

Surge in Drone Intrusions Across Prisons Raises National Security Concerns

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The number of drone-related incidents in prisons across England and Wales has surged by 43% over the past year, prompting renewed concerns about security and organised criminal activity within the prison estate.

Government figures show that between April 2024 and March 2025, a total of 1,712 drone incidents were recorded, up from 1,196 the previous year. The use of drones to smuggle

illicit items, including drugs and weapons, has reached what officials describe as “a new peak,” highlighting an ongoing challenge for the prison service.

Alongside the increase in drone activity, the same dataset revealed more than 26,000 recorded incidents involving drug finds inside prisons, representing a 25% rise year-on-year. Additionally, over 13,000 weapons were discovered within the prison system during the same period.

Concerns over the sophistication of drone technology have also been raised. Earlier this month, the Chief Inspector of Prisons warned that drone capabilities are becoming so advanced that the idea of a prisoner being extracted by drone is now considered a “theoretical possibility.” In its annual report released in July, His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons described drones as a source of “overwhelming amounts” of illicit goods, posing a “threat to national security.”

The report specifically referenced repeated drone incursions into high-security Category A prisons, including those in Worcestershire and Manchester. These facilities house some of the nation’s most dangerous inmates, including convicted terrorists. Sky News has reported that drone operators can remotely control aircraft from outside the United Kingdom, complicating law enforcement efforts to identify and apprehend suspects.

In response to the growing threat, the Government has allocated £900,000 towards efforts to crack down on the use of drones in smuggling operations. This funding is part of a broader strategy that includes a previously announced £40 million package aimed at strengthening prison security through exterior netting, reinforced windows, and other protective measures.

Prisons Minister Lord Timpson stressed the Government’s commitment to “tackling the organised crime gangs behind the drug supply routes” to disrupt criminal operations and reduce reoffending. He emphasised the importance of ensuring that prisons serve their purpose of rehabilitation rather than becoming centres for further criminal development.

Law enforcement agencies are also intensifying their coordination. Claire McGuire from the North West Regional Organised Crime Unit highlighted the role of intelligence-sharing in combating the issue: “By sharing intelligence and coordinating operations, we are strengthening our collective response to this growing threat.”

The figures underscore a mounting challenge for authorities as they work to prevent contraband from entering prisons through increasingly sophisticated means. The rise in drone-related incidents is being met with heightened urgency and enhanced countermeasures to ensure public safety and maintain order within the penal system.