

DRONES ARE 'GAME CHANGERS'

IN SEARCH AND RESCUE

Civil Defence Ireland recently gave a demonstration to West Cork's emergency services on the uses of drones, which are becoming a big 'game changer' in the search for missing persons, by offering invaluable support to An Garda Síochána and the Irish Coastguard during such operations.

Emergency drones are becoming the big 'game changer' when it comes to the search for missing persons, according to West Cork Civil Defence Officer Niall Twomey. He explained that the team's acquisition of a drone would be of huge assistance to local units in West Cork,

offering support to agencies such as An Garda Síochána and the Irish Coastguard in searches for missing persons.

His comments followed a recent demonstration, which was given by Civil Defence Ireland to members of an Garda Síochána, the Irish Coastguard, the HSE National Ambulance, RNLI, West Cork Underwater Search and Rescue and Schull Community Inshore Rescue, who gathered at Lough Hyne in Skibbereen to watch the demonstration by Civil Defence pilots George Vladisavljevic and Tim McKnight.

Also watching were members of Cork County Fire Service and Irish Civil Defence Technical Officer, Kevin Houston who said he came up with the idea of using drones when he read an article about how the Australian Fire Service used them to gather information on forest fires.

"We can offer it to the Gardaí or the Coastguard in a missing



Drone pilot George Vladisavljevic explains the capabilities for search operations to Garda Inspector Ger Lacey, and Brendan Cahill of the Irish Coast Guard. Niall Twomey, Civil Defence Officer for West Cork, is pictured to the left.

person situation, but we have also used drones in mass casualty training exercise such as a bus crash or a train crash to give the HSE National Ambulance Service an eye in the sky so they can better co-ordinate their operations," he added.

SUA SEARCH TEAMS

Ireland's Civil Defence has, to date, invested around €80,000 in drone technology, with nine SUV (small unmanned aircraft) search teams deployed geographically in Civil Defence emergency areas, in accordance with the Major Emergency Management Regions.

There are currently two SUA teams for the southern region, based in Skibbereen and Kinsale. Each team consists of two SUA pilots, fully licensed and accredited with the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA), after a comprehensive eight-weekend training schedule, which consists of unmanned aircraft maintenance, flight regulation theory and practical piloting tasks. Civil

DRONE CERTIFICATES PRESENTED TO CIVIL DEFENCE VOLUNTEERS

Civil Defence volunteers were presented with competency certificates by the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) for the use and operations of Small Unmanned Aircraft (SUA), better known as drones. The presentation of certificates took place at the Civil Defence Training Centre at Ratra House in the Phoenix Park in Dublin on 26 November. Pic: www.EmergencyTimes.ie



Drone pilots George Vladisavljevic and Tim McKnight demonstrate drone capabilities for search operations.



Pictured at the demonstration of the Civil Defence Small Unmanned Aircraft capabilities for search operations were (l-r): Tim McKnight, Civil Defence Drone Pilot, Supt. Ger O'Mahony Sgt. Alex Buttler and Sgt. Michelle O'Leary.



Watching live streaming from the Civil Defence Small Unmanned Aircraft, which has capabilities for search operations were (l-r): Mick Lynch, Cork West Civil Defence, Garda Shannon Ryan and Jeroen Van Der Vlugh, Irish Coast Guard.



West Cork pilots George Vladisavljevic and Tim McKnight were presented with their IAA Small Unmanned Aircraft (SUV) Pilot Competency Certificates by Niall Twomey, Civil Defence Officer, and Kevin Houston, Civil Defence Technical Officer.

Photographs courtesy of Garry Minihane, a paramedic with the HSE National Ambulance Service for last 12 years. He also served as a firefighter with Skibbereen Fire Service for 10 years and has volunteered with Civil Defence in West Cork for over 32 years.

Defence now plans to spend a further €70,000 to enhance the service over the coming months.

Houston explained that Civil Defence has now receive special IAA permits, which allows them to fly to 500 metres range and to heights of 120 metres. "The reason for that is that we run an intensive training programme and all of our drones are operated by a pilot and a co-pilot," he said.

VOLUNTEER TRAINING

It is now intended to train additional volunteers in West Cork as observers and co-pilots in the near future. According to Civil Defence Officer Niall Twomey, "it's an ideal resource in areas like West Cork where you have a lot of upland terrain and rocky headlands as well as huge stretches of coastline.

"The drone can get into these places much faster than searchers on the ground and can also do it safely, so it can be a huge assistance," Twomey explained. Cork West Civil Defence is now equipped with a Typhoon H search drone,

which will aid all agencies in missing persons search operations.

Drone pilots George Vladisavjevic and Tim McKnight put the search drone through its paces during the recent demonstration. Vladisavjevic explained

just how useful the technology can be as he flew the battery powered drone, which has a 20-minute flying time, out some 500 metres to an island in Lough Hyne, before flying it back to a furze-covered hillside behind the lake in less than a minute!



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