

Syracuse, N.Y., Fire Department Gets Approval for Drone Program

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(TNS) — SYRACUSE, N.Y. — The Syracuse Fire Department has launched a new drone program to help it fight fires, Syracuse Fire Chief Michael Monds said Friday.

The department expects to use drones for stubborn fires or on fires in large commercial buildings, said Fire Capt. Timothy Gleeson at a demonstration of the drones the department held Friday.

The drones' thermal imaging capabilities will allow firefighters to see hotspots in stubborn fires and identify spots where roofs or parts of buildings could collapse, Monds said.

"We're aggressive. ... This is a really different type of concept," Monds said. "To step back and get a good picture."

The fire department does not plan on using thermal imaging to find people trapped in a fire yet because that imaging technology is not that advanced, Gleeson said.

The department began looking into a drone in June 2017 and applied for approval from the Federal Aviation Administration in early April, Gleeson said. The FAA approved the program last week, he said.

Monds said the program has cost the department close to \$20,000 to start, though he expects the cost to maintain the program to drop.

The fire department's Unmanned Aerial System team has three team leaders who took a 40-hour training class before the department could get approval to use drones, Gleeson said. Because drones are considered aircrafts, people operating them have to fly under FAA rules and be registered with the FAA, he said.

Ten team operators have been taking a 32-hour course for the last week, Gleeson said. Eight of them work for the fire department while two others worked for other departments with the city, he said.

Other departments across the country use drones for search and rescue and wildfires, Gleeson said. During the department's research, they looked into how the drone's capabilities could be applied by an "urban" fire department, he said.

"I think it's going to be a good thing," Monds said. "We just have to take some time and see how it goes."

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