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EXCLUSIVE: State DOT admits mistake with unusable drone aircraft

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Posted: Apr 09, 2012 8:35 PM PDT
Updated: Apr 10, 2012 11:59 AM PDT

By Keoki Kerr - [bio](#) | [email](#)



HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow) – The state Department of Transportation's Harbors Division has been unable to use an unmanned drone aircraft purchased with \$75,000 in federal grant money to provide security at Honolulu Harbor because it falls within restricted airspace near Honolulu International Airport.

"I'm not trying to make any excuses for the Department of Transportation. We're not making any excuses. We made a mistake," said Dan Meisenzahl, spokesman for the state Department of Transportation.

In 2006, the state DOT was awarded a \$1.4 million harbor security grant from the federal government to install high-tech security measures at Honolulu Harbor where more than 90 percent of the state's merchandise arrives every year.

Roughly \$75,000 of that money went to purchase an unmanned aerial vehicle, known as a UAV or drone, which arrived in Honolulu last June, Meisenzahl said.

It's supposed to be used to transmit aerial video of harbor facilities, but the craft has never left the ground and sits in a state DOT Harbors office nine months later.

"The UAV has never flown. It's very unfortunate. This is an example of government not working," Meisenzahl said.

"Unfortunately, we never checked if we could fly a UAV around Honolulu harbor. And we cannot," Meisenzahl said, noting that the FAA said the state can't fly the drone at the harbor because it's too close to Honolulu International Airport. "It's an international airport. And there's a restricted area around the airport and



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Honolulu Harbor is part of that restricted area. And so, unfortunately, you cannot fly within a restricted area."

Meisenzahl said the state harbors division hopes to enter a partnership with another state or county agency that could use the drone for surveillance.

"We're not going to let this sit here in a room for the next twenty years. We're going to do something about this, we're going to rectify this and that's something we're definitely working on in the harbors division," Meisenzahl said.

He said in the worst-case scenario, the state could sell the drone to another agency.

"We might have to sell it. And if that's the case, we'd be able to recoup the cost," Meisenzahl said.

But since the drone was paid for with federal grant money, it has to be used for specific purposes and can't be given away to other federal agencies, for example, because it was supposed to be used by local government.

While Meisenzahl admitted the state made a \$75,000 mistake with the drone, he said the rest of the federal grant went to install video surveillance of Honolulu Harbor, Kewalo Basin and Kalaeloa Harbor. The cameras are connected to a control center at Honolulu Harbor that monitors waterfront facilities.

"That 1.4 million dollars, I would argue, the vast majority of it, is being put to great use every day," Meisenzahl said.

The contract for all of the work was awarded to Hawaiya Technologies in 2009 and the contractor has delivered all of the equipment and technology required in the contract, Meisenzahl said.

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Dan Meisenzahl, spokesman for the state Department of Transportation



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thefish101 3 days ago	The issues of FAA flight clearances near the Airport; drone take-off/landing areas; just who would fly the drone (i.e. qualifications); and maintenance were some of the issues raised in early 2010, more than 12 months before the drone's arrival at the harbor. Just who signed off on the Security Grant Request prior to submission to the Federal Government (Department of Homeland Security)? They should be looking into other lines of work. Also, are there no procurement procedures within Harbors/DOT which would have stopped this wasteful (and possibly illegal) purchase? If so, why weren't they followed and enforced ?	+5  
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