

Highlights

Why We Did This Audit

According to recent articles, federal, state, and local governments are using or starting to use drones to perform a variety of tasks such as aerial photography, inspections, search and rescue, and damage assessments.

Some city departments have started acquiring and using drones for city business. However, implementing this type of new technology, one that operates under federal regulations, carries risks that need to be considered.

Objective

This audit was designed to answer the following question:

Has the city developed guidance for departments on the purchase and operation of drones?

Background

Who regulates drones?

The Federal Aviation Administration regulates drones through the Code of Federal Regulations. 14 CFR 107 provides general drone information, operating rules, remote pilot certification, and waivers.

What is a drone?

A drone is a small unmanned aircraft system operated in the national airspace. It weighs less than 55 pounds on takeoff, including everything attached to or on board the drone. A drone is a flying robot that can be remotely controlled by a pilot or through software-controlled instructions.

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PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Guidance Needed to Manage City’s Use of Drones

What We Found

The city does not have policies to address the use of drones by departments that report to the city manager. Drone technology and the regulatory environment are rapidly evolving. Operating drones for city business can expose the city to a range of risks including personal injury, property damage, invasion of privacy, and violation of FAA regulations that need to be addressed.

Four city departments and the Kansas City Missouri Police Department, a state agency, have drones. Not all city drones were registered or city remote drone pilots certified as required by Federal Aviation Administration regulations. Failing to register a drone or operating a drone without being certified could result in civil and criminal penalties with fines up to \$25,000.

City and Police Department Drone Data: Drones, Pilots, and Guidance

	City Departments	KCMO Police Department
Number of drones	6	22
Number of drones registered	3	22
Number of certified drone pilots	2	13
Written & adopted drone policy guidance	No	Yes

Sources: City Auditor’s Office survey and interviews with departments.

The city has not provided departments with guidance on evaluating their need for drones or methods for securing drone services. Some city departments have drones, while other departments report having access to drone services from the Kansas City Missouri Police Department.

Management should consider how it plans to incorporate a drone into its operations, and whether it needs to purchase a drone, could share a drone with another department, or contract for drone services. While there is no single method for obtaining drone services, alternatives should be systematically evaluated.



What We Recommend

We recommend the city manager develop citywide guidance for departments on operating drones and on determining the need and methods for acquiring drone services.

Management agreed with the recommendations.