

BAND C: Are private drones hurting our privacy?

By Los Angeles Times, adapted by Newsela staff, Jul. 07, 2014 4:00 AM

LOS ANGELES—A couple of weeks ago, a tiny remote-controlled plane buzzed over some Los Angeles Kings fans. The hockey team had just won the Stanley Cup. The fans were celebrating and not happy to see the drone. First, the fans knocked the drone down, then they smashed it into bits. What remains of the drone is sitting at the Los Angeles Police Department. If the owner wants it, police will give it back. Flying drones is not against the law.



A DRONE CRASH AT SUNSET

Drones are remote-controlled airplanes. They're also known as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). They are usually equipped with a camera. Drones are flown by onboard computers or by a person on the ground. They have become more popular. But their use is becoming the subject of a debate over privacy. Drones can take pictures from the sky without people knowing. And a lot of people don't like that.

Recently, people began using them to make videos. YouTube is filled with videos of Yosemite National Park taken with drones. Last month, rangers said that people cannot fly drones in the park. At the Grand Canyon recently, a drone crashed. No one was hurt. But it really surprised visitors who were watching the sunset. On Friday, the National Parks Service also outlawed low-flying drones. Parks officials are worried about the safety of visitors and the effect on wildlife.

The Federal Aviation Administration is in charge of U.S. skies. It has made many rules about how businesses and police can use drones. Farmers use drones to monitor their fields for instance. Amazon.com even plans to deliver packages with drones.

A DRONE SEIZED AT MOUNT RUSHMORE

But there are few rules for people who fly the drones for fun. Government officials said they hope to make better rules by 2015. But some experts said it will take longer to write clear rules.

The cost of drones is going down. Prices now range from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars. So, more people are buying them. The FAA expects that 7,500 people may be flying drones in five years.

But many people have strong feelings against drones. They don't like something taking pictures of them without their knowledge. Jennifer Lynch is a lawyer with the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a technology law group in San Francisco. She believes people will only become more concerned about drones. "It's because they're so in-your-face. It's easy to see the drone."

Recently, a drone snapped photos of a mother and a daughter at a beach. Another drone flew around the Mount Rushmore National Monument. A ranger seized it.

DEALING WITH DRONES

The FAA said that flying a drone is generally allowed. But the pilots must fly safely. They should be careful near airports and avoid crowds. Police said that some drone uses are against the law. They shouldn't get in the way of airplanes. People also shouldn't use the planes to spy on their neighbors.

But mainly, drones take pictures of beautiful sunsets. They also capture historic moments, like the Kings' victory celebration. Still, many people don't want to appear in someone else's YouTube video.

General Understanding: Drones can document nature and record historic events, but they can also cause issues with other planes, animals and privacy

QUESTIONS:

1. What is a drone?
2. The article states several purposes for drones? Identify three purposes.
3. Why do you think some people dislike drones?
4. According to the article, what conclusions can you draw about drones? Provide evidence from the article to support your conclusion.