



Interagency Aviation Accident Prevention Bulletin



IA APB 19-04

July 25, 2019

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Subject: UAS Intrusions in Fire Suppression Operations

Area of Concern: Mid-Air Potential

Distribution: All Aviation Activities

Discussion: Interagency Safety [Alert \(IASA\) 14-03, Conflicts with Civilian Unmanned Aircraft & Hobbyist/Remote Controlled Aircraft](#), was published to highlight emerging Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) hazards that pose significant potential to interfere with DOI and USFS missions.

[IASA 15-01, UAS Intrusions Impacting Incident Air Operations](#), was published a year later to help mitigate the risk associated with unauthorized UAS operations in the fire environment. Incident personnel were encouraged to develop standard operating procedures to manage UAS intrusions in the Fire Traffic Area (FTA).



On July 7, 2019, the drone intrusion procedures for the Incident Management Team on the Swan Lake Fire in Kenai, Alaska were put to the test. While driving eastbound on Alaska Highway 1, the Division L Trainee observed a drone taking off from a vehicle parked on the side of the highway. The Trainee stopped his car (if you see something, say something) and confronted the civilian UAS operator. He informed the UAS operator that he was putting firefighters and aviation resources at risk and needed to leave the area. A Ch-47 helicopter, enroute to the fire, was able to continue the mission instead of being grounded because of the UAS intrusion. The UAS operator's license plate number was later provided to law enforcement officials.

After discussing the incident with the Air Operations Branch Director (AOBD) (T), the AOBD (T), in accordance with the drone intrusion procedures, notified the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center (AICC) in Fairbanks and the Kenai Dispatch Center (KIDC) in Kenai.

The U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, 43 CFR 9212.1(f) is very specific when it states that it is illegal to resist or interfere with the efforts of firefighter(s) to extinguish a fire. Doing so can result in a fine of \$1,000, a year in prison, or both.

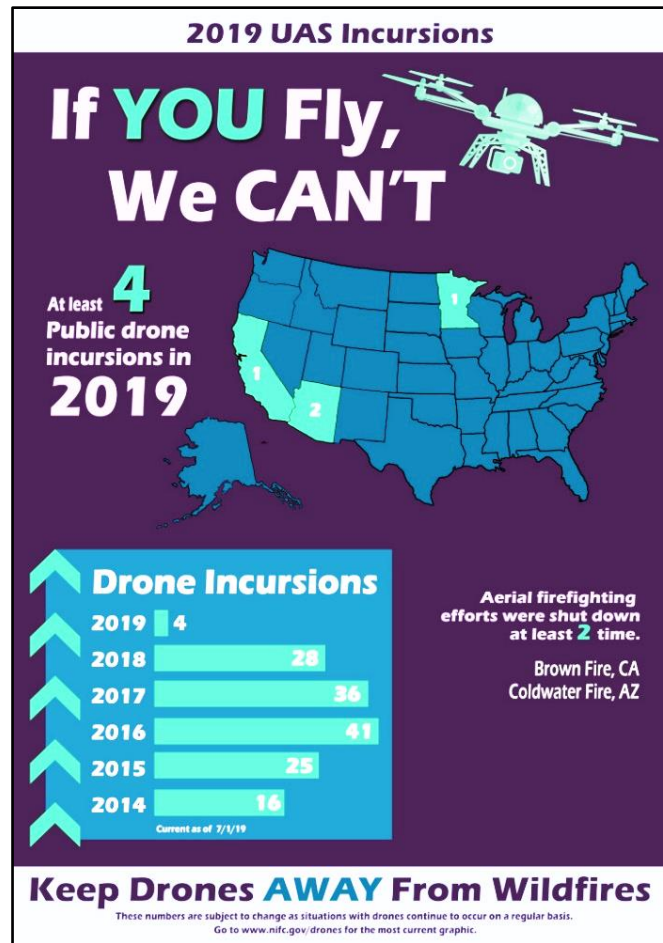
According to incursion data tracked by our interagency partners, there have been over 153 incidents since 2014 (7 now in 2019), where UAS incursions during fire suppression operations had the potential to cause an aircraft mishap resulting in aircraft damage, personal injury or death.

With the proliferation of small UAS, FTA intrusions will continue to occur until education, awareness, and strong enforcement action make an impact.

[The NWCG Unmanned Aircraft System Incursion Protocol for Wildland Firefighters](#) provides very detailed procedures for UAS intrusions.

FAA [Public Safety and Law Enforcement Toolkit](#) is designed to assist law enforcement and public safety entities in operating and handling situations involving drones or UAS.

Remember, please continue to report all incursions in [SAFECOM](#). Make sure to include in the SAFECOM that local law enforcement and the FAA were contacted.



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