

Salisbury, Mass., Police Consider How They Could Use Drones

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(TNS) — A specially equipped drone is expected to fly over the police station on Beach Road next week as part of a demonstration of what could become the town's newest law enforcement tool.

Police Chief Thomas Fowler said a Rhode Island-based company is scheduled to visit the station to show what a police drone could mean in terms of rescue operations, inspecting suspicious packages and even measuring beach erosion.

"It would be a 'nice to have' not a 'need to have,'" Fowler said.

The idea came courtesy of Det. Keith Forget, who attended a training session for unmanned aerial vehicles and thought the Police Department could benefit.

"I thought to myself, 'This is a great technology,' so I brought it to the chief's attention and he agreed," Forget said.

Fowler said a drone could be used not just for the department but also the town's emergency management operations and the building inspector. Officials from those departments and others will be among those taking part in the demonstration.

"This is the first time we're really taking a look," Fowler said.

Ethan Cohen, president of UAV Look, a local drone photography/videography company, said he could see how a drone could be very useful for a police department.

"It certainly can be an effective tool for them if they use it responsibly," Cohen said, adding that an increasing number of federal, state and local agencies are deploying drones.

Drones have been the center of controversy for years as privacy advocates raise concerns about their possible misuse to pry into people's lives. Drones have also caused serious disruptions at major airports, including last month in London.

"There's an understandable concern from the public for privacy concerns but all the same laws apply to government drone use," Cohen said.

If the department purchases a drone, Fowler admitted there would be some who wouldn't be pleased.

But for a beach community such as Salisbury, a drone could be a lifesaver if a surfer is swept out to sea or at the very least, it could help ease beach traffic that clogs town roads on summer weekends, according to Fowler and Forget.

"There's a million applications for it," Forget said.

He added that it is too early to say if the department would purchase and then operate a drone program.

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