



NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
OC Sheriff Public Affairs, 714-904-7042

Orange County Sheriff Launches 'Drone as a First Responder' Program

SANTA ANA, Calif. (Oct. 20, 2026)– The Orange County Sheriff's Department will launch the first phase of its Drone as a First Responder (DFR) program in October 2026, bringing a new public safety resource to the contract cities of Laguna Hills, Lake Forest, and Stanton. The program utilizes Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) to respond to calls for service and critical incidents, providing deputies with real-time information that can support safer and more informed responses.

The DFR program is designed as a reactive public safety tool that enhances situational awareness during emergency incidents. In many cases, UAVs can arrive before or alongside patrol personnel, providing critical information about conditions on scene and helping responding deputies make informed decisions before they arrive. The UAVs will also be available to assist with incidents in portions of neighboring contract cities when operationally appropriate.

"Drone as a First Responder is an incredible advancement in public safety technology," said Orange County Sheriff Don Barnes. "By providing real-time information, DFR helps us improve safety, deploy resources more effectively, and ensure our deputies have the best possible information when responding to calls for service in our community."

DFR is intended to supplement, not replace, existing first responder services. Deputies, dispatchers, and other emergency personnel remain central to every response. UAVs are unarmed, operated by FAA-certified Department personnel, and deployed only for authorized public safety purposes in accordance with Department policy.

DFR aircraft may be deployed to assist with calls for service, missing persons, and critical or hazardous incidents. Information provided from UAVs can help deputies identify safer approaches to a scene, assess potential threats, and better coordinate emergency responses. UAV video may also assist with scene documentation and investigations.

Transparency and responsible technology use are key components of the DFR program. Public information, including flight reporting information, will be available at <https://ocsheriff.gov/dfr>

The October launch represents Phase 1 of a broader vision to expand DFR capabilities throughout the Orange County Sheriff's Department service area in future phases, strengthening regional emergency response and enhancing safety across the communities served by the Orange County Sheriff's Department.

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