

# DOJ PISSED AWAY \$2.1 MILLION ON DRONES THAT DON'T WORK

DOJ's IG just released a report on the Department's drone use. Its overall recommendation is that FBI get more drones, so it has them in locations around the country for quick use if they're needed (sigh). It also found that FBI doesn't have good records of how it partners with other agencies (notably, Customs and Border Patrol) to use their drones, which seems like it might present discovery problems.

But I'm most struck by how much money DOJ is blowing on drones that don't work.

The IG reports – but seems unconcerned – that half of the drones FBI has bought are not operational.

Our September 2013 interim report found that between 2004 and 2013, the FBI spent approximately \$3 million to acquire small UAS it deployed to support its investigations. As of August 2014, the FBI had acquired 34 UAS vehicles and associated control stations, of which it considered 17 vehicles and a smaller number of control stations to be operational.

I find this more troubling given that FBI claims only to have used drones in 13 investigations between September 2006 and August 2014. So are they losing more than one drone every time they use one for an investigation?

The IG is far more concerned about ATF's sunk drone costs.

Our September 2013 interim report found that ATF possessed UAS and planned to deploy them operationally. Specifically, between September 2011 and September

2012, ATF's UAS program spent approximately \$600,000 to purchase three different types of rotary-wing UAS with a total of six UAS vehicles.

[snip]

ATF officials reported that ATF never flew its UAS in support its operations because TOB testing and pilot training revealed a series of technological limitations with the UAS models it had acquired. In particular, ATF determined the real-time battery capability for one UAS model lasted for only about 20 minutes even though the manufacturer specified its flight time was 45 minutes. ATF determined that the other two models of UAS acquired also were unreliable or unsuitable for surveillance. One UAS program manager told us ATF found that one of its smaller UAS models, which cost nearly \$90,000, was too difficult to use reliably in operations. Furthermore, the TOB discovered that a gas-powered UAS model, which cost approximately \$315,000 and was specified to fly for up to 2 hours, was never operable due to multiple technical defects.

In June 2014, the Special Operations Division concluded that ATF's UAS were unsuitable for operational use, suspended all ATF UAS-related activities, and reassigned all UAS staff until after DOJ issues and ATF reviews new UAS policy recommendations. In September 2014, the TOB transferred its six UAS vehicles and other related equipment purchased prior to June 2014 to the Naval Criminal Investigative Service at no cost.

Although the OIG did not specifically audit ATF's UAS contracts, we are troubled that the process ATF used to purchase these UAS resulted in ATF

spending approximately \$600,000 on UAS models it ultimately determined to have significant mechanical and technical problems that rendered them unsuitable to deploy in support of ATF operations.

By my calculation, all of ATF's investments in drones (\$600,000) and half of FBI's investments in drones (half of \$3 million) have been lost to drones that either never did or no longer work. \$2.1 million on drones that don't fly.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not crazy about DOJ buying up a fleet of small drones for investigative uses they're keeping inadequate paperwork on in the first place.

But neither am I happy about DOJ pissing away all this money on drones that don't work.