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Drones

Drones lifting inmates out of prisons? UK inspector says it's a 'theoretical possibility'

The prison inspector's warning follows a viral video showing a person being rescued from floodwaters by an agricultural drone

July 10, 2025 02:24 PM



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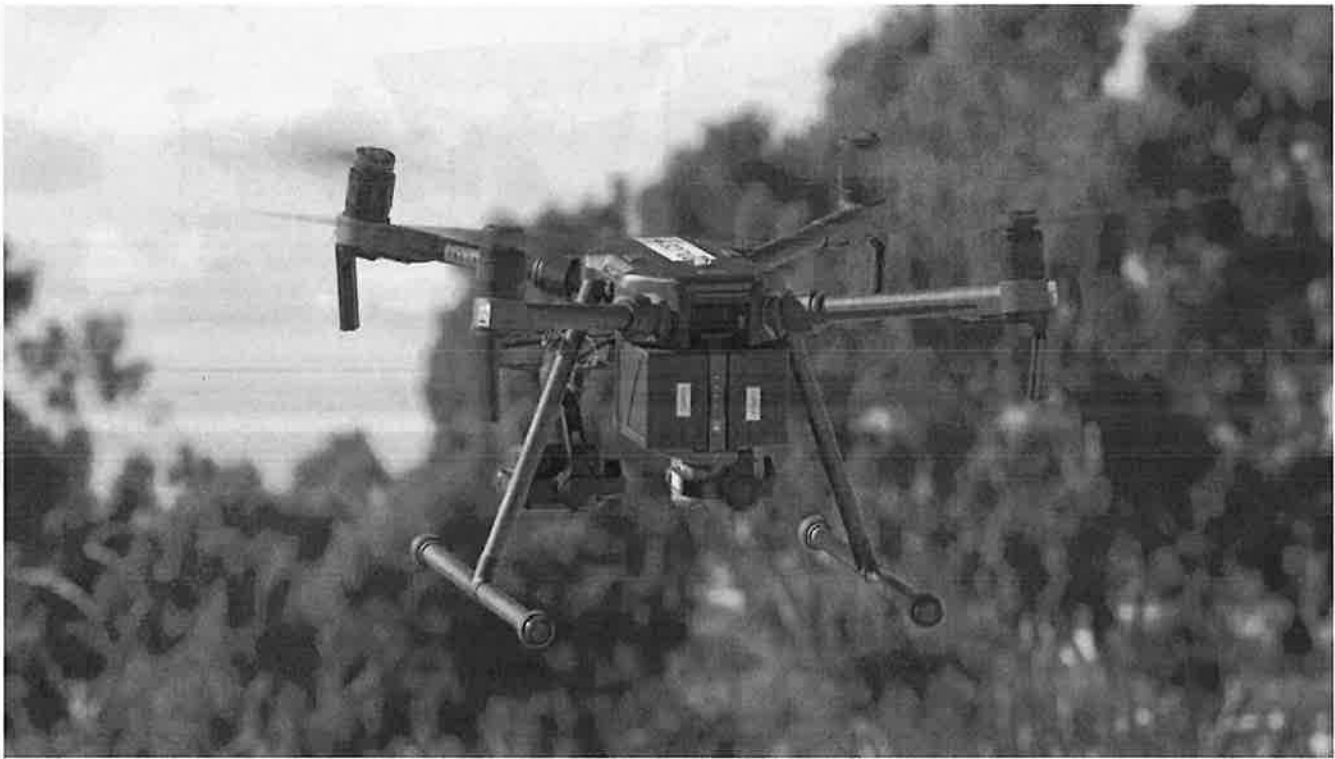
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Chula Vista has been working with drones in their DFR Operations Center (Drone First Responder) where they can deploy directly from the rooftop of the Chula Vista Police Department. The drone works with and is confined to the geofence perimeter and drone pilots conform to all set FAA drone flight regulations.

Nelvin C. Cepeda/TNS


LONDON — Drones have become a persistent challenge for correctional facilities, with incidents of **contraband deliveries increasing year after year**. But some correctional leaders believe it's only a matter of time before drones are used in even more ambitious ways — including assisting with escapes.

In comments reported by **The Times** on July 8, His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons Charlie Taylor warned that drone technology is advancing so quickly that the idea of an inmate being lifted out of jail by drone is now "a theoretical possibility."

Taylor's comments come after a viral video showed **a person being lifted to safety by an agricultural drone** during severe flooding in southwestern China.

"What's scary — and we haven't reached this stage yet — but if you look on Google, you'll be able to see someone being lifted up by a drone. So you know this isn't ultimately just a risk of what might come in, there is also a danger of what might go out of prisons as well," Taylor told The Times.

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Contraband still the primary concern

Taylor's official annual report focused on the ongoing challenge of illegal drugs and other contraband being delivered into England and Wales prisons via drones. The report found that drones are now regularly breaching prison walls, delivering packages weighing up to 10kg (over 22 pounds), including not just drugs, but also cellphones and weapons. In one instance, a large "zombie knife" was flown into a prison yard.

Taylor warned that organized crime groups are taking advantage of this technology, making it easier for inmates to continue criminal operations from inside. In some prisons, as many as 59% of randomly tested inmates were positive for illicit drug use, and nearly 40% of surveyed prisoners reported that drugs were easy to obtain.

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"Drones were making regular deliveries to Manchester and Long Lartin, which held some of the most dangerous men in the country, including terrorists and organized crime bosses," the report states.

This challenge isn't limited to the UK. In the United States, authorities have documented similar trends. For example, in 2024, federal indictments in Georgia — part of "**Operation Night Drop**" — uncovered a criminal conspiracy in which drones were used to deliver methamphetamine, marijuana, tobacco and cellphones directly into state prisons.

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