

Band D: Are private drones privacy pirates?

By Los Angeles Times, adapted by Newsela staff

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LOS ANGELES—A couple of weeks ago, some Los Angeles Kings fans noticed an unmanned air- craft buzzing overhead. The hockey team had just won the Stanley Cup and the fans were celebrating. Angry at being interrupted, they knocked it down with a T-shirt. Then, they used a skateboard to smash it into bits.

What remains of the drone is sitting in a Los Angeles Police Department property room. If the owner wants to claim it, police will simply give it back. Flying a drone in public is not illegal.

DRONES BANNED AT NATIONAL PARKS

Drones are unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) piloted either by onboard computers or remotely by a person on the ground. As the unmanned aircraft become more popular, their use is raising questions about people’s privacy. Drones can be equipped with cameras and take pictures from overhead without people noticing.

Recently, people have been using them to make videos. YouTube, for instance, is filled with drone videos of Yosemite National Park. This led rangers last month to issue a public notice saying the planes are banned. At the Grand Canyon recently, a drone crashed, stunning visitors who were there to watch the sunset.

On Friday, the National Parks Service announced that it will ban low-flying drones in all of its parks. The decision came out of concern for the safety of visitors and the effects of the drones on wildlife.

The Federal Aviation Administration has made rules about how businesses and police can use drones. Farmers can use drones to monitor their fields for instance. Real estate agents photograph homes for sale with drones. Amazon even plans to deliver packages via drones. But there are few rules covering people who fly the remote-controlled planes for fun.

A NEW HOBBY TAKES OFF

The FAA estimated that there could be 7,500 people flying drones within five years. Federal officials said they hope to create clearer rules by 2015. But some experts believe it will take longer. The rise in everyday drone use comes as prices for the aircraft have fallen. Prices now range from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars.

DRONE UPSETS BEACH SUNBATHERS

But strong feelings against drones are on the rise. Many people don’t like something taking pictures of them without their knowledge. “Once drones become widely used in our society, there’s going to be a lot of concern,” said Jennifer Lynch. She is a lawyer with the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a technology legal group in San Francisco. “It’s because they’re so in-your-face. It’s easy to see the drone, it’s easy to recognize the privacy issues.”

At a beach last year, a mother became upset when a drone snapped photos of her and her daughter while they were tanning.

DON’T SPY ON YOUR NEIGHBOR

The FAA said that flying a drone is generally allowed as long as the pilots fly safely. Guidelines suggest that pilots should be careful near airports and avoid crowds. Police said that some drone uses are against the law. They can’t interfere with aircraft. People also can’t use the planes to spy on their neighbors.

But most cases don’t involve drones taking pictures of sunbathers. Usually, they are photographing beautiful scenery or historic moments like the Kings’ Stanley Cup victory celebration a few weeks ago.

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Questions

1. What are the advantages of disadvantages of using drones?
2. What word could the author have used in paragraph 6 for the word “monitor”?
3. How would you feel if a drone snapped pictures of you sunbathing at the beach?
4. According to the article, which of the following sentences is NOT TRUE?
 - (a) Flying a drone is generally allowed as long as the pilot flies it safely.
 - (b) Many people are using drones to film videos of sports events and local beaches.
 - (c) Despite a number of rules, there has been an increase in the use of drones for fun.
 - (d) Drones are now available for prices ranging from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars