

CAL FIRE NEWS RELEASE

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection



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CAL FIRE Issues Urgent Warning Regarding Incursions of Unmanned Aircraft Systems

Sacramento - CAL FIRE, alongside our cooperators, wishes to issue an urgent warning regarding the incursion of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), commonly known as drones, into firefighting airspace. These incursions have raised serious concerns as they have led to the temporary suspension of critical aerial firefighting operations on a half-dozen incidents so far this year.

The FAA regularly implements Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFRs) around wildfire areas to protect the safety of aircraft participating in firefighting operations. All aircraft, including drones, are explicitly prohibited from entering these restricted areas unless they are operated by an agency directly involved in wildfire suppression efforts. Even when a TFR is not in effect, drone pilots are strongly urged to avoid flying near wildfires as it is considered a crime to interfere with firefighting operations.

“The danger of flying drones near wildfires cannot be overstated,” said Chief Jake Sjolund, Staff Chief Tactical Air Operations. “Such actions jeopardize lives and have immediate consequences for firefighting agencies' response efforts.”

When drones are detected near wildfires, fire response agencies will ground their aircraft to mitigate the risk of a midair collision. This delay in airborne response poses a significant threat to the safety of firefighters on the ground, residents, and properties in nearby communities. Additionally, it can allow wildfires to expand, putting more lives and resources at risk.

Individuals who operate UAS's without proper authorization over wildfire-affected areas may be found in violation of federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and ordinances, regardless of whether a is in place or not. Those who are determined to have interfered with wildfire suppression efforts and/or endangered manned aircraft or people on the ground with a UAS may face severe consequences, including civil penalties of up to \$20,000 and potential criminal prosecution.

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UAS (Drone) Incursions

Incursion: an entering in or into (something, such as an activity or undertaking)



IF YOU FLY, WE CAN'T.

Flying hobby drones near wildfires could cause injury or death to firefighters.

Drone Incursions

- *2023 - 6 incursions**
- 2022 - 1 incursions**
- 2021 - 5 incursions**
- 2020 - 4 incursions**
- 2019 - 3 incursions**

Total of **19** incursions on CAL FIRE incidents in the past **5** years.

KEEP DRONES AWAY FROM WILDFIRES.

*2023 numbers are subject to change as situations with drones continue to occur on a regular basis. Total incursions are for CAL FIRE incidents only, and do not include federal incidents.