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Orland Park Police: First Illinois Police Department to Receive Drone Permit

The Village of Orland Park has added another first to its list of programs with the Orland Park Police Department being the first local police department in the State of Illinois to be granted a Federal Aviation Administration Certificate of Authorization (COA) for an unmanned aircraft system --- a drone. The FAA mandates that all public entities obtain a COA before flying any mission or operation.

"This is an important day for the Orland Park Police Department because they now can use a drone for law enforcement emergencies and to locate missing residents," said Mayor Dan McLaughlin. "I know that a lot of research and work went into Orland Park getting this certification and we appreciate the time spent on this project."

The department received a grant from the Region 7 Health Care Coalition to purchase a DGI Phantom III Professional drone. The Phantom III shoots 4K video at up to 30 frames per second, capturing 12 megapixel photos.

"We are grateful to the Health Care Coalition for providing the funding for Orland Park's drone," said Trustee Dan Calandriello, chair of the village's Public Safety Committee. "This will help the police department tremendously when they're looking for fugitives or trying to find missing people."

The Federal Aviation Administration requires that officers complete the private pilot ground school and successfully pass the FAA private pilot written examination in order to fly the drone. The drones may not fly higher than 400 feet as operators monitor the flight patterns for Midway and O'Hare Airports. The FAA is responsible for ensuring the safe operation of any aircraft within the National Airspace System.

"The Certificate of Authorization is a two year license that is drone specific," explained Police Chief Tim McCarthy. "Other agencies have used drones and being able to provide an aerial view has been invaluable in search and rescue situations, tactical, emergency response, hazardous incidents and investigative cases."

Because of its size, many small unmanned aircraft systems can be transported in the trunk of a patrol car and quickly deployed at an incident. With a hazardous materials incident, the sUAS can quickly deliver an aerial view of the scene, providing enhanced situational awareness and allowing first responders to develop an effective response while documenting the scene for subsequent investigation.

Orland Park Police Lieutenant Joe Mitchell oversaw the department's grant and authorization process.

"We began the process last May and are happy that the police department now has its authorization. It was a very involved process to receive the certification," Mitchell said. "We have six officers currently being trained to operate the department's drone."

Reiterating the benefits to the department, the mayor said, "There are many instances in Orland Park where a drone will help police on the ground --- if a child gets lost, if a fugitive takes off on foot or if a disabled resident wanders off. The benefits are endless."