

FAQs - Unmanned Flying Vehicles (UFVs) at Stanford

Federal regulations governing unmanned flying vehicles (UFVs) were enacted in 2016. To address these regulations and provide for ongoing research, educational, and University business use of UFVs, policy and guidance governing the proposed use of UFVs at Stanford or by Stanford community members is now in place at Chapter 7.10 of Stanford's Research Policy Handbook. The FAQs below will help guide people interested in learning more about the use of UFVs at Stanford.

1. Can anyone fly an UFV at the University?

No. Third Parties are prohibited from flying UFVs from within or above the University lands. For the purposes of this policy, current faculty, students, staff, or other persons acting on behalf of the University pursuant to an approved agreement (or "Approved Vendors") are not "Third Parties," and may fly UFVs with the approval of the UFV Committee. All other persons or entities are Third Parties and are prohibited from flying UFVs from within or above the University lands.

2. Are there any restrictions on flying UFVs at the University?

UFVs may be flown by faculty, students, staff, and Approved Vendors *if and only if* the flight is approved in advance by the University's UFV Committee in addition to any other applicable entities within the University, the flight has a nexus to the University's mission or community, and the flight adheres to any limits prescribed by the UFV Committee to ensure safety and compliance with all applicable laws.

3. Do you have to be a member of the Stanford community to be able to fly UFVs from or over Stanford land?

Yes, the policy applies to faculty, students, or staff seeking to pursue the following activities:

- o Research and development or data collection by flying UFVs in the pursuit of their university duties, whether on or off the University property.
- o UFV flight as a part of their university courses, or research activities, whether on or off the University property.
- o Agreements or other arrangements for Approved Vendors and other persons to fly UFVs on behalf of the University (such as for aerial photography, or for any of the reasons above), whether on or off the University property; and
- o Model aircraft or other UFV flights from within or above the University property for recreational or hobby purposes (which will require membership in a University sanctioned hobbyist club).

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All other persons or entities are prohibited from flying UFVs from within or above the University lands.

4. I comply with the FAA regulations, or have an applicable exemption, do I need to do anything else to fly at the University? Why?

Stanford University has a strong interest in ensuring that its private property and facilities are used in support of its mission and in a manner that is not harmful to it or its surrounding community. In addition, UFV's may be regulated by agencies other than the FAA (including state and local entities) for reasons of safety, privacy, national security, or environmental reasons.

For example, certain UFV's may include components that are regulated for export control purposes as

defense articles, and foreign national access restrictions may apply. Stanford, by policy, maintains an open campus where all members of its community may participate fully in activities associated with its research and educational mission regardless of citizenship.

As such, an application must be submitted and approved by the UFV Committee regardless of whether the applicant complies with FAA regulations.

5. If I am a student hobbyist, can I fly anywhere?

Stanford students who wish to fly UFVs on University property must comply with the UFV policy, including being a member of the University sanctioned hobbyist club, and meeting the requirements of the club and this policy. Currently Stanford has an active student organization, Stanford Flight Club (previous name Stanford Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Enthusiasts Engineers and Entrepreneurs (SUAVE)) that is open to any currently registered Stanford student or employee. With active membership and training, members of SUAVE can fly UFVs in pre-approved locations.

6. What if I see a drone flying around the University, and I'm not sure whether it has been approved for flight?

Approved operators are required to carry a Certificate of Permission from the UFV Committee on their persons. If you have concerns, call the Stanford Department of Public Safety (DPS) communications line at 650-329-2413.

7. Where can I find a map of no-fly zone areas?

The map is available here: <https://doresearch.stanford.edu/resources/tools-documents/ufv-use-restrictions-no-fly-zone-map>

8. What if I see a drone flying dangerously close to people or posing serious imminent dangers? Call 911 or the DPS communications line at 650-329-2413 to report the observation.

9. In general, which areas are flight-restricted or require exceptional circumstances for approval?

Flights are generally not permissible in locations such as the Oval, Main Quad, Memorial Court, the Central Energy Facility, SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory, in the vicinity of a highway or road, above public venues or thoroughfares, and in the vicinity of hospitals or airports.

10. What kind of components, payloads, or modifications are not allowed?

Stanford University will generally not approve flight requests for UFV's that include commercial components or payloads that are regulated under the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) as export-controlled defense articles. Because Stanford's foreign national community is prohibited from openly flying UFV's entailing commercial ITAR controlled components or payload, or UFV's that are modified for a specific military or intelligence gathering purpose, the University will not sanction flights that would run counter to its policies on openness and nondiscrimination.

Additional information about the ITAR and Stanford's export control program is available at

<https://doresearch.stanford.edu/topics/export-controls-overview>.

11. How long will my approval be valid?

The Committee will approve only the necessary duration for the proposed activity. Recurring flight approvals may be requested. Maximum period of approval for ongoing activities will be for one year or the duration of research project.

12. Do I need approval even though I am not flying above the University lands? What if I'm flying outside the U.S.?

Yes, unless the drone use is in faculty field research as discussed in the next question.

13. What is the process for using a drone for faculty field research away from campus or in another country?

Faculty (Note: Students or staff if not accompanied by faculty will need to follow normal application process) using drones during their field (domestic or foreign) research (but not on the Stanford campus/ Stanford lands), must ensure that their use accords with all applicable laws, rules, regulations, and restrictions at the location of the research. These uses do not require prior approval by the UFV Committee, though they may require approval by local authorities, sponsors, IRBs, schools, and departments.

UFV Committee (including advisory and administration membership) works as an advisor to the researchers. Here are considerations faculty should keep in mind:

- i. Drone Pilot should have FAA Remote (or applicable) pilot Certification.
- ii. Drone Pilot should be familiar with University's Drone Policy located at <https://doresearch.stanford.edu/policies/research-policy-handbook/environmental-health-and-safety/operation-unmanned-flying-vehicles#anchor-9204> .
- iii. Some private and public places require evidence of insurance. Evidence of insurance can be provided in the form of Memorandum of Insurance (MOI) located at [University's MOI](#) . If your contact is not familiar with MOI, provide them introductory information located at <https://orm.stanford.edu/certificates-insurance> .
- iv. Drone Pilot or fire spotter should have in their possession a fire extinguisher during all flights and know how to use it. Review the UC's "Fire and Drones" educational slides at the link below, especially on use of a fire extinguisher: <https://ucdrones.github.io/library/trainings/FireSafety/index.html#/lessons/u1ntQq6TcsRo7GjKexBxxkjDh6SDmCgc>
- v. Pursuant to the American Security Drone Act, effective immediately, government contractors are prohibited from delivering any unmanned aircraft system that is prohibited by the Federal Acquisition Security Council (FASC), which includes those manufactured or assembled by a "covered foreign entity", as defined by [NDAA Section 1822](#), including entities subject to influence or control by China. Effective December 22, 2025, government grant or award funds may not be used to procure or operate any FASC-prohibited unmanned aircraft system nor use such systems in the performance of a government contract. A cleared list of drone vendors can be found [here](#), although other

vendors will also be considered.

- vi. **Export Controls Drone Temporary Exports**
Most UAV's used in research projects are not subject to specific export controls and may generally be temporarily taken outside the United States without an export license. However, it is the responsibility of the exporting party to assess the applicability of export control regulations. In particular, drones designed for military applications, those capable of operating beyond the operator's direct line of sight, those equipped with autonomous flight control systems, or those featuring aerosol dispensing capabilities are subject to export controls.
- vii. Exporting parties should consult the Export Control Office at exportcontrols@stanford.edu to determine the appropriate export classification for drone hardware. Additionally, any temporary export of Stanford-owned equipment must be reported to the Export Control Office by completing the [One Time TMP Certification form](#).
- viii. Consider privacy and land use laws and regulations. You may need permission to fly from landowners and authorities. Be aware of local privacy laws regarding aerial surveillance, photography, or data collection. Some countries and jurisdictions may prohibit capturing identifiable images of individuals, private property, or sensitive facilities.
- ix. Develop safety, contingency, and emergency plans. emergency landing sites, local contacts in case of accidents, weather protocols.
- x. In case of any accident involving the drone, damage to property or injury to any person, please report it to us at:
 - a. [Property Loss Form](#) (theft) or [Property Incident Report](#) or upon learning of an incident that could result in a claim against the University, [form SU-17B](#).
- xi. Enter your drone flight data (related to field research) at <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1hiJbAN0TNTSc8KUVL38ztZxIJneD3GO2/edit?usp=sharing&oid=102817269206963977171&rtpof=true&sd=true>
- xii. Contacts: Ash Chaudhry, Senior Research Consultant, at ashcha@stanford.edu .
: **Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S)** (for fire/safety guidance), at <https://ehs.stanford.edu/> .