**Beat: News**

# Drone Pilot Sentenced to Jail

**After Collision With Another Aircraft**

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**Brian Teepell/USPA 24 News -** Drones are regarded as aircraft under the majority of aviation regulations(Transport Canada & FAA), which positions the operator as a pilot who must conform to all applicable safety and flight standards. This categorization implies that drones are bound by the same regulatory requirements as other aircraft, including those pertinent to restricted airspace, altitude, and pilot certification.
Licensed Drone Pilots have the responsibility to know the rules and regulations of their jurisdiction and lead by example.

A California tech executive has been sentenced to jail time and ordered to provide restitution after his DJI Mini 3 Pro drone collided with a critical firefighting aircraft battling the Los Angeles January Palisades Fire, forcing the plane out of service at a crucial moment in the firefight and highlighting the dangers of flying drones near emergency operations.

Peter Tripp Akemann, 57, a veteran of the gaming industry and co-founder of Treyarch, the developer of Call of Duty, currently serving as chief technologist at Skydance Interactive, will serve a 14-day federal prison sentence, followed by 30 days of home detention, and pay around $156,000 in restitution, with an additional requirement to complete 150 hours of community service supporting Southern California wildfire relief efforts.

Prosecutors say Akemann’s actions could have been catastrophic. “This defendant recklessly flew an aircraft into airspace where first responders were risking their lives."

The U.S. Attorney’s Office said; “Flying drones during times of emergency poses an extreme threat to personnel and compromises firefighting operations.”

On the morning of January 9th, amidst the devastating flames in Pacific Palisades, Akemann arrived at Santa Monica’s Third Street Promenade and initiated drone operations with his Mini 3, taking off from the rooftop of a parking garage. Authorities were later informed that Akemann aimed to verify the status of a friend’s residence and witness the fire’s impact.

Contrary to its intended flight path, the drone deviated over 1.5 miles into FAA-restricted airspace, directly into the flight path of aircraft ferrying 1,600 gallons of ocean water at a time. Akemann lost contact with the drone and only became cognizant of the situation's severity upon hearing a news report about a drone colliding with a firefighting aircraft.

Akemann wrote in a three-page aology letter to the court; "It was not until I heard on the news that a drone had collided with a firefighting aircraft that I became concerned it was possibly my drone,”

A 3-by-6-inch hole was sustained in the wing of the Canadair CL-415, referred to as Super Scooper Quebec 1, leased by Los Angeles County from the Quebec government, following the drone strike, prompting costly repairs and temporary decommissioning.

The cost of repairing the aircraft alone exceeded $65,000, but when factoring in downtime and additional expenses, the total cost rose to approximately $156,000. As part of his plea agreement, Akemann consented to reimburse both the Quebec government and the repair company. The sentence also included two weeks of incarceration and 30 days of home confinement, as handed down by U.S. District Judge Michael W. Fitzgerald.
Considering Akemann's guilty plea, remorse, and cooperation, the court took a lenient approach, despite his potential liability for a year-long prison term for the unsafe operation of an unmanned aircraft.

Federal authorities stress that the case should serve as a warning to all drone users. FBI Los Angeles Assistant Director reminds unmanned aircraft pilots;
“Lack of common sense and ignorance of your duty as a drone pilot will not shield you from criminal charges."

Even compact consumer drones like the DJI Mini 3 Pro can incapacitate a multi-million-dollar aircraft and disrupt critical missions.

**Article online:**
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