



Minnesota's Emergency Response Agencies

- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Minnesota Department of Public Safety
Homeland Security and Emergency Management
- National Park Service
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Forest Service

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Private aircraft and drone intrude in airspace over wildfire

Wildfires are serious business. Many people would like to get a closer look at fires or take photos of wildfires. But, those activities are restricted, and that includes the airspace above and around wildfires. Intrusions into this airspace can be dangerous.

Over the last few days, there have been at least two intrusions – one was a private airplane, the second an unmanned aircraft system (UAS) also known as a drone.

During fire season, the Minnesota wildfire agencies use aircraft to detect and suppress wildfires. At times of increased fire danger, up to 40 aircraft may be coordinated through the aviation staff at the Minnesota Interagency Fire Center.

When aircraft are needed on a wildfire, oftentimes a temporary flight restriction (TFR) will be placed on the airspace above and around the fire. This helps ensure the safety of pilots and firefighters. A TFR prohibits other aircraft from entering the area, so the aircraft involved in suppression and the air attack (air traffic controller in the sky) can operate without interference.

If an unauthorized plane or a drone is spotted over fires, aerial firefighting operations must immediately cease.

Those operating an unapproved aircraft inside a TFR are subject to a variety of penalties such as suspension of pilot certificate and fines.

Wildland fire agencies are working with organizations, such as the “[Know Before You Fly](#)” program, to provide UAS users with safe and responsible flight information. Also, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is creating a plan for safe and staged integration of UAS into the National Airspace System.

Wildland fire agencies are working to increase awareness of FAA rules and regulations on drone usage. They are also asking operators not to fly drones within five miles of wildfires or Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFR). For more information, contact Matthew.Woodwick@state.mn.us.

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