

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD, AND FORESTRY

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Drones and Firefighting Aircraft Don't Mix

Fire conditions and drought continue to intensify across Oklahoma and with that comes an increase in wildfire activity. Firefighters were responding to a fire in northern Seminole County near Cromwell earlier this week and it was reported that a drone (Unmanned Aircraft System) was flying over the wildfire. Flying a drone near a wildfire creates a serious safety hazard for firefighters. Oklahoma Forestry Services is urging people to keep drones away from fire lines.

Drones of any size, small or large, can cause a serious or fatal accident if they collide with firefighting aircraft. In most situations, if drones are spotted near a wildfire, firefighting aircraft must be grounded due to safety concerns. This can result in wildfires becoming larger and firefighters on the ground no longer have aircraft as a tool to drop fire retardant, drop water or provide tactical information from above.

“If you fly, we can't,” said Mark Goeller, assistant director and fire management chief of Oklahoma Forestry Services. “Homes and other structures could burn needlessly, firefighters or others could be injured, or worst of all, a fatal accident could occur. Firefighting aircraft have no way to detect drones other than seeing them and a mid-air collision with an unauthorized drone is a distinct possibility.”

Individuals who are flying drones over fires are breaking the law. Occasionally during wildfires, the Federal Aviation Administration imposes temporary flight restrictions to protect aircraft and fire crews. Anyone operating a private aircraft or drone could face criminal charges.

“It is a felony in Oklahoma to prevent firefighters from performing their duties,” stated Goeller, citing Title 2, Section 16-6 of the Oklahoma Statutes.

Oklahoma Forestry Services, a division of the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, is the state's lead agency responsible for wildland fire suppression. For the latest burn ban and fire information, visit www.forestry.ok.gov.



United States Department of Agriculture

IF YOU FLY, WE CAN'T



DRONES NEAR WILDFIRES ARE NOT SAFE!

 FLYING DRONES OR UAS (UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS) WITHIN OR NEAR WILDFIRES WITHOUT PERMISSION COULD CAUSE INJURY OR DEATH TO FIREFIGHTERS AND HAMPER THEIR ABILITY TO PROTECT LIVES, PROPERTY, AND NATURAL CULTURAL RESOURCES

 FIRE MANAGERS MAY SUSPEND AERIAL FIREFIGHTING UNTIL UNAUTHORIZED UAS LEAVE THE AREA, ALLOWING WILDFIRE TO GROW LARGER.

 CONTACT YOUR NEAREST LAND MANAGEMENT AGENCY OFFICE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT UAS AND PUBLIC LANDS



Forest Service

Note to Media:

For the latest Oklahoma “Daily Wildfire Situation Report” visit www.forestry.ok.gov and click the link on the homepage (green box on right hand side.) The report contains information about recent fire activity, predicted fire weather and a link for current burn bans.

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