

Seattle Fire Department

Emergency Response Aerial Technology

What is the technology?

The Seattle Fire Department proposes adding a small number of Emergency Response Aerial Technology (ERAT), or drones, to its specialty fleet of fire, rescue and emergency medical response tools. The anticipated ERAT range would provide citywide coverage.

The SFD ERAT will be stored on the roof of an SFD fire station and dispatched/operated by the Fire Alarm Center.

When dispatched, the ERAT will fly to a specific latitude and longitude with camera aimed at the horizon. After arriving, the camera will be pointed downward at the scene to provide a live feed for trained Seattle Fire incident commanders and dispatchers, to view and help make operational decisions. The feed will not be recorded or saved in any way. No one besides SFD responders may watch the drone livestream. The SFD will not use the drone feed for any enforcement purposes. It will not be connected to any surveillance tools.

Why will we use the technology?

ERAT is an important and newer tool used by fire agencies to save lives and protect property. The SFD has been evaluating how ERAT can improve our emergency responses and outcomes for the community.

In some areas, the ERAT may reach an incident first and provide the SFD with critical information for our firefighting or rescue tactics. It can also provide greater safety for firefighter/EMTs and people who are at or near an incident. In the event of a major disaster, it can survey critical infrastructure such as bridges, hospitals and schools. It can check that response routes are safe for SFD responders to drive.

The SFD has identified several incident types where having improved aerial visibility would improve its capabilities and provide greater safety to responders and the public. An example of situations the ERAT would be used: fires in buildings and high rises, water rescues, brush fires, hazardous materials and energy responses, and after an earthquake.

Collection

The live aerial footage will not be retained or stored. The live footage will not be shared with or seen by anyone from other departments or agencies, or the public.

Data that we anticipate the ERAT vendor collects and stores on a secure server: metrics about the flight and the drone, such as number of flights, hours online, distance traveled and maintenance status. Contract language will follow City IT language to require data encryption and safeguards to prevent unauthorized access and use expect for troubleshooting purposes.

Protections

SFD ERAT dispatchers/operators will be FAA certified and follow all training and requirements. SFD fire personnel will receive privacy training and follow policy and procedures to prevent the livestream from being viewed by anyone outside the SFD incident command team and dispatchers. The vendor will be contractually prohibited from observing the live feeds except for technical trouble shooting, and from sharing any of these data with anyone outside of the SFD. ERAT feeds will not be used to identify individuals; its purpose is specific to giving the SFD incident command information they can use to direct firefighting, technical rescue and response, assess structural damage or transport live-saving equipment.

Comment period

The comment period is July 13-August 12, 2026. The SFD is hosting two in-person and two online meetings to answer questions during the comment period.

You can provide comments to [Seattle.gov/Surveillance](https://seattle.gov/surveillance). All comments will be included in the Surveillance Impact Report on this technology and submitted to Seattle City Council. If you would like to provide feedback outside of the open comment period, please submit them directly to the City Council using the emails at seattle.gov/council.