

Drones

The ICO recommends that users of drones – also called unmanned aerial systems (UAS) or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) – with cameras should operate them in a responsible way to respect the privacy of others.

Are drones covered by the Data Protection Act (DPA)?

If a drone has a camera, its use has the potential to be covered by the DPA.

Is it OK to use drones with cameras?

If you are using a drone with a camera, there could be a privacy risk to other people. Follow our tips below to help ensure you respect people's privacy when using your drone.

How can I use my drone responsibly?

Tips on responsible use of drones:

- **Let people know before you start recording.** In some scenarios this is going to be quite easy because you will know everyone within close view (for example, if you are taking a group photo at a family barbeque). In other scenarios, for example at the beach or the park, this is going to be much more difficult so you'll need to apply some common sense before you start.
- **Consider your surroundings.** If you are recording images beyond your home, a drone may intrude on the privacy of others where they expect their privacy to be respected (such as in their back garden). It is unlikely that you would want a drone to be hovering outside your window so be considerate to others and don't hover outside theirs.
- **Get to know your camera first.** It is a good idea to get to know the capability of your camera in a controlled situation to understand how it works. What is the quality of the image? How powerful is the zoom? Can you control when it starts and stops recording? Drone cameras are capable of taking unusual and creative pictures from original vantage points. Knowing the capabilities of your camera will help you to reduce the risk of privacy intrusion.
- **Plan your flight.** Your drone's battery life is likely to be short. By understanding its capabilities you will be able to make best use of its flight and it will be easier to plan how to avoid invading the privacy of other people. For example, it may be more privacy-friendly to launch from a different location rather than flying close to other people or their property.
- **Keep you and your drone in view.** You won't want to lose it, and if you are clearly visible then it will be easier for members of the public to know that you are the person responsible for the drone.

- **Think before sharing.** Once your drone has landed, think carefully about who's going to be looking at the images, particularly if you're thinking about posting them on social media. Avoid sharing images that could have unfair or harmful consequences. Apply the same common sense approach that you would with images or video recorded by a smartphone or digital camera.
- **Keep the images safe.** The images you have taken may be saved on an SD card or USB drive attached to the drone or the camera. If they are not necessary, then don't keep them. If you do want to keep them, then make sure they are kept in a safe place.

Other laws

Other laws that protect individuals from harassment may apply when using your drone. It is worth checking which laws you need to be aware of before you fly your drone to avoid any unexpected complaints or disputes.

The safe use of drones is regulated by the Civil Aviation Authority. For guidance about this, see [UAS on the Civil Aviation Authority website](#).

<http://www.caa.co.uk/default.aspx?catid=1995>

Can I use my drone for work?

As with personal use, if you are using your drone for a more formal, professional purpose, then it is important that you understand your legal obligations as a data controller as the situation will be different.

For more information, read [the CCTV code](#) (for organisations), which has a section about drones (referred to as UAS in the code).

<https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1542/cctv-code-of-practice.pdf>

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