



EAST TENNESSEE STATE
UNIVERSITY

Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) / Drone Operations Policy

Policy Name: Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) / Drone Operations Policy

Policy Purpose

This policy establishes requirements for the safe, lawful, authorized, and responsible operation of unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), commonly referred to as drones, when UAS are launched, landed, or operated from East Tennessee State University (ETSU) property; owned, leased, or operated by ETSU; or used on behalf of ETSU or in connection with a University-sponsored event, activity, or program. The policy is intended to support compliance with applicable Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations and Tennessee law; protect the safety, privacy, and security of the University community and visitors; reduce interference with nearby emergency medical aviation operations; and protect University events and activities.

Applicability

This policy applies to faculty, staff, students, visitors, third-party vendors, contractors, researchers, media representatives, and other persons or entities that (1) launch, land, or operate a UAS from University Property; (2) operate a UAS owned or leased by ETSU; or (3) operate a UAS on behalf of ETSU or in connection with a University-sponsored event, activity, or program. This policy does not purport to regulate lawful transit through navigable airspace by a person who is not acting for or on behalf of ETSU and whose UAS is launched, landed, and controlled from property not owned or controlled by ETSU. Such operations remain subject to applicable federal and state law.

Responsible Official, Office, and Interpretation

The ETSU Chief of Police is responsible for the review and revision of this policy. For questions about this policy, please contact the ETSU Police Department. The Chief Operating Officer, in consultation with the Office of University Counsel, has the final authority to interpret this policy.

Defined Terms

A defined term has a specific meaning within the context of this policy.

Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) or Drone

A powered aerial vehicle that does not carry a human operator, is operated without the possibility of direct human intervention from within or on the aircraft, uses aerodynamic

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forces to provide vehicle lift, can fly autonomously or be piloted remotely, and can be expendable or recoverable. This term includes the aircraft and its associated elements (including communication links and the components that control the aircraft) that are required for the safe and efficient operation of the aircraft in the national airspace system.

University Property

All land, buildings, facilities, and other real property owned, leased, or controlled by ETSU, including outdoor athletic and event venues.

Visual Line of Sight (VLOS)

The ability of the remote pilot or visual observer to see the unmanned aircraft throughout the entire flight with vision unaided by any device other than corrective lenses, in order to know its location, determine its attitude, altitude, and direction of flight, observe the airspace for other air traffic or hazards, and determine that the unmanned aircraft does not endanger the life or property of another.

Policy

1. Compliance with Federal and State Law.

1.1. All UAS operations subject to this policy must comply with applicable federal and state law, including the rules governing the particular operation, airspace authorization, aircraft registration, Remote ID, and any temporary flight restrictions (TFRs) or other airspace restrictions. ETSU authorization does not replace any FAA certificate, waiver, airspace authorization, or other legal requirement.

1.2. University Authorization Required.

1.2.1. Prior written authorization from the ETSU Police Department is required before a person may (1) launch, land, or operate a UAS from University Property; (2) operate a UAS owned or leased by ETSU; or (3) conduct a UAS operation on behalf of ETSU or in connection with a University-sponsored event, activity, or program. Authorized emergency and public-safety operations are governed by the Procedures section below.

1.3. Athletic and Ticketed Events.

1.3.1. UAS operations from University Property or on behalf of ETSU are prohibited during intercollegiate athletic events and practices unless specifically approved in writing by Athletics and the ETSU Police Department.

Policy Effective Date: 09/14/2026 • **Policy Revised:** Insert
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1.3.2. Operators must independently comply with Tennessee restrictions applicable to public K-12 school grounds and ticketed or open-air events, and with any applicable FAA stadium TFR. When required by Tennessee law, an operation involving University School grounds must also be approved by the University School Director or designee. ETSU authorization does not waive or replace any state or federal requirement.

1.4. Hospital Helipad and Life-Flight.

1.4.1. The remote pilot in command must not interfere with any crewed-aircraft operation, must yield the right-of-way to all crewed aircraft, and must immediately land or otherwise terminate the UAS operation when necessary to avoid interference. When a proposed operation may affect Johnson City Medical Center Heliport (TN91) or another nearby heliport, the ETSU Police Department may require documented coordination with the facility as a condition of authorization.

1.5. Privacy.

1.5.1. UAS may not be used to conduct surveillance, capture or use images, or collect data in any manner that violates federal or Tennessee law or University policy. Operators must take reasonable steps to avoid or minimize the incidental capture of identifiable individuals when it is not necessary for the approved operation.” Law-enforcement use must comply with Tennessee Code Annotated § 39-13-609 and applicable constitutional requirements. A University-sponsored operation must limit the collection, use, disclosure, and retention of images and data to its approved purpose and must obtain any other required University approval.

1.6. Safety.

1.6.1. Operations must comply with applicable FAA requirements concerning VLOS, altitude, airspace authorization, operation over people or moving vehicles, night operations, right-of-way, and careless or reckless operation, unless the FAA has granted an applicable waiver or other authorization.

1.6.2. University UAS must be registered with the ETSU Police Department.

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Procedures

1. Request for Authorization.

- 1.1. Any person or entity seeking authorization under this policy must submit a written request to the ETSU Police Department at least ten (10) business days before the proposed operation. The Police Department may waive or shorten this period when circumstances reasonably require.
- 1.2. The request must include, as applicable:
 - 1.2.1. Name, contact information, and affiliation of the remote pilot in command and any visual observers.
 - 1.2.2. Description of the UAS (make, model, weight, registration number, and Remote ID status).
 - 1.2.3. Purpose of the flight, proposed date(s), time(s), duration, and flight path or operating area.
 - 1.2.4. Proof of the FAA credentials required for the operation (such as a Remote Pilot Certificate under Part 107 or TRUST completion for a qualifying recreational operation), aircraft registration, and any required FAA waiver or airspace authorization.
 - 1.2.5. Evidence of liability insurance in limits determined by Risk Management, or confirmation of applicable University coverage.
 - 1.2.6. For an operation that may affect Johnson City Medical Center Heliport (TN91), any coordination documentation or risk-mitigation plan requested by the ETSU Police Department.
- 1.3. The ETSU Police Department will review the request for consistency with this policy and campus safety, security, property, and operational considerations. It may coordinate with Athletics, Risk Management, Facilities, the Office of University Counsel, the responsible University unit, or other offices as appropriate. The operator remains responsible for compliance with all FAA and other legal requirements.
- 1.4. Authorization, if granted, will be issued in writing and may contain conditions, time or location restrictions, or required coordination measures. A decision will be based on viewpoint-neutral safety, security, property, operational, privacy, or legal considerations. Authorization may be denied, suspended, or revoked when those considerations reasonably require. University authorization permits only

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the University-controlled aspects of the operation; it does not constitute FAA authorization or grant access to restricted University areas.

2. Emergency and Public Safety Operations.

2.1. Authorized ETSU Police Department personnel, or personnel of another public-safety agency operating under mutual aid or with the approval of the Chief of Police, may operate UAS for emergency response, search and rescue, threat assessment, crime-scene documentation, or similar official purposes without the advance-request period above when delay is impracticable, provided all applicable FAA and state-law requirements are met. This policy does not independently authorize a search, surveillance, or the collection, use, disclosure, or retention of evidence or other data. Law-enforcement operations remain subject to Tennessee Code Annotated § 39-13-609, applicable constitutional requirements, and departmental procedures.

3. Registration of University-Owned UAS.

3.1. Any UAS owned or leased by ETSU, or operated by an ETSU department, unit, or employee for University purposes, must be registered with the ETSU Police Department before first use and annually thereafter. Registration information must also be updated after a material change.

3.2. Registration includes the aircraft and operator information required in the authorization request and confirmation of applicable University insurance coverage or another arrangement approved by Risk Management.

4. Incident Reporting.

4.1. Any accident, incident, near-miss, loss of control, injury, property damage, or complaint involving a UAS operated under this policy must be reported to the ETSU Police Department as soon as practicable, and immediately when an emergency or continuing hazard exists.

4.2. The remote pilot in command must also comply with any applicable FAA reporting requirement, including 14 C.F.R. § 107.9.

5. Enforcement.

5.1. A violation of this policy may result in a direction to cease the operation or leave University Property, denial or revocation of University authorization, and, as applicable, referral for student or employee disciplinary action. Suspected violations of state or federal law may be referred to the appropriate enforcement authority.

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Applicable Forms and Websites

[FAA Drone Zone](#)

[FAA B4UFLY / LAANC authorization tools](#)

[Tennessee Department of Transportation Aeronautics UAS Program](#)

[ETSU Police Department UAS Authorization Request Form](#) (contact the ETSU Police Department or visit the [ETSU Police Department website](#))

[Johnson City Medical Center / Ballad Health HEART operations coordination](#) (if required by the ETSU Police Department)

Authority and Revisions

Authority: T.C.A. § 49-8-203; 49 U.S.C. §§ 40103 and 44809; 14 C.F.R. Parts 48, 89, and 107; 14 C.F.R. § 99.7 and applicable FAA temporary flight restrictions; T.C.A. Title 39, Chapter 13, Part 9; and T.C.A. § 39-13-609.

Previous Policy: N/A

The ETSU Board of Trustees is charged with policy making pursuant to TCA § 49-8-203, et seq. On March 24, 2017, the Board delegated its authority to ETSU's President to establish certain policies and procedures for educational program and other operations of the University, including this policy. The delegation of authority and required process for revision to this policy can be found on the [Policy Development and Rule Making Policy webpage](#).

To suggest a revision to this policy, please contact the responsible official indicated in this policy. Before a substantive change to the policy section may take effect, the requested changes must be: (1) approved by the responsible office; (2) reviewed by the Office of University Counsel for legal sufficiency; (3) posted for public comment; (4) approved by either Academic Council or University Council; and (5) approved by ETSU's President.