

**GENERAL ORDER**

December 2024

Immediately

**III-39**

Distribution: All Employees

**Subject: SMALL UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS (sUAS)**

Index as:	Drones	Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems (sUAS)
	Post-Flight Log	sUAS
	Pre-Flight Log	Unmanned Aerial Vehicles
	Remote Pilot in Command (RPIC)	Visual Observer (VO)
	RPIC	VO

Accreditation Standards: 41.1.3, CFA 32.03

Cross Reference: G.O. III-14, Property and Evidence  
G.O. III-15, Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) Team  
§ 934.50, FS., Searches and seizure using a drone  
Florida Administrative Code 60GG-2.0075, Unmanned Aerial Systems Minimum Security Requirements

Replaces: Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) 14 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 107  
III-39 Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems (sUAS) (June 12, 2023)

This Order governs the use of Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems (sUAS) by the Department. It consists of:

- I. [Policy](#)
- II. [Definitions](#)
- III. [sUAS Deployment Criteria](#)
- IV. [uUAS Operation](#)
- V. [Training and Documentation](#)
- VI. [Storage and Retention](#)
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**I. POLICY**

- A. It is the policy of the St. Petersburg Police Department that any employee operating a Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems (sUAS) adheres to all applicable federal and Florida statutes governing drones and operates the sUAS in a safe manner.
- B. The Department's sUAS program is under the direction of the Strategic Operations Division (SOD) Major.

Designated supervisors may be assigned to oversee the use of a sUAS to achieve unit or function objectives (i.e. the use of a sUAS by the Traffic Section to map crash scenes).
- C. Only sUAS approved by the SOD Major, owned by the Department, and registered with the FAA are authorized to be used by Remote Pilots in Command (RPIC) in the performance of their duties. The assigned registration number will be on the body of the sUAS.
- D. All personnel authorized to use the sUAS will do so in a safe manner to minimize potential injury or property damage.

## II. DEFINITIONS

- A. Pre-Flight and Post-Flight Log – Either an electronic or hard copy log that contains a safety checklist for the sUAS, flight times, area flown, and weather conditions.
- B. Remote Pilot in Command (RPIC) – An individual who has full control over the sUAS and holds a valid Part 107 Airman Certificate with a Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems rating certified by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). RPICs are also considered “pilots.”
- C. Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems (sUAS) – An aircraft system that operates without a human pilot on board. The flight of the sUAS is controlled remotely by the RPIC.
- D. Visual Observer (VO) – An individual who is trained in sUAS operations and tasked to maintain a constant visual of the sUAS while it is airborne. The VO is also responsible to scan the immediate area for hazards that could impact the safe operation of the sUAS and to coordinate with the RPIC. Hazards may include, but are not limited to, adverse weather patterns, other aircraft, and terrain.

## III. sUAS DEPLOYMENT CRITERIA

- A. The operation of a sUAS may be authorized under the following conditions: (§ 934.50, Florida Statutes)
  - 1. To counter a high risk of a terrorist attack by a specific individual or organization if the United States Secretary of Homeland Security determines that credible intelligence indicates that there is such a risk.
  - 2. If the Department first obtains a search warrant signed by a judge authorizing the use of a sUAS.
  - 3. If the Department possesses reasonable suspicion that, under particular circumstances, swift action is needed to prevent imminent danger to life or serious damage to property, to forestall the imminent escape of a suspect or the destruction of evidence, or to achieve purposes including, but not limited to, facilitating the search for a missing person.
  - 4. To assist a law enforcement agency with traffic management; however, traffic infraction citation will not be issued based on images or video captured by the sUAS.
  - 5. To facilitate the collection of evidence at a traffic crash scene.
  - 6. To provide a law enforcement agency with an aerial perspective of a crowd of fifty (50) people or more.
  - 7. To assessment of damage due to a flood, a wildfire, or any other natural disaster that is the subject of a state of emergency declared by the state or by a political subdivision, before the expiration of the emergency declaration.
  - 8. In compliance with any additional provision of section 934.50, Florida Statutes.
- B. Unless otherwise allowed by law, it is prohibited to use a sUAS to record an images of private property or of the owner, tenant, occupant, invitee, or licensee of such property with the intent to conduct surveillance on the individual or property in violation of such person’s reasonable expectation of privacy, as defined in section 934.50, Florida Statutes, without their written consent.

## IV. uUAS OPERATION

- A. The sUAS will be flown by an authorized Remote Pilot in Command (RPIC) and, when practical, an authorized Visual Observer (VO) will be present during operations.

With the approval of the sUAS Commander or designee, personnel may operate the sUAS under the direct supervision of a RPIC.

## B. Remote Pilot in Command

1. The RPIC is responsible for the direct control over the sUAS.
2. The RPIC has the authority to deny a flight of the sUAS due to adverse weather, aircraft limitations, terrain obstructions, and/or pilot physical conditions.
3. Small UAS operators are encouraged to monitor local Common Traffic Advisory Frequency (CTAF) radio traffic when operating on or near an airport, for situational awareness.

## C. Visual Observer

The VO will work to assist the RPIC during flight operations in maintaining visual awareness of the airspace and relaying any hazards to the RPIC. Such hazards may include other aircraft, adverse weather, and terrain.

# V. TRAINING AND DOCUMENTATION

## A. A RPIC is required to:

1. Possess and maintain a valid CFR 14 Part 107 Airman Certificate with a sUAS rating certified by the FAA; and
2. Pass the Part 107 sUAS refresher test every twenty-four (24) months.

## B. To continue proficiency with the sUAS, RPICs will inspect and fly the sUAS at least once a month.

Each RPIC will keep an individual logbook documenting their flight hours and any certifications obtained.

## C. The following documentation will be maintained by the SOD Major or designee:

1. Pre-flight and post-flight logs,
2. Maintenance logs, and
3. Certification paperwork.

# VI. STORAGE AND RETENTION

## A. During official missions, video record mode will be activated on the sUAS at the RPIC's discretion based on their training and experience, or as directed by the SOD sUAS Commander or designee. The video recording may briefly be paused to take still images as necessary for documentation. However, the RPIC will endeavor to maintain video recording when not taking still photographs.

## B. All case related images and video will be uploaded into Evidence.com by either the RPIC or by another member of the Department to whom the RPIC has transferred the images to for investigative purposes. Any case-related images or video not uploaded to Evidence.com will be turned into the Property and Evidence Room.

Images and video turned into Property and Evidence will be maintained in the same manner as other forms of submitted digital evidence.

## C. Images and video that are not considered evidence, will be stored in Evidence.com for a period of at least thirty (30) days.

# VII. RESTRICTED USE AND RELEASE

## A. Downloaded images and video may be a public record, and the applicable exemptions and confidentiality provisions contained within Chapter 119 apply.

- B. Before any personnel utilizes any images and video for any law enforcement use not specified in this Order, they must submit a memorandum and acquire prior approval from an Assistant Chief. The memorandum must describe the data sought and the purpose for which they desire to use it.
- C. If videos and images would be useful for training purposes, an email should be sent to the Training Division. If the Training Division feels the video or images has value as a training tool, the Training Division must make a request through the Digital Evidence Management Unit for a copy of the video.
- D. Personal use of images and video, including but not limited to, downloading, copying or recording the images or video with another device (e.g., cell phone or tablet) is prohibited and may be subject to disciplinary action.
- E. The use of sUAS hardware or data for any purpose other than in accordance with Department policy is prohibited and may be subject to disciplinary action.

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Anthony Holloway  
Chief of Police