

INTERVIEW:

DroneWISE – the European project targeting terrorist drone attacks

7th August 2020 **Andrew Staniforth, Policing Insight**



Dr Holger Nitsch, coordinator of the new European Commission DroneWISE innovation project, explains exclusively to Policing Insight the threat from the terrorist use of drones, and the measures being developed across Europe to support the emergency services' response to a potential terrorist drone attack.

What is the aim of project DroneWISE?

Project DroneWISE recognises that the terrorist adoption of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), or drones, for targeting public spaces represents a key vulnerability. At present, our research, when combined with analysis of rogue drone incursions across Europe, indicates that many first-responder agencies have not fully developed the capacity or capability to effectively respond to a

drone-related incident. This includes a potential terrorist attack on a public space. We already know that emergency service agencies experience challenges when responding together to major terrorist incidents; developing and implementing coordinated plans to effectively respond to a terrorist drone attack adds more complexity, as it is a relatively new threat.

These are the reasons why the Internal Security Fund for Policing of the European Commission launched a call for proposals to tackle this problem. We submitted the Project DroneWISE proposal in response to this call, which brings together first-responder practitioners, academic security professionals and private industry drone and drone detection partners from five European member states. The consortium of partners are now combining their expertise to deliver a series of practical measures designed to develop the response to potential terrorist drone attacks on public spaces.

What is the current threat from the terrorist use of drones to attack public spaces?

Across Europe, we know that there have been devastating terrorist attacks over recent years in public places. The threat from further attacks where crowds gather is generally considered to be high and while the specific threat from a terrorist attack using a drone to attack a public place is considered to be low, despite new laws and safety measures, the adoption of drones as a tactical option for terrorists to threaten security remains a concern.

These concerns are made even more serious when you consider how widely available drones are. They have become much cheaper to buy over recent years and are increasing their capacity to carry larger payloads. They are also much more sophisticated, being able to be operated beyond the line of sight of the pilot – all of which makes them excellent tools for terrorists.

We have seen drones used in conflict zones by terrorist and insurgent groups to conduct hostile reconnaissance and being equipped with explosives. We have also seen the weaponisation of drones in attempted assassination attacks, and military officers have been killed by drones when explosive devices have detonated during their recovery.

These incidents highlight the threat and consequences when responding to the terrorist use of drones. The purpose of the DroneWISE project is to provide protective measures for first responders, so that they can support the prevention of such attacks and are better prepared to respond when attacks occur.

What are the key project outputs of DroneWISE?

The general objective of DroneWISE is to significantly improve the security of public spaces by enhancing the cooperation and coordination between first-responder agencies, to effectively plan against – and manage the aftermath of – a terrorist attack by use of drones. To meet this objective, we are to research, develop, design and deliver a first-responder agency command, control and coordination strategy which will be a key output of the project, underpinned by evidence-based joint training.

How will the project outputs of DroneWISE help police respond to terrorist incidents using drones?

The delivery of a Counter-UAV Command, Control and Coordination Strategy, which provides a multi-agency command planning policy framework with decision-making models and threat and risk matrices, will be of great help to first-responders.

It will support and inform the decision-making process of commanders in direct response to a terrorist attack on public spaces using a UAV. The impact of DroneWISE measures will also increase the preparedness of first-responder agencies to better coordinate their efforts, improving the protection of public spaces and coordinated response, as well as increasing resilience to all manner of terrorist attacks using drones.

What project DroneWISE activities are you currently progressing?

The two-year project started on 1 June, and the first phase will capture and analyse end-user requirements to assess first-responder agency operational challenges, primarily to ascertain the current state-of-the-art in drone and drone detection technologies. This first phase will also assess terrorist threats from UAVs in public spaces, and benchmark UAV-related laws, policies and procedures. The outcome of this important analysis will inform and provide the evidence base for the second phase and is a very important part of the project.

It is a very busy time for the DroneWISE consortium of partners, especially for the law enforcement agency end-users. They will be gathering their requirements through the analysis and assessment of case studies related to drone incidents; capturing details of the incidents, response, operational command, control, communication challenges and lessons to be learned; and identifying the training needs and best practice.

Are you receiving support from police forces to deliver and inform the project?

Yes, within the consortium of partners we have police forces from Bulgaria, the Hellenic Police in Greece as well as the police in Bavaria to whom we provide training here at the Police Department within the University of Applied Sciences. We have also been contacted by the counter-terrorism unit of the European Commission and are reaching out to Europol and Interpol. This project has a real police and emergency service end-user focus, so the support and active participation in the design and delivery of the project outputs is essential.

What do you hope to achieve through the delivery of DroneWISE?

First of all, I believe that all partners want to make sure the project has real and positive impact upon the protection of public spaces from terrorist attacks using drones. We have no desire to simply engage in pure research, our collective efforts must add value to first-responder emergency service responses to terrorist incidents.

I also believe that in delivering the key outputs of the project we will be able to bring together the different agencies whose response to a terrorist incident is vital. Our key goal must be to support the prevention of terrorist drone attacks and the protection of public spaces. I believe the DroneWISE project can raise awareness of planning and preparing for such attacks before they happen.

How does the participation in Project DroneWISE support your work at the Police Department within the University?

As well as providing training to support police officers in Bavaria we also engage in research and innovation at an international level. We really see the value in working and learning from other partners across police, academia and private industry to tackle new and emerging security challenges.

We continue to work with police partners from across Europe, and making networks and sharing knowledge and best practice is a key part of role in progressing research and innovation activities. We regularly engage in European Commission-funded projects, and the Internal Security Fund for Police (which is funding Project DroneWISE) provides a real opportunity for law enforcement agencies to actively participate and contribute in innovation activity that will have a direct operational impact upon the service they provide to their communities.



To learn more about Project DroneWISE, visit the project website at www.DroneWISE-project.eu. You can also follow the project on LinkedIn, by connecting to www.linkedin.com/company/dronewise-project

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