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Increasing drone incidents near US airports, stadiums prompt alarm, officials say

By David Shepardson

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A view shows the U.S. Department of Homeland Security signage in New York City, U.S., July 21, 2025. REUTERS/Jeenah Moon / File Photo [Purchase Licensing Rights](#)

WASHINGTON, July 22 (Reuters) - U.S. officials told a Senate committee on Tuesday that there have been more than 3,000 drone events near American airports since 2021, including 11 aircraft this year that reported taking evasive action to avoid collisions.

Those drone incidents have caused significant flight delays at times near major airports, said Steven Willoughby, a counter drone official with the Homeland Security Department, who told the Senate Judiciary Committee that in two instances drones collided with aircraft conducting critical response operations during emergencies in California and Texas this year.

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Officials also raised concerns about the intentional use of drones for attacks, and also at major sporting events. They also point to major upcoming events like the 2026 World Cup.

Of around 90,000 special events annually where the FBI could have had counter drone protection, it was only used in about 0.05% of events, according to testimony from the Department of Justice and the FBI.

"We cover the Super Bowl, right? What about the other 200-plus NFL games that are happening?" Willoughby said. "We can't be everywhere all the time."

Sports leagues have also urged Congress to take action. Some tethered drones are used by broadcasters to provide aerial coverage.

Senators and administrative officials said Congress needs to change laws to toughen penalties for drone use and to give federal agencies new expanded authority to address drones that may be used to threaten the public or events.

Congress in 2018 expanded authority of the Justice Department and the Department of Homeland Security to disable or destroy threatening drones and that has been repeatedly temporarily extended.


Senator John Cornyn said, "It just strikes me we are woefully unprepared." Senator Ted Cruz added, "Drones pose an immediate and growing threat to our national security."

Willoughby noted that since 2018, the Secret Service has tracked hundreds of drones violating temporary flight restrictions that protect the president and others, while the FBI and Justice Department said drones used as espionage technology within the United States is also increasing.

Willoughby added that in the last six months of 2024, over 27,000 drones were detected within 500 meters of the U.S. southern border.

A man pleaded guilty in June after he was charged with violating defense airspace after he flew a drone over the NFL AFC Championship game in Baltimore in January; in September, a Boston man was charged with unlawfully flying a drone near the finish line of the April 2024 Boston Marathon, which prompted law enforcement to seize it mid-air and land it.

Reporting by David Shepardson; Editing by Aurora Ellis

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