

Joshua Young
Air Safety Investigator
AS-ERA

Date: 1/3/2024

Subject: ERA24LA079, Drone Operator Statement

Contact: Victor Fuguet, Drone Operator, Drone Hive

Mr. Fuguet emailed the following statement to the IIC on 1/3/2024.

"Dear Joshua Young,

I am writing to recount the events that occurred on Saturday, December 30, at approximately 2:00 pm, during my drone flight activity over a construction zone. I was conducting an automated flight at 180 feet altitude using the DroneDeploy application, marking this as my ninth flight within a span of nine weeks. I was positioned at the northern boundary of the construction area, affording me complete visibility of the developing zone.

After roughly 20 minutes in the air, a helicopter suddenly appeared behind me, flying from the northeast towards the west, headed for an area across Interstate Highway I95, where a landing strip is located. It's noteworthy that despite constant activity in the area involving planes, helicopters, and machinery, I had never witnessed aircraft flying at such a low altitude (180 feet) over either the construction site or Interstate Highway I95.

Aware of the helicopter's sudden presence, I attempted a rapid descent, but I had barely 2 or 3 seconds before hearing an impact and losing connection with my drone. I immediately proceeded to the area where the helicopter landed and was able to converse with the pilot to ensure all occupants were unharmed.

Representatives from the Daytona Beach International Airport security department also arrived at the scene, requesting my driver's license and drone pilot license to aid communication with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Subsequently, a Volusia County officer requested pertinent documentation and asked additional questions.

Upon returning home and reviewing the relevant documentation, I identified errors in my actions. At the outset of this assignment, I attempted to obtain flight authorization, which was denied due to proximity to the airport. In response to this denial, the company that hired me provided a waiver to operate in the area. My mistake was not thoroughly reviewing it and proceeding solely with the flight unlock request. This allowed my drone to reach an altitude of 180 feet when the waiver only authorized flights at 150 feet, in addition to requiring me to report each flight 15 minutes in advance and upon the conclusion of each operation.

After all this and upon much reflection, I have learned that I must meticulously review every detail of each flight authorization received and compare the waiver instructions with flight authorizations or unlocks, as they might not align, leading to confusion."