary in the USA in his piece (above).

You can buy a lot of manned helicopters with the money being proposed for this drone and airspace future, and probably give each cop who agrees to walk the streets in the cold and rain a large bonus.

Fortunately for Superintendent Tarynn Evans and her worthy team they do not have to tackle that lower airspace problem just yet!



Image SLiNK-TECH

SLiNK-TECH expressed great interest in the discussions on the future of drones as ‘eyes in the sky’ for emergency responders. The panel also prompted some interesting reflections on the lessons from SLiNK-TECH’s partnership with Thames Valley Police through the ‘DFR’ project earlier this year using PORTAL—and the potential for this technology to continue evolving how emergency services respond on the ground.



NPAS a recent visit to the unit at Barton (Greater Manchester)

NPAS

There remains that impression that the drone teams are driving manned police aviation into defending itself against the upstart drone, but despite this a manned resource still offers far more flexibility and the ability to put the best sensor of all – the human eye - in the sky. Even the best of cameras is not as flexible as the human eye in the search mode. However, once the target has been found, the narrow field of view of the electronic sensor far surpasses the 'Mark 1 Eyeball' in the tasking.

On grounds of cost police forces are being obliged to use drones but in the current state of technology there are suspicions that searches are not as thorough as those involving the overhead human eye and a related suspicion that some people may be dying unseen.

At the ESS Show the message being put out from NPAS on Linked In and the event marketing was 'What does the future of police aviation look like?' It was an invitation to draw near and hear how NPAS is embracing innovation to support (manned) policing from the skies.



The session sought to explore how NPAS is harnessing the latest technology to enhance operational effectiveness including the introduction of new helicopters and working with force drone teams.

The speaker team were Assistant Chief Constable Lee Berry NPAS and West Yorkshire Police and Paul Watts Head of Flight Operations, NPAS.

The operations are from fifteen bases, with no more planned, operating a fleet of Airbus helicopters in dire need of replacement. The first of the fully role equipped new fleet of nine should come on line in a years time. The aircraft currently in use are painted in NPAS colours but are only partially role equipped and used for pilot training.



ACC Lee Berry NPAS and West Yorkshire Police and Paul Watts Head of Flight Operations, NPAS

The role equipment to be fitted to all the fleet is a definite upgrade to that currently carried but each item is a 2025 selection that will only see the light of day in 2027. Yes very modern but (despite the inevitable claims on launch day) not necessarily the most advanced helicopter in the world.

There was a fleeting mention of West Yorkshire Police finally getting rid of NPAS operations to the yet to be created National Police Service (NPS). That might happen in around 18 months, and no doubt it will please the reluctant West Yorkshire Mayor Tracey Brabin and her Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime (DMPC), Alison Lowe but, as we have learned the hard way in politics and policing, it has yet to take place.

Questions were taken and addressed with candour but there were inevitably areas where the speakers chose not to venture.

It is debatable whether a clear picture of what police air support would look like in the future from the presentation given at the NEC in Birmingham but it was as clear as anyone would dare to offer at this time.

Off the podium there was good news about pilots. Recent moves in the military have resulted in an increase in the availability of pilots, taking a long-standing pressure away for the time being. In contrast the national problem of police officer retention is placing increased pressure on the retention of TFOs. Forces are recalling officers early or refusing to release them to serve with NPAS. This is little to do with NPAS other than they have to adjust their crewing to reflect the national problem.

No one knows what will happen to manned police air support in the face of drones, there are guesses out there of course, but only time will prove how accurate they turn out to be. Maybe nothing will really change for a long time simply because the required autonomy and safety cannot be guaranteed. Kill a few more

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pedestrians with stray drones and the public might just halt everything in its tracks, either permanently or just for a while. Aviation is the safest form of travel but every so often something goes awry.

THE REST

I have always reported that the Emergency Services Show was the greatest meeting place of its type in the United Kingdom – especially if you are a fire fighter or an ambulance operator. Despite the persistent overall lack of a police presence the gatherings to listen to the police drones and helicopters presentations on their future expectations were well attended and the information imparted of real interest.

This year the event seems to have taken a step back in progressing to an ever-bigger existence. From occupying two halls at the NEC last year, it has downsized slightly to just one hall and the usually bustling outside park of fire engines and other equipment simply failed to materialise.

I think it is a sign of the times and costs for the organisers, and the exhibitors have perhaps hit a bad patch under the current government that they have not been able to overcome.

It remains a good and interesting show and hopefully its fortunes will pick up for next September.



THE REST

