



CORAL GABLES

New Drones Aid First Responders in Coral Gables; First of Their Kind in the US

When complete darkness came, it didn't matter. The drones' infrared heat-seeking technology allowed commanders to see like it was high noon.

By **Willard Shepard** • Published July 8, 2022 • Updated on July 9, 2022 at 9:35 am



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NBC 6's Willard Shepard reports on the coral gables police department using drones to respond to 911 calls

It's a cutting-edge new way to stop crime: drones in the sky sending images and life-saving information back to first responders.

On July 4 in Coral Gables, images from such drones showed what it looked like from above when about 40,000 people came to see the fireworks show in front of the Biltmore Hotel.

NBC 6 exclusively obtained the video from the Coral Gables Police Department taken by their new drone out on its first real-world mission.

"We were able to check the entire perimeter of it. Make sure everything was secure," said Police Chief Ed Hudak Junior who was well aware of the gunman in Illinois who ultimately killed 7 people from a rooftop earlier that same day.

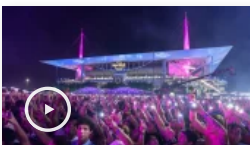
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When complete darkness came, it didn't matter. The drones' infrared heat-seeking technology allowed commanders to see like it was high noon.

"The ability for us to look at the perimeter with infrared cameras to see if anyone was lying in wait or anything like that was immense for us," Hudak told NBC 6.

Now the Gables is moving to do something NBC 6 was told no police agency in the country has tried. They'll be sending the drones out to locations ahead of police when the call comes to 911.

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A data link will allow officers to see images and dispatchers will also be able to tell arriving officers what to expect when there's an active shooter or suspicious person.

"If we can see where that person is going when we get there that minimizes the time it takes to engage that individual and to save lives," Hudak said.



Police Chief Ed Hudak Junior Discusses Drones in Coral Gables

The drones are being flown by a private company in a pilot program called Bond's Air Guardian. Both Hudak and Doron Kempel, the CEO of the company, say that the drones will not be used in any way that would encroach upon a person's 4th Amendment Right to not have an illegal search and seizure.

"We're not running patrols. We are not running any surveillance. If we know that a human is in need, we'll fly the drone as soon as possible, as fast as possible, as safely as possible, and give the authorities a good image of the situation," said Kempel. "There is no secondary mission."

The drone cameras can also virtually see inside a burning building. The images will tell firefighters what's going on before they arrive — critical information to save civilian lives and keep first responders safe too, whether they're dealing with a blaze or a gunman.

Chief Hudak says after Kempel approached him they started brainstorming to come up with a way to make effective use of the drones and data link platforms every day — not just during a special event.

"We know what our officers are expected to do in South Florida," Hudak said. "If it's an active shooter with the tragedy that we learned at Stoneman Douglas, we know where we are going to go. If we can see where that person is going when we get there, that minimizes the time it takes to engage that individual and to save lives."

If you live in the Gables and you're asking how much all this is going to cost, for now, the answer is just 10 bucks as the pilot program goes forward and gets evaluated.

Chief Hudak says there are times when they will still need to ask Miami Dade Police to launch its helicopter but that would be something that could affect the county and other cities around the Gables.

Hudak is planning to have it all up and running by the end of July.

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