An Escalating Crisis of Drone Crimes in Correctional Facilities
Executive Summary

Drone intrusions at correctional facilities are a persistent, ongoing threat that will only escalate with time as inmates continue to test the boundaries of vulnerable airspace and a facility's lack of knowledge of drone activity. Without this awareness, the consequences of drone intrusions at a correctional facility can cause disruption to the care and order of inmates, staff, and the general public. This white paper discusses:

• A brief history of drone technology and involvement with correctional facilities
• The most impactful drone incidents in correctional history, and the impact on the care and control of facilities
• An overview of drone detection technology and the applications for use within correctional facilities
Drones are a New Contraband Point of Entry, With Few Restrictions to Protect Correctional Facilities

Drone contraband deliveries began making headlines in the U.S. in late 2013 when organized criminals attempted to deliver tobacco and cell phones to inmates in prisons. Operating from nearby woods, the group used binoculars to navigate the drone over the prison's fences. Over the years, drones have been used to survey operations, assist in prison escapes, and continue to be a reliable channel to deliver contraband. However, the introduction and integration of drone detection technology have allowed security personnel to understand their airspace activity, prevent airspace intrusions, and protect their property, inmates and the public from malicious drones.

In response to the rise of drone threats at correctional facilities, the FAA began establishing drone restrictions over federal prisons in 2018. This is the first time the administration has placed specific flight restrictions for drones over properties operated by the Federal Bureau of Prisons. In addition to potentially facing criminal smuggling charges, drone pilots carrying contraband or who violate the flight restrictions may be subject to enforcement action, including potential civil penalties and criminal charges. States such as California have also
outlawed flights over prisons, providing prosecutors an additional legal avenue in the event that evidence for the contraband is not available, but if a suspected smuggler is caught with a drone.

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With Sales of Drones Exploding, so Are their Applications for Use in Correctional Facilities

Drones and unmanned aircraft systems were initially developed to support military operations, and over the years, have developed into technology for personal and commercial use, providing cost-effective solutions for multiple industries. The Consumer Technology Association predicts sales in the US to be 3.7 million units for 2018. As with any technology, consumers will find ways to use drones to solve problems, but also find ways to use them for unintended or malicious purposes, such as contraband delivery.

The airspace security industry is growing rapidly, and laws involving the safe integration of drones to national airspace are slow to catch up. Airspace management will inherently become more complex as correctional facilities research and invest in drone programs, such as inmate surveillance and infrastructure inspection. Correctional facilities must be able to immediately differentiate between an authorized drone, a friendly drone from the community or a local business, and a malicious drone. Without this awareness, the consequences of drone intrusions at a correctional facility can cause disruption to the care and order of inmates, staff, and the general public.
Drones Aiding in Daring Escapes, Drug-Fueled Riots, and Weapons Delivery

No correctional facility is immune to drone breaches. Contraband drops and other intrusions may remain undetected by security staff, placing prison staff, inmates and the public at risk. Drone deliveries can not only increase the risk of violence between inmates but threaten the physical safety of the facility and the people protecting it. Undetected drones can also expose security vulnerabilities by showing a bird's eye view of staff rotations and inmate movement.

**Ohio DOC fends off riots after drone drops contraband**

One of the first publicly documented drone incidents occurred in 2015 when the [Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections](https://www.ohioshine.org) reported a yard fight broke out between 75 inmates after a drone dropped off a package in the yard. 144.5 grams of tobacco, 65.4 grams of marijuana and 6.6 grams of heroin were dropped from the air. A fight ensued and the package was thrown out of sight into the prison's south yard. Officers had to use pepper spray to get the situation under control, and inmates were later strip-searched before being allowed to return to their cells.
**South Carolina DOC reveals maximum-security prison break with assistance from drone contraband**

After testing out drone deliveries, inmates were able to acquire more creative tools to support not only their drug habits but also test out the physical security of the facility. In 2017, South Carolina Department of Corrections reported a drone-assisted prison break. A prisoner broke out of a maximum-security prison using a cell phone to coordinate his movement, a makeshift dummy to throw off patrol officers, and a critical tool delivered via drone - wirecutters. After breaking through fences, the fugitive triggered a manhunt. Law enforcement apprehended him, and he was captured with a semi-automatic pistol, a pump shotgun, $47,654 in cash and four cell phones.

**French correctional spots drone spies prior to the armed escape of a high-profile prisoner**

Drones are also able to track movement and help organized criminals plan sophisticated attacks against correctional facilities. Drones were found buzzing ahead a French correctional facility months before a daring prisoner evacuation. Heavily armed men landed a helicopter in a prison courtyard, used a grinding machine to break open the door of the visiting room where a high-profile inmate was seeing his brother and escorted the prisoner to freedom.

**Drone contraband fails to deliver to the correctional facility and drops drugs at an elementary school**

Not all contraband deliveries make it to the right destination, putting communities at risk for violence and unwanted activity. In Canada, a drone carrying marijuana, tobacco, cell phones, SIM cards, lighters, and glue, crash-landed on the roof of an elementary school. Investigators believe the drone was planning to fly to a correctional facility nearly a mile away, and instead ditched the contraband or lost control of the drone.

**UK law enforcement prosecutes organized criminals after they delivered over $1.34 million in contraband via drone**

With more time to practice comes more sophistication in drone contraband deliveries, but the law is catching up. In 2017, law enforcement in the UK prosecuted the players in a carefully orchestrated operation, which involved a drone “gang,” which connected criminals on the outside with contacts inside prisons, delivering contraband worth up to $1.34 million. Investigators had evidence of at least 49 illegal drone flights, with some using fishing lines and hooks to fly the contraband near cell windows. Inmates used tools such as a broom handle to grab the deliveries from the drones as they hovered outside.
Drone Detection Technology Is the Key to Stopping Drone-Delivered Contraband

State and federal correctional facilities are gearing up with drone detection services and found not only how much drone activity was happening in their airspace, but who was responsible.

Proactive drone detection is used as a diagnostic tool, building intelligence around the scope and problem by auditing airspace, and then translating that information into strategic security protocol changes. At correctional facilities, drone detection hardware and software can be incorporated into an existing security ecosystem. Detection systems follow the drone’s flightpath and locate the pilot. Security personnel can use flight data to determine if a single drone has visited the area multiple times or if there are multiple, individual intruders, and record if there are certain days or times where there are an increase in incidents. This data is invaluable when looking to identify and prosecute pilots who violate federal laws.

With drone detection technology, correctional facilities now have the upper hand in protecting their airspace from unwanted drones and dangerous contraband deliveries. See how drone detection systems work in this video with Georgia Department of Corrections.
The Future of Correctional Airspace Is Controlled and Protected Against All Drone Threats

When an unauthorized drone appears, corrections professionals must brace for innumerable dangers. During the daytime, drone alert systems can trigger alarms, prompting personnel to shut down operations and lock down the facility. Contraband delivery drones, if noticed by inmates, can make maintaining control of the prison extremely difficult. Officers will have the opportunity to escort inmates before the drone breaches the property, conduct searches, review video, and locate contraband. A drone detection system gives security personnel time to control a situation and stay ahead of it rather than react to it.

All correctional facilities want to make certain that every member of their team goes home safely. Drone contraband, espionage, and interruptions are adding new risks and challenges to their employee's personal safety. Proactive drone detection and automated alerts integrate efficiently and into existing security protocols, supporting the security goals of all correctional facilities around the world.