

NEWS RELEASE

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Fire Dept. adds drone technology to increase efficiency

PROSPER (February 5, 2018) Gaining vitally-important visual information and taking advantage of the most advantageous perspective during emergency situations is critical to the successful resolution of those incidents.

“Knowing where to deploy our resources to their greatest use is crucial,” says Fire Chief Stuart Blasingame. “Having an additional view from above to a fast-changing situation gives us another dimension from which to operate.”

A new addition to the inventory at the Prosper Fire Department does precisely that. A small UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle) which includes a heat-sensitive thermal camera now gives firefighters and other first responders another angle from which to ascertain where and how to deploy their resources.

The drone, a DJI Inspire 1 v2 with Zenmuse XT FLIR (forward-looking infrared) camera, has been acquired and registered with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). A Certificate of Authorization (COA), a requirement for a drone of that size and capacity, was obtained after a rigorous 90-day process, clearing the way for the drone’s use.

“The use of the drone gives us a way to increase our situational awareness,” said the Chief. “The thermal camera gives us a unique way to fight fires, revealing hot spots, showing us the path of a fire, and essentially giving us yet another set of facts from which to make decisions.”

The drone’s camera can also be utilized for search and rescue, as a person’s body heat is often enough to show up on the heat sensors. Other uses include training, traffic and crowd control, flood and disaster relief, and other life-saving situations.

Unlike the popular drones that are used by hobbyists, the Prosper Fire Department’s version requires a valid COA. This document stipulates that the department train and certify drone pilots adhering to FAA guidelines. The training and certification includes 40 hours of instruction and flight training.

Firefighter/paramedic Broox Nevil, a licensed pilot who holds a remote pilot certificate, teaches the course and certifies pilots. Dexterity with the drone’s remote control is an essential part of the training, requiring the precise dropping of a life vest onto a ground target in simulation of an over-water life-saving action. Recertification by the FAA is required on a regular basis.

Used only in emergency situations or when required for visual documentation by other Town departments, the drone is not designed for recreational or inconsequential flight.

“We are not flying it for fun or to shoot random photos or video,” said the Chief. “We take the privacy of residents very seriously and will not use it for any frivolous purposes. It is strictly another tool in our inventory to increase our efficiency, protect our personnel, and better serve our community.”

The department is working with neighboring agencies in developing agreements on using the devices in a coordinated fashion when necessary.

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ABOUT THE TOWN OF PROSPER – The Town of Prosper is a fast-growing suburb with small town charm, located 30 miles north of Dallas at the crossroads of U.S. 380, Preston Road and the Dallas North Tollway in Collin and Denton Counties. Prosper sits on 27 square miles and is home to more than 20,000 people. A home-rule municipality, governed by a council-manager form of government, the town has full-time fire and police departments, including its own dispatch service. As the Town grows to its projected build-out population of 70,000 residents, Prosper’s vision is to remain a “Place Where Everyone Matters.”