



RALPH M. TERRAZAS
FIRE CHIEF

April 22, 2020

TO: Board of Fire Commissioners

BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS
FILE NO. 20-042

FROM: *RMT* Ralph M. Terrazas, Fire Chief

SUBJECT: UNMANNED AERIAL SYSTEMS EXPANDED USE IN 2020 BRUSH
CLEARANCE INSPECTION PROGRAM

FINAL ACTION:	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved w/Corrections	<input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn
	<input type="checkbox"/> Denied	<input type="checkbox"/> Received & Filed	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

SUMMARY

The hillside and canyon communities in Los Angeles found within the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ) have proven to challenge our fire prevention and fire suppression efforts. The Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) always strives to improve upon our comprehensive Brush Clearance Program to protect lives and property for those who live in these communities. During these trying times, due to the COVID-19 health pandemic, the LAFD must create opportunities to leverage and utilize technology to remain in alignment with safety precautions and social distancing, while increasing efficiency and meeting our mission.

The LAFD is now in the position to integrate the Unmanned Aerial System (UAS – drone) to support our Brush Clearance Program. The LAFD UAS will be utilized during the 2020 Brush Clearance Season to support Brush Clearance Unit (BCU) Fire Inspectors with real time, clear imagery, giving them the ability to more accurately conduct and record the brush inspection of properties within the VHFHSZ.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board:
Approve the report.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this report.

DISCUSSION

The 2019 Brush Clearance Program tested the integration of UAS into the inspection process, mapping and archiving 37 public parcels for the BCU. The trial met its intended goal of increasing situational awareness, supporting enhanced brush inspection

documentation and gauging public acceptance of the use of the technology in this manner. To the later, the pilots and the mission were met with complete acceptance by the public and property owners involved. The use of UAS in conducting inspections do not fall under our Certificate of Authorization as these flights are not in response to an emergency. Therefore, all flights would be conducted under the FAA Part 107 license held by the pilot in charge.

These flight missions are consistent with our existing policy and the spirit of maintaining public trust and the Department's efforts to at all times remain transparent in our service delivery. These flight missions are also consistent with existing federal, state and local privacy protection guidelines. Recent state legislation has been amended to provide greater clarity on the issues of using unmanned vehicles in support of public safety missions, including code enforcement ([AB-1327 Unmanned aircraft systems](#)).

All missions flown to support the BCU and the brush clearance/brush task force program will be flight planned, filed and conducted in accordance with all existing policies, operation manuals, and FAA airspace regulations.

CONCLUSION

The fire service of today goes far beyond extinguishing fires and providing emergency medical care. Tools that provide our fire service professionals greater awareness and access to critical information allows for safer and more effective action. Through the use of the LAFD UAS within our Brush Clearance Program, more efficient and effective brush clearance inspections will be conducted. Just as essential, the LAFD UAS will allow for increased safety precautions and ensure the health and wellbeing of our BCU Fire Inspectors throughout the Brush Inspection season during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Board report prepared by Richard Fields IV, Battalion Chief, LAFD UAS Program Coordinator.

Attachment



THE LOS ANGELES FIRE DEPARTMENT

To Property Owner,

The Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) provides exceptional Fire Protection and Emergency Medical Services by being metric driven, technologically sophisticated and community focused while reflecting the people we serve. The LAFD always strives to improve upon our comprehensive Brush Clearance Program to protect lives and property for those who live in the Very High Fire Severity Hazard Zone. During these trying times, due to the COVID-19 health pandemic, safety precautions are paramount to protect Fire Inspectors while they ensure the safety of the public. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has created an opportunity to leverage and utilize technology to assist the LAFD with staying in alignment with safety precautions and social distancing, while increasing efficiency and meeting our mission.

The LAFD is pleased to announce the integration of the Unmanned Aerial System (UAS – drone) to support our Brush Clearance Program. The LAFD UAS will be utilized during the 2020 Brush Clearance Season to support BCU Fire Inspectors with real time, clear imagery, giving them the ability to more accurately conduct and record the brush inspection of your property.

The use of LAFD UAS will not only expedite the inspection process, reduce the number of properties requiring entry by BCU Fire Inspectors, it will also be less intrusive to the property, property owner and all involved in the brush inspection process. The LAFD UAS images will only be utilized to determine the status of brush clearance on your property. If the BCU Fire Inspector determines from the LAFD UAS images that brush clearance on your property has been completed, a Cleared by Owner (CBO) record will be recorded. If the BCU Fire Inspector determines from the LAFD UAS images that brush clearance on your property has not been completed, an onsite brush inspection will be conducted to determine and confirm if brush hazard violation(s) exist prior to recording a failed initial inspection of your property.

The integration of the LAFD UAS requires no additional action from you. If you have completed the brush clearance on your property, we thank you in advance. If the brush clearance has not been completed, please do so prior to June 1, 2020 to avoid the \$29.00 initial inspection fee. Brush clearance is a year-round responsibility. Clear early. Clear often.

For more information about our Brush Clearance Program, please visit: lafd.org/brush or visit the Brush Inspection Portal at vms3.lafd.org and register a Brush account to follow the brush inspection status of your property. For questions or concerns, email the BCU at lafdbush@lacity.org. As always, the LAFD BCU is happy to assist you.