



Roxana Kennedy
Chief of Police

CHULA VISTA POLICE DEPARTMENT

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POLICE MEDIA ADVISORY

Date: July 18th, 2024
To: San Diego Media
From: Chula Vista Police Department
Contact: Sergeant Anthony Molina
Phone: (619) 691-5111
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Subject: **MILESTONE REACHED AT THE CHULA VISTA POLICE DEPARTMENT – DRONE AS FIRST RESPONDER SURPASSES 20,000 MISSIONS!**

Message: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Chula Vista Police Department's Drone as First Responder Program – the first of its kind in the nation – reached a major milestone this Wednesday when it surpassed 20,000 missions in support of police calls for service.

Since 2018, the Chula Vista Police Department has been responding to calls for help with the support of drones remotely operated by police officers. When someone in Chula Vista has an emergency and calls 9-1-1, the officer in the drone operations center (known as the teleoperator) hears the call in real-time and can send a drone to the scene, often before the call is even dispatched. Since the drone isn't affected by traffic or most physical boundaries, it can arrive close enough to start streaming live video of the emergency to officers before they arrive. ****It's important to note, the Chula Vista Police Department does not use DFR to proactively patrol or surveil the community.***

This live video feed can make all the difference in the outcome of an incident. It provides crucial information that helps officers decide which routes to take to the call, how many patrol resources they need to use, if special equipment is needed, and can even help resolve some calls without needing officers to respond – keeping them available for other emergencies.

Since it began, the Drone as First Responder (DFR) program has assisted on numerous types of calls such as armed robberies, domestic violence incidents, stolen vehicles, missing person cases, fires, traffic collisions, thefts in progress, various disturbance calls, and calls involving potential or actual weapons. Coupled with other technologies like Live911, which uses a web-based platform to stream audio of emergency calls to officers in real-time, DFR has helped officers de-escalate dangerous incidents by providing them with information to assess the situation before reacting. In many cases, officers have been able to delay approaching dangerous individuals because of the drone's live feed, allowing them time to use alternative methods, rather than force, to bring a peaceful end to the situation.

In 2019, the department received national attention when its DFR program was credited with de-escalating a “man with a gun” call. The emergency calls began as a man waved around what people thought was a gun. The drone arrived in the area within a minute and a half, focusing its camera on the man and allowing the teleoperator to provide updates to the responding officers. Prior to officers contacting the man, the teleoperator saw the man use his “gun” to light a cigarette. The “gun” was actually a lighter – information that potentially saved the man’s life. ([VIDEO LINK](#))

“When I watched the video of that incident, I knew we were on the right track with DFR, and that we owed it to our community to keep exploring innovative police technologies that could make our officers and the people they contact safer,” said Chief Roxana Kennedy.

More recently, in October of 2023, a man was rescued from a burning car on the side of the freeway – seconds before it was fully engulfed in flames. Although it was a heroic effort by officers to pull the man to safety, the outcome would have likely been tragically different without the department’s use of DFR and Live911. It was Live911 that allowed a Chula Vista Police sergeant to hear the incoming phone calls that would have normally been transferred to the California Highway Patrol. Based on what he heard, the sergeant requested an immediate response by Chula Vista Police officers. Although the location of the car fire had been given incorrectly by callers, the drone teleoperator observing DFR video provided the precise location of the fire, cutting the response time significantly. Officers arrived and battled the intense heat and flames to reach the man trapped in his car. In under four minutes, they had him pulled to safety, just seconds before the car became fully engulfed in flames. ([VIDEO LINK](#))

Chief Kennedy said, “Every day I see our officers put themselves in harm’s way to protect people they don’t even know. And it’s important for me to provide them with tools, including technology like DFR, to do their jobs safely and effectively.”

With over 20,000 missions flown, it would be hard to quantify how many times a life was saved because of information provided to officers by DFR. But other DFR activity is made available on the department’s [website](#), including the following numbers, updated July 18th, 2024:

- 2,835 – number of times DFR played a role in an arrest
- 4,336 – number of times patrol officers did NOT need to respond due to DFR
- 14,830 – number of times DFR was first on scene
- 92.75 seconds – the average response time when DFR arrived before patrol officers
- 110.16 seconds – the average response time for DFR overall

In addition to providing the DFR activity dashboard on their website, the department also provides a link to its [Drone Program Historical Flight Data](#). The portal gives community members access to a visual log of drone missions that includes a map and brief explanation for each flight. The portal is updated after each mission and community members are encouraged to check the portal if they wonder why a police drone may have been seen in their neighborhood.

Historical Flight Data is just one of many features added to enhance public safety and transparency throughout the program’s evolution. Other features include the addition of emergency drone parachutes, longer flight time, and even thermal capabilities which have become beneficial to both law enforcement and fire department personnel. Policies have also been established to prioritize the community’s privacy while responding to and from incident locations, as well as how DFR video is stored and utilized.

The department's DFR program reached 10,000 missions in March 2022, and now just over two years later, it surpassed 20,000. "20,000 missions is an amazing accomplishment, but we're not stopping here. As we continue to grow and adapt to the everchanging environment of police work, you can expect to see the Chula Vista Police Department remain at the forefront of innovation and technology for good," said Chief Roxana Kennedy.

See below for a detailed list of accomplishments and significant milestones reached since the inception of the Chula Vista Police Department's Drone as First Responder program.

PROGRAM HISTORY:

- In November 2018, the Chula Vista Police Department was selected by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to be a part of the FAA's Integration Pilot Project (IPP). The department was the only law enforcement member to participate. The IPP was a federal initiative designed to help integrate drones into the National Air Space.
- In May 2019, Chula Vista Police became the first law enforcement agency in the country to be authorized by the FAA to fly Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) in an urban area. FAA regulations usually require drone operators to maintain a visual line of sight of drones at all times while in flight. The BVLOS authorization allowed the department to fly drones to emergency incidents up to three miles away from the launch site, beyond visual line of sight. This allowed the department's drones to fly as first responders to many more emergencies across the community, often arriving long before officers on the ground.
- In August 2019, the FAA authorized the department to open a second launch site, greatly expanding the area its drones could cover. The second launch site allowed the department to provide DFR services to about 33% of the city's geographic location. Due to its density and commercial activity, it is responsible for about 70% of the priority calls for service.
- In April 2020, the department became the first police agency in the nation to test and successfully use Live911, a revolutionary software that live-streams 911 calls directly to officers in the field. Drone operators and officers can monitor Live911 to get a "jump-start" on emergency calls, reducing the department's response time. The Live911 program also provides quality information to responding officers for enhanced decision-making. The ability to hear a caller's voice, rather than only getting an electronic description through Computer Aided Dispatch systems, can create faster and safer outcomes for everyone involved.
- In November 2020, department received FAA approval that allowed two drones to fly in close proximity airspace for a single incident. The department was the first law enforcement agency in the country to receive this type of authorization. It allowed for continuous drone coverage over a scene to support first responders with real-time information.
- In March 2021, the department made history as the first in the United States to obtain FAA authorization to launch from anywhere in the city. By November of the same year, with the addition of two launch sites in the eastern portion of Chula Vista, first responders finally had the support of DFR city-wide. In addition, the Chula Vista Police Department became the first to obtain a two-to-one waiver from the FAA, which allowed the department to launch two drones from each site, providing seamless service to the community and first responders.
- In April 2021, the department partnered with Airdata and Motorola Solutions in creating a website portal to enhance transparency with the community. The [Drone Program Historical Flight Data](#)

is updated after each DFR mission to provide community members with flight path data information and the reason for the flight.

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