

Academic Safety Code for Small Airborne Objects on Institutional Property

For the purposes of this *SAO Safety Code*, small airborne objects (SAOs) are understood to include any small balloon, kite, rocket, projectile, model aircraft, drone, unmanned aircraft, flying toy, or similar contrivance used below the federal navigable airspace for conventional manned aircraft.¹ Any SAO used on institutional property:²

- shall not be operated in a manner that creates a hazard to other persons or their property;³
- shall not exceed 400 feet altitude, or exceed the height of nearby obstacles when used in the vicinity of any airport or restricted area, except as allowed by the Federal Aviation Administration;⁴
- shall not enter any other property below 400 feet altitude, nor create a nuisance on, nor survey any other property, without permission from the affected landowner;⁵
- shall be labeled with the owner's contact information if it is capable of sustained flight;
- shall give way to, and not interfere with, any manned aircraft;⁶
- shall comply with institution-specific *SAO Guidelines* developed by a designated institutional authority in accordance with community-based safety programming.⁷

Any SAO not conforming to this safety code or any unidentified SAO of concern below 400 feet altitude on institutional property should be reported immediately to campus police or other appropriate public safety officials.

¹ Model airplanes similar to drones and unmanned aircraft systems have been freely used on private property for teaching, research, and recreation since at least the 1930s. Kites, balloons and projectiles have been in use for centuries. These tools are employed in a wide range of fields including aeronautics, robotics, environmental science, GIS, agriculture, art, archaeology, film production, and journalism. This safety code does not apply to sports balls or other airborne objects being used in association with recognized athletic activities.

² Institutional property is understood to include the immediate reaches of the airspace where the operation of manned aircraft is either prohibited or exceptionally infrequent and where intentional incursions by government aircraft generally require a warrant or exigent circumstances. See *United States v. Causby*, 328 U.S. 256 (1946), *Griggs v. Allegheny County*, 369 U.S. 84 (1962), *California v. Ciraolo*, 476 U.S. 207 (1986), *Florida v. Riley*, 488 U.S. 445 (1989), *Argent v. United States*, 124 F. 3d 1277 (1997), and 49 U.S.C. § 40103(a)(2).

³ Any SAO that could plausibly cause serious injuries due to its mass, speed, or construction shall not be used in proximity to populated areas, public roads, outdoor events, or unaffiliated persons, unless the operation is specifically approved by a designated institutional authority (see footnote 7). Slow-flying model aircraft that weigh less than two pounds, classified as *Park Flyers* by the Academy of Model Aeronautics, may be operated under less stringent requirements at the discretion of the institutional authority.

⁴ Altitude above ground level (AGL) is interpreted as the distance between the SAO and the nearest surface of the Earth. The "vicinity of an airport or restricted airspace" means within 5 statute miles of a major airport (class B or C) or within 3 statute miles of any other airport, or immediately adjacent to any restricted or prohibited airspace. Within these limits, the use of SAOs normally requires notification of Air Traffic Control or, for small facilities, the airport manager.

⁵ Property boundaries are understood to extend vertically upward from the surface. Trespass, nuisance and surveillance are considered to be safety issues because they can create conflict and promote reckless acts.

⁶ If a manned aircraft is visible, audible, or could plausibly arrive in the vicinity of the lower airspace, the operator of the SAO must immediately take the safest course of action, which in nearly all cases will be rapid descent to the ground.

⁷ A designated institutional authority (e.g., safety committee, officer, director, or administrator) shall be assigned responsibility for the safe use of SAOs on institutional property in accordance with nationwide community-based guidelines (i.e., Public Law 112-95 § 335). Moored balloons, kites, amateur rockets, and unmanned free balloons must comply with 14 CFR Part 101.