# Police warn of catastrophic risk after drone near-miss with rescue helicopter in the Mournes



Police in Northern Ireland have condemned a recent near-miss between a rescue helicopter and a drone as “absolute madness,” warning that the consequences could have been catastrophic. The incident unfolded in the Mournes on Saturday evening when the coastguard helicopter, following a successful rescue operation in the Lower Cove area, was preparing for take-off to return to its base in Prestwick, Scotland. As the helicopter awaited clearance, officers noticed a drone flying dangerously close, prompting immediate concern and action.

As the police worked with the Newcastle Coastguard to secure the landing site for Maritime and Coastguard Agency Rescue Helicopter 199, they responded to the looming threat posed by the unknown drone in the vicinity. Fortunately, the helicopter had just completed its mission—transporting a casualty to a Northern Ireland Ambulance Service vehicle. An officer swiftly alerted the coastguard of the drone sighting, yet despite their efforts to locate the drone operator, it had vacated the area by the time they arrived.

The police spokesperson emphasised the gravity of the situation, stating, “Had that drone impacted with the helicopter at any time, the result would have been catastrophic.” This sentiment echoes increasing concerns about drone operations near emergency services, as highlighted by the European Union Aviation Safety Agency. EASA firmly advises that drones should not be operated near emergency helicopters unless operators are collaborating with the emergency services. In emergencies, the agency insists that operators must land their drones immediately upon hearing or seeing any incoming helicopters.

The dangers associated with indiscriminate drone use have become a pressing issue internationally. In the United States, drones are implicated in two-thirds of reported near misses with commercial airliners, particularly around busy airports—highlighting the urgency for stricter regulations. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has enacted various measures to mitigate risks, including bans on unauthorized drone flights near airports and mandatory registration for drones over a certain weight. Yet, enforcing these regulations remains a significant challenge.

This incident in the Mournes mirrors other alarming encounters with drones internationally. In Australia, for instance, a near miss between a drone and a Westpac Lifesaver rescue helicopter led to calls for enhanced regulations and mandatory training for drone pilots. Similarly, incidents involving drones have also been reported in the UK, with authorities stressing the importance of adhering to legal flight altitudes and other safety measures. Notably, a drone in Londonderry operated at about 1,000 feet, significantly violating UK law; such actions could not only result in severe penalties but also endanger lives.

As drones proliferate in various capacities, their allure must come with an understanding of the inherent responsibilities. Police in Northern Ireland are actively seeking witnesses or anyone with information about the incident, reminding the public of the potential legal ramifications of negligent drone operation. The broader implications of such near-misses, especially during critical operations, underscore the imperative for responsible behaviour among drone users to preserve the safety of all in shared airspace.

The message is clear: drones are not toys, and their operation requires a serious commitment to safety and legality.

### Reference Map

* Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/police-hit-out-at-absolute-madness-following-drone-near-miss-with-rescue-helicopter-XM2TUJDX4FGXBNQM726I47NE4A/)
* Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/police-hit-out-at-absolute-madness-following-drone-near-miss-with-rescue-helicopter-XM2TUJDX4FGXBNQM726I47NE4A/)
* Paragraph 3: [[3]](https://www.easa.europa.eu/community/topics/drones-and-emergency-helicopters-dont-mix)
* Paragraph 4: [[2]](https://www.apnews.com/article/d8bb7192173d90b46258c91152454cf3)
* Paragraph 5: [[4]](https://www.airmedandrescue.com/latest/news/drone-regs-call-follows-near-miss-rescue-helicopter)
* Paragraph 6: [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c0jx37lqn4go)
* Paragraph 7: [[6]](https://www.ksnt.com/news/local-news/what-are-the-risks-for-flying-a-drone-near-an-accident/)
* Paragraph 8: [[7]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-49673373)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/police-hit-out-at-absolute-madness-following-drone-near-miss-with-rescue-helicopter-XM2TUJDX4FGXBNQM726I47NE4A/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.apnews.com/article/d8bb7192173d90b46258c91152454cf3> - An Associated Press article discusses the increasing risk drones pose to commercial airliners near major U.S. airports. In 2024, drones accounted for nearly two-thirds of reported near midair collisions involving passenger planes at the top 30 busiest U.S. airports. The sharp increase in drone use—over a million in operation in the U.S.—has particularly intensified risks during plane takeoffs and landings. The FAA has banned unauthorized drone flights near airports and requires registration and transponder devices for drones over 250 grams, but effective enforcement remains challenging. The article also highlights recent incidents, including near misses with passenger jets in San Francisco, Miami, and Newark, underscoring the gravity of the threat. Authorities stress the importance of prosecuting violators to deter illegal drone activity and ensure aviation safety.
3. <https://www.easa.europa.eu/community/topics/drones-and-emergency-helicopters-dont-mix> - The European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) emphasizes the dangers of operating drones near emergency helicopters. The agency advises that during emergencies, individuals should not operate drones in the affected areas unless they are part of the collaborative effort with emergency services. If a drone operator sees or hears a helicopter approaching, they should land their drone immediately. The article highlights the challenges emergency helicopter pilots face in spotting drones, especially when focused on conducting rescue operations, and the potential catastrophic consequences of a collision.
4. <https://www.airmedandrescue.com/latest/news/drone-regs-call-follows-near-miss-rescue-helicopter> - An article from AirMed&Rescue reports on a near miss between a drone and a rescue helicopter in Carrara, Australia. On July 6, a Westpac Lifesaver rescue helicopter was flying at 60 meters (200 feet) on a routine patrol when the pilot saw a drone in front of him. Fortunately, the pilot managed to dodge the drone and avoid a collision. The incident prompted UAVair, a UAV pilot training organization, to call for tighter regulations on remotely controlled aircraft. The article includes statements from Westpac Lifesaver’s safety manager David O’Brian and UAVair's chief executive Ashley Cox, who emphasize the potential dangers of unregulated drone operations and the need for compulsory training for drone pilots.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c0jx37lqn4go> - A BBC News article reports on a 'near miss' between a helicopter and a drone over Londonderry, Northern Ireland. The incident occurred near the Foyle Bridge, with the drone operating at an altitude of approximately 1,000 feet (305 meters), which is illegal under UK law. The Civil Aviation Authority warns that anyone breaking the rules on the use of drones could face severe penalties, including fines and imprisonment. The article includes statements from the police and the Civil Aviation Authority, emphasizing the importance of responsible drone operation to ensure airspace safety.
6. <https://www.ksnt.com/news/local-news/what-are-the-risks-for-flying-a-drone-near-an-accident/> - An article from KSNT News discusses the risks and potential consequences of flying drones near accident scenes. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) warns that operating drones near emergency situations can interfere with law enforcement and emergency response efforts, potentially leading to delays and increased risks for first responders and victims. The article includes statements from FAA Public Affairs Specialist Jilian Angeline, who highlights the impact of drones on response times and the potential for mid-air collisions. It also mentions the fines and penalties drone operators could face for unsafe or unauthorized operations.
7. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-49673373> - A BBC News article reports on a near-miss between an air ambulance and a drone in Yorkshire, England. The incident occurred when the drone came within 10 feet (3 meters) of the helicopter, which was returning to its base at Nostell near Wakefield. The drone was being flown at an illegal height of 1,300 feet (396 meters), more than three times the permitted height of 400 feet (120 meters). The article includes statements from Yorkshire Air Ambulance Chief Pilot Steve Waudby, who emphasizes the dangers of such incidents and appeals for the drone's operator to come forward.