



Ministry
of Defence



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Mr Chris Cole
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Our Reference: FOI2019/09914

Date: 24/10/2019

Dear Mr Cole,

Thank you for your email of 29 August 2019 which requested the following information:

- A) *A list of accidents (according to Air Safety Information Management System or equivalent) involving Watchkeeper and Reaper UAVs since 1 Jan 2015 until present. Please can the response include: 1. Date of accident; 2. Location of accident; 3. Cause of accident; 4. Aircraft type; 5. Tail number/serial number of aircraft; 6. Status of the aircraft after incident (for example write off, withdrawn from service, repaired and returned to service, etc) and (where appropriate) 7. Repair category.*
- B) *The location of UK Watchkeeper UAVs at today's date*
- C) *The location of UK Reaper UAVs at today's date (by country or region)*

I am treating your email as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. A search has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence, and I can confirm that information in the scope of your request is held.

As previously advised, some of the information you have requested falls within scope of qualified exemption Section 26 (Defence) of the FOIA and disclosure was therefore subject to a public interest test. This means that the information requested can only be withheld if the public interest in doing so outweighs the public interest in disclosure. Section 26 provides that information is exempt if it is likely to prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of any relevant forces (where relevant force means the Armed Forces of the Crown).

While it is public knowledge that Reapers operate in the Middle East, disclosure of specific accident locations would impact on ongoing operations by putting the safety of our Armed Forces at risk and allowing enemies to draw conclusions about UK and allied operations. The balance of public interest was found to be in favour of protecting the ability of the Armed Forces to conduct safe and effective operations. Information about the location of the Reaper accidents has therefore been withheld under Section 26 of the FOI Act. I have set the level of prejudice to the higher level of 'would'.

All other information requested is included in this letter.

WATCHKEEPER

There have been four Watchkeeper accidents since 1 January 2015. The detail you have requested regarding these accidents is already in the public domain, through the publication of Statutory Inquiry (SI) and Non-Statutory Inquiry (NSI) reports. I am therefore withholding the detailed information regarding these accidents under Section 21 of the FOI Act (information reasonably accessible by other means). Section 21 is an absolute exemption, with no requirement to consider the public interest.

Under Section 16 of the FOI Act (advice and assistance), however, I have provided links to the relevant reports below.

WK006 2 Nov 2015 - the SI Report into the incident is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/service-inquiry-into-the-watchkeeper-wk006-unmanned-air-vehicle-uav-accident-at-boscombe-down-aerodrome-on-2-november-2015>

WK042 3 Feb 2017 - the SI Report into the incident is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/service-inquiry-report-into-the-loss-of-watchkeeper-wk042-unmanned-air-vehicle-over-cardigan-bay-in-west-wales-on-3-february-2017>

WK043 24 March 2017 - the SI Report into the incident is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/service-inquiry-report-into-the-loss-of-watchkeeper-wk043-unmanned-air-vehicle-over-cardigan-bay-in-west-wales-on-24-march-2017>

WK050 13 Jun 2018 – NSI Report into the incident is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/foi-responses-released-by-mod-week-commencing-19-august-2019>

WK006, WK042, and WK043 were written off and WK050 is awaiting a Reclamation and Sentencing Board.

The UK Army's Watchkeeper fleet is based in Larkhill and Boscombe Down. Thales operate Watchkeeper from West Wales Airport for trials and evaluation. Watchkeeper is also currently deployed on exercise (for training) at RAF Akrotiri, Cyprus.

REAPER

There have been two Reaper accidents since 1 January 2015:

ZZ201 17 Oct 2015. The port Main Landing Gear collapsed on landing. The air vehicle was withdrawn from service due to it being near the end of its viable flying life.

ZZ205 16 Aug 2016. Runway excursion. The air vehicle is under repair at Poway and will be returned to the fleet.

Reapers are based and operate in the Middle East.

If you are not satisfied with this response or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact me in the first instance. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, Ground Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.gov.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review must be made within 40 working days of the date on which the attempt to reach informal resolution has come to an end.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not investigate your case until the MOD internal review

process has been completed. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website, <http://www.ico.org.uk>.

Yours sincerely,

DE&S Secretariat Parliamentary