

Department of Public Safety Report  
House and Senate Judiciary  
House and Senate Government Operations  
On  
2017 Vermont Law Enforcement Agency Drone Use



This document serves as the 2017 reporting requirement mandated by Section 4624 of Title 20. By statute, law enforcement agencies are required to send the Department of Public Safety (DPS) information related to any drone use within the previous 12 months. *See* 20 V.S.A. § 4624(a). Annually, DPS must forward the information collected pursuant to subsection (a) of this statute to the House and Senate Committees on Judiciary and on Government Operations. *See* 20 V.S.A. § 4624(b).

Vermont law enforcement agencies must report to DPS the following information:

- (1) The number of times the agency used a drone within the previous 12 months. For each use of a drone, the agency shall report the type of incident involved, the nature of the information collected, and the rationale for deployment of the drone.
- (2) The number of criminal investigations aided and arrests made through use of information gained by the use of drones within the previous 12 months, including a description of how the drone aided each investigation or arrest.
- (3) The number of times a drone collected data on any person, home, or area other than the target of the surveillance within the previous 12 months and the type of data collected in each instance.
- (4) The cost of the agency's drone program and the program's source of funding.

*See* 20 V.S.A. § 4624(a).

In accordance with statute, DPS submits the following information received from the Grand Isle Sheriff's Department:

**1. The number of times the agency used a drone within the previous 12 months. For each use of a drone, the agency shall report the type of incident involved, the nature of the information collected, and the rationale for deployment of the drone.**

The Grand Isle County Sheriff's Department (GICSD) deployed its Unmanned Aircraft System (UAV) 5 times for search and rescue missions:

- On February 27, 2017 and July 15, 2017 at Plainfield, Vermont, the GICSD deployed its UAV to assist in a search for a possible female drowning victim;
- On May 19, 2017 at Burke Mountain, Vermont, the GICSD deployed its UAV to assist in the recovery of a body from the bottom of a gorge; and
- On July 3, 2017 and July 5, 2017 at Colchester, Vermont, the GICSD deployed its UAV to assist in a search for a missing female in an area of land, swamp, and water (shoreline).

UAV use in all above-reported incidents provided video recording with GPS overlay of areas that was unsafe or difficult for people to search. It also provided video recording that could be reviewed for possible secondary searches. Recordings were also used for recovery teams to plan a safe route for recovery missions.

**2. The number of criminal investigations aided and arrests made through use of information gained by the use of drones within the previous 12 months, including a description of how the drone aided each investigation or arrest.**

UAV recordings or use was never used in criminal investigations or arrests.

**3. The number of times a drone collected data on any person, home, or area other than the target of the surveillance within the previous 12 months and the type of data collected in each instance.**

Anytime the UAV is flown and a recording is made there is always data collected (field of view of camera). This data would include buildings, persons outside, vehicles, etc. This data would only be collected if these objects were near or adjacent the search area. The height of UAV operation and camera view must be taken into account. There is no way to avoid collecting such data with a bird's-eye view recording.

**4. The cost of the agency's drone program and the program's source of funding.**

- The primary funding source is through a recreational boating safety (RBS) grant. This grant is through the U.S. Coast Guard and is managed by the Vermont State Police Marine Division. Reimbursement is only allowed if the incident involved a boating incident. Reimbursement is strictly enforced by the grant.
- When the UAV is requested and deployed and the usage does not meet the grant guidelines, the costs are covered by the Grand Isle Sheriff's Department. Typically, the Sheriff's Department covers the costs through in-house funds.
- GICSD uses its UAV at public events and school talks. The UAV is a new device used for Public Safety and Community Policing. GICSD holds demonstrations, and GICSD discusses its UAV usage is limited to search and rescue missions. GICSD's demonstrations have received a positive reaction from the community. GICSD's school talks have been positively received by the community's children, and the children are surprised to learn GICSD is the only law enforcement agency in the State using this technology.