

From: [Scurti, Angela \[DEP\]](#)
To: [Heck, Kelley \[DEP\]](#); [Hajina, Larry \[DEP\]](#); [Shinske, Caryn \[DEP\]](#); [LaQuaglia, Debra \[DEP\]](#); [Grassi, Vincent \[DEP\]](#); [Nanneman, Emily \[DEP\]](#)
Cc: [Zaraza, Harley \[DEP\]](#); [Gray, Beryla \[DEP\]](#); [Hoover, Debra \[DEP\]](#)
Subject: DEP Press Calls 12.16.24
Date: Monday, December 16, 2024 4:19:40 PM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)

Caryn

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[Ron Zeitlinger, The Jersey Journal](#), Interview with DEP official or commissioner on North Bergen school trailers, I am working on one last North Bergen school trailers story before we close up shop Feb. 1. The story is scheduled to run in the paper Dec. 26. Is it possible to interview Nancy Lawrence or Commissioner LaTourette for the story? Also, can you tell me the status of the application and the next steps? zeitlinger@jjournal.com (emailed 12.16.24) , 201-217-2429 (CS)

Larry

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[Jennifer Johnson, Fox News Media](#), Media Inquiry: Significant Radiation Spikes Detected in New York and New Jersey, Can you confirm or deny that there is an increase in radiation detected in New York and New Jersey where the drone activity has been spotted. <https://x.com/kystenabecker/status/1868375526647234884> There have been significant radiation spikes detected in the New York and New Jersey Metro areas amid a spate of 'mysterious' drone sightings. One theory that has been floated by a subject matter expert named John Ferguson, the CEO of a military drone company named Saxon Aerospace, is that these drones are flying at night because they are searching for gas leaks or radioactive material. Drones typically don't fly at night unless they are equipped with special sensors; these may include infrared or thermal imaging, as well as gas and radioactivity sensing technology. Two locations in the NY/NJ metro area have been flagged as condition "red," with CPM (counts per minute) levels exceeding the safety threshold of 200 CPM over the past week, according to the Geiger Counter World Map. One 1000 CPM reading was detected at Hamilton Park in Weehawken, New Jersey, across the Lincoln Tunnel going into New York City, while the other was detected near Fort Hamilton, which is located near the Verrazano Narrows bridge. These readings are markedly higher than typical background radiation levels, raising concerns about localized environmental or industrial factors that may be contributing to these spikes. The CPM metric measures the number of radioactive particles detected in a given area per minute, using Geiger counters. This does not directly quantify the strength of the radiation but provides an indication of its presence. For reference, a typical background radiation level is around 30–50 CPM, while readings above 100 CPM may indicate an anomaly requiring attention. Prolonged exposure to higher levels of radiation, such as

those recorded in Weehawken and Fort Hamilton, can pose health risks depending on duration and proximity. Readings of over 1,000 CPM (counts per minute) on a Geiger counter are relatively rare under normal circumstances. Authorities are urged to investigate the source of these elevated readings and assess potential risks to the population in these areas. However, there is another factor that one should consider: An increased in reported or perceived “drone activity” that may correspond to increased military presence or emergency response and accompanying spikes in radiation levels. There are military drones and unmanned flight systems that use radioactive fuel sources, although such designs are typically considered to be “experimental” due to safety, regulatory, and operational constraints. Radioisotope Thermoelectric Generators or RTGs use radioactive isotopes, such as plutonium-238, to generate electricity through thermoelectric conversion. These have been more commonly used in space missions (e.g., NASA's Voyager probes) but have been considered for unmanned aerial systems (UAS) in specific scenarios where long endurance and reliability are critical. RTGs typically use isotopes like plutonium-238, which primarily emit alpha particles. Alpha radiation cannot travel far and is usually blocked by the outer casing of the RTG. It is unlikely to directly contribute to a 1,000+ CPM spike unless the RTG casing is compromised, exposing the radioactive material. Some radioactive decay chains produce beta particles and gamma rays, which can penetrate the RTG casing to some extent. Gamma radiation, in particular, can travel significant distances and could lead to elevated Geiger counter readings. However, radiation escaping from a well-functioning RTG is minimal and typically not detectable at a significant distance. However, if the RTG casing is damaged or degraded, radioactive material could leak, leading to higher-than-normal CPM readings. More plausible or at least common forms of radiation capable of causing Geiger counter spikes would be leakage from medical isotopes (e.g., cesium-137 or cobalt-60), industrial equipment accidents, or environmental contamination. However, increased military activity into the areas may introduce variables such as top secret equipment that may be associated with radioactivity spikes. Agencies like DARPA have explored advanced power systems for drones, including nuclear-based options, but details are often classified. DARPA's SIGMA program also equips the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey with an advanced radiation detection system, enhancing counterterrorism efforts and radiological threat monitoring across the region's critical infrastructure. SIGMA, operational since late 2019, uses networked sensors—stationary, vehicle-mounted, and wearable—to provide real-time radiation detection and alert capabilities. The mysterious drone sightings in New Jersey took an unexpected turn with an ABC 7 News crew capturing video footage of a strange, white orb floating in the Mendham Township sky. The reporter described the phenomenon as unidentifiable and urged residents to submit similar videos for expert analysis. The unexplained activity has also included sightings over military bases, intensifying demands for clarity from public

officials as speculation swirls about the drones' origins, including theories that they may have been sent by foreign adversaries. While National Security Council spokesman John Kirby dismissed over 3,000 reports as mistaken observations of helicopters or airplanes, his statements contradict confirmations from military officials at New Jersey's Picatinny Arsenal and Naval Weapons Station Earle of unauthorized drone breaches. These sightings add to growing public concern over an apparent "drone invasion" across New Jersey and neighboring states. The FBI and DHS said in a joint statement on Thursday that there was "no evidence at this time that the reported drone sightings pose a national security or public safety threat or have a foreign nexus." On Sunday, Hochul announced federal officials are deploying a high-tech drone detection system to New York State. The advanced system will support state and local law enforcement in investigating the drones, which have been flickering across the night skies over the past month, Gov. Kathy Hochul announced Sunday. Despite the federal support, Hochul urged Congress to provide greater resources. The Aerospace CEO's explanation that the 'mystery' drones may be searching for gas leaks or radioactivity fits with both the government secrecy surrounding the reported phenomena, as well as the increased radioactivity detected in the region. jennifer.johnson@fox.com (emailed 12.16.24) (C) 646-254-2975, (O) 212-301-8507 (LH)

Jenna Calderon, Asbury Park Press, Media inquiry – drones, I'm reaching out from the Asbury Park Press regarding drone activity above Island Beach State Park. I spoke with Ocean County Sheriff Mastronardy and he mentioned that Island Beach Park Police reported seeing 50 drones last Sunday. Could you please provide any information you have on this incident? Additionally, I'd like to request any body camera footage of this incident. Please let me know if that needs to be OPRA requested instead. JCalderon@gannettnj.com (emailed 12.16.24) (LH)

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[REDACTED]
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Laura Sullivan, NPR, NPR/PBS FRONTLINE request, We're working on a film about disaster recovery post Helene and wanted to see if Commissioner LaTourette might be available for a background interview? We are not filming yet, but would like the chance to speak with him to learn more about environmental recovery after Sandy, his work with environmental mitigation in the area and coastal erosion. Please let me know if a zoom

might be possible at his convenience. It would be great to speak with him before the holidays if that is at all possible. LSullivan@npr.org (emailed 12.16.24) C 202-744-7185 (LH)

Melena Ryzik, NYT request for comment: SeaQuest bankruptcy, We were last in touch over the summer when I was working on a NYT piece about SeaQuest and other animal-interaction parks. SeaQuest filed for bankruptcy this month. (Its CEO also stepped down a month after our story ran.) Does the department want to offer any comment in light of the bankruptcy, or about how SeaQuest has changed its practices or continued to operate after the DEP investigation? ryzik@nytimes.com (emailed 12.16.24) 212.556.8814 (LH)

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Don Gilpin, Witherspoon Media Group, Deer Management, Princeton, NJ. (Town Topics newspaper), I'm wondering if I could talk with someone at NJDEP about Princeton's deer management application. Sorry about the short deadline (See below.) I've been trying to make contact. Thanks for any help you can provide. I can push our deadline to early Tuesday. don.gilpin@witherspoonmediagroup.com <don.gilpin@witherspoonmediagroup.com (emailed 12.16.24) 609-627-9020 (LH)

Angela Scurti

Administrative Assistant | 609-940-4631

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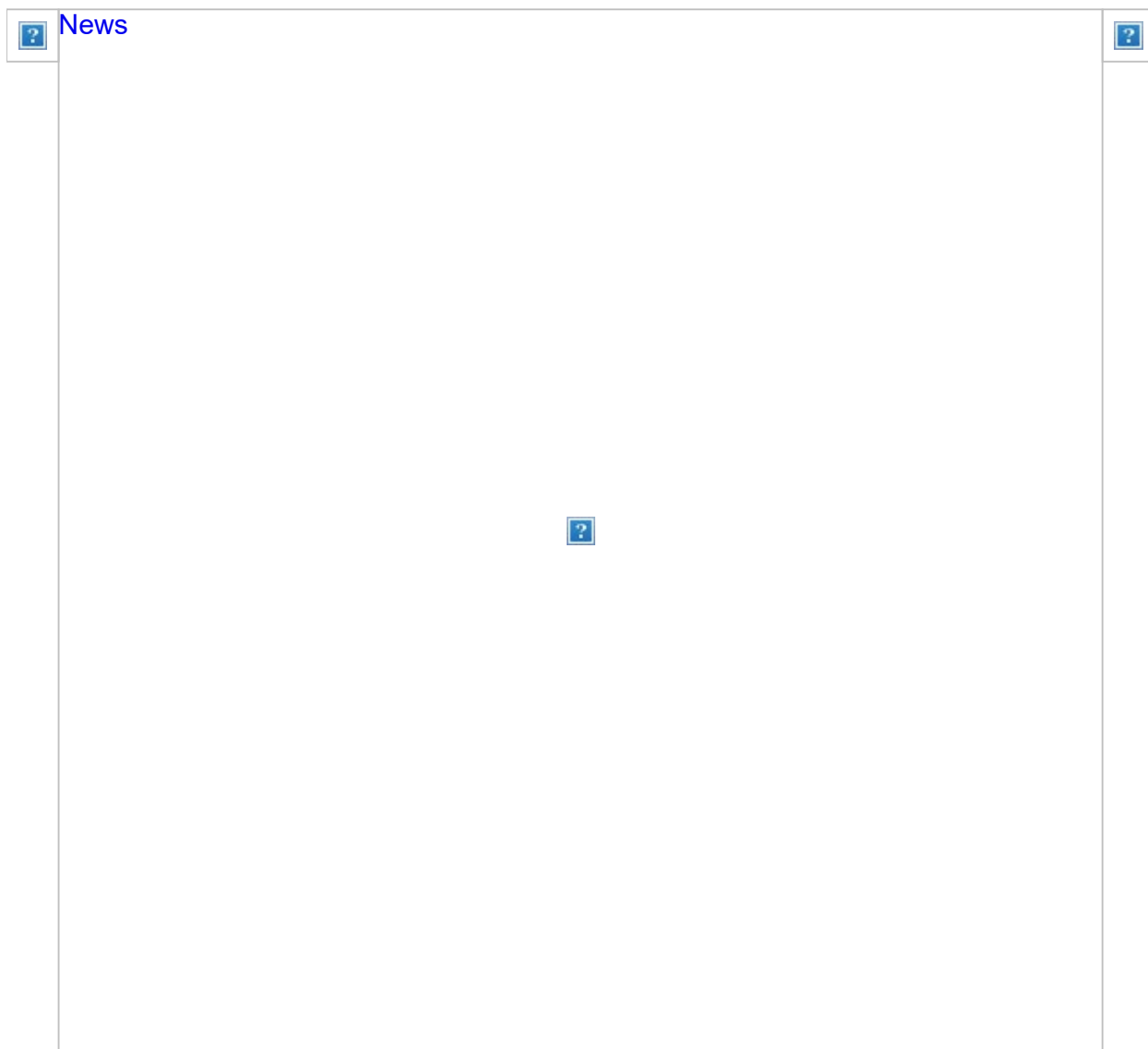
Angela.Scurti@dep.nj.gov



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From: [U.S. Department of Defense](#)
To: [Kaiura, Mitzi \[DEP\]](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Joint Staff Addresses Drones Over New Jersey Military Installations
Date: Saturday, December 14, 2024 7:04:36 PM



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Joint Staff Addresses Drones Over New Jersey Military Installations

Dec. 14, 2024 | By C. Todd Lopez

In recent weeks, a number of drones have been sighted over New Jersey, prompting concern and thousands of telephone calls to report them. Some of those drones have even been sighted over Picatinny Arsenal and Naval Weapons Station Earle, both in New Jersey.

During an on-background telephone call today, officials from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Homeland Security, Federal Aviation Administration and the Joint Staff provided

comment and answered questions from reporters about the drone sightings.

A spokesperson from the Joint Staff acknowledged that there had been sightings of drones over two military installations in New Jersey, but said such sightings are typical.

"We have had confirmed sightings at Picatinny Arsenal and Naval Weapons Station Earle," the spokesperson said. "This is not a new issue for us. We've had to deal with drone incursions over our bases for quite a time now. It's something that we routinely respond to in each and every case when reporting is cited."

The spokesperson said military installations have means to detect and respond to such drones, and that security personnel are trained to identify, categorize and employ those tools to keep drones from flying unauthorized over U.S. military bases.

Right now, the FBI, DHS, FAA and DOD have been unable to determine who is responsible for flying the drones, and there's no indication that there are adversary nations involved.

"To date, we have no intelligence or observations that would indicate that they were aligned with a foreign actor or that they had malicious intent," the spokesperson said. "But ... we don't know. We have not been able to locate or identify the operators or the points of origin."

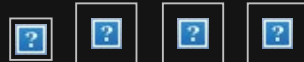
The spokesperson said that the military has "limited authorities" when it comes to conducting investigations off of military installations in the United States, and is also prohibited from conducting intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance operations in the United States which might be used to determine the origins of who might be flying the drones. But the spokesperson also said those military installations have good relations with local law enforcement, who can conduct investigations off the installation.

"We have to coordinate with law enforcement to try to do that, which we are doing," the spokesperson said. "And we do that on a routine basis at nearly all of our locations. We have good relationships and excellent coordination, and we respond quickly to try to identify them."

The spokesperson also said the department is frustrated with the appearance of the drones.

"The main point is to deter the activity using some of our electronic means that can respond to most of these small commercial systems and deny them access to the airspace over our bases," the spokesperson said. "We don't know what the activity is. We don't know ... if it is criminal. But I will tell you that it is irresponsible. Here on the military side, we are just as frustrated with the irresponsible nature of this activity."

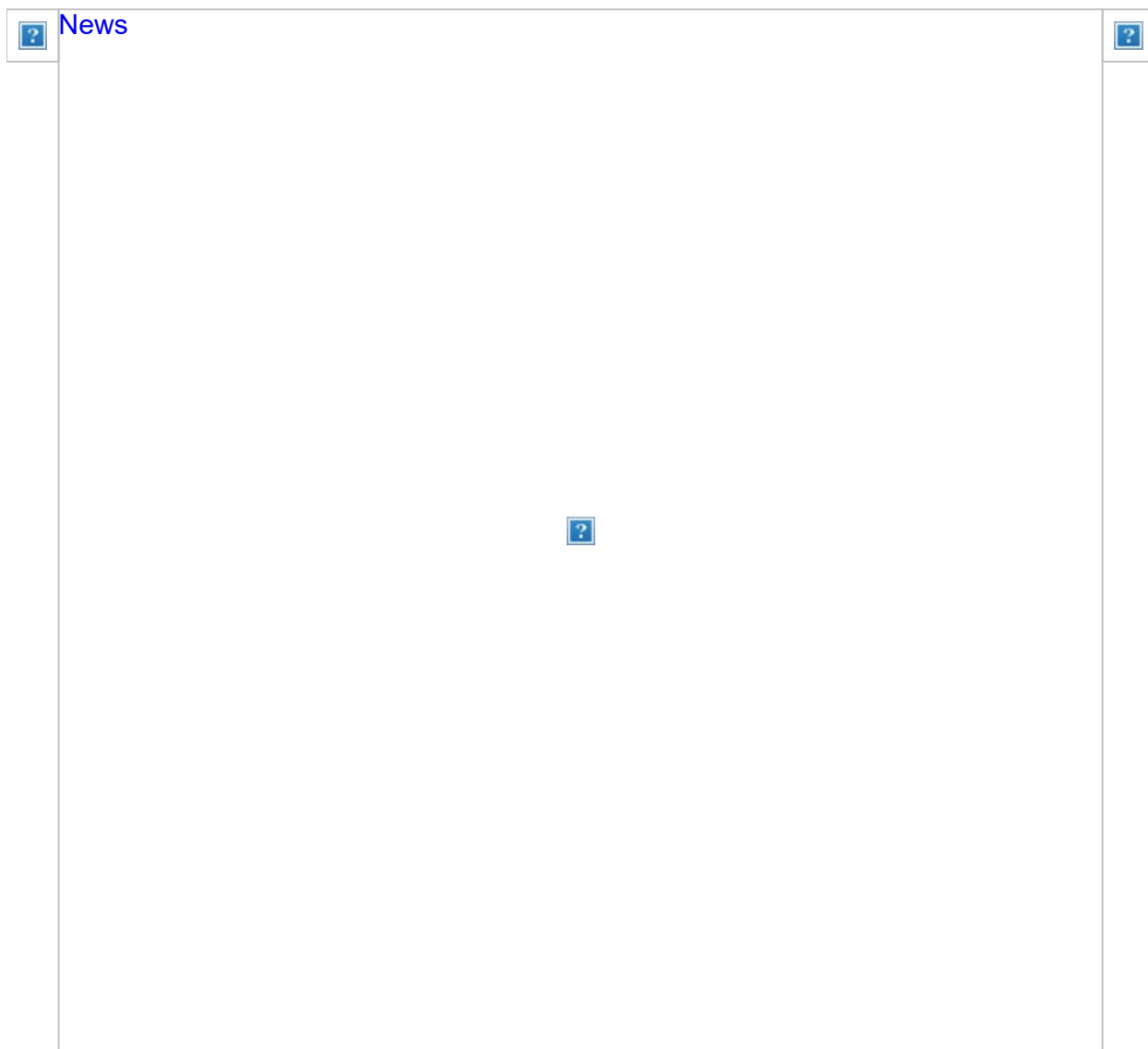
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1400 Defense Pentagon Washington, DC 20301-1400

From: [U.S. Department of Defense](#)
To: [Kaiura, Mitzi \[DEP\]](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Reports of Drone Incursions Taken Seriously, DOD Spokesman Says
Date: Tuesday, December 17, 2024 6:24:31 PM



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An aerial view of the Pentagon.



Reports of Drone Incursions Taken Seriously, DOD Spokesman Says

Dec. 17, 2024 | By Jim Garamone

The Defense Department is taking all reports of drones seriously and working with the White House, the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Aviation Administration to examine the sightings and assess the situation, Pentagon Press Secretary Air Force Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder said today.

It is a big job.

"Just to kind of put this into context, ... over a million drones registered in the United States, and on any day, approximately

8,500 drones are in flight," Ryder said at a news conference. "The vast majority of these drones are going to probably be recreational or hobbyist. They're going to be commercial drones used in things like architecture, engineering, farming or they could be used for law enforcement."

It is possible some of the drones could be up to malign activities, "but for the vast majority that is not the case," he said.

Drones flying near or over U.S. military installations is not something new, the general said. "We take all of those seriously," he said. "Typically, when we detect them, we attempt to classify them and take appropriate measures. Is it possible that some of those are surveillance? Absolutely. Can you make that assumption in every case? Not necessarily so."

Local installation commanders have the authorities to respond appropriately and will continue to do so.

DOD is sending additional resources to Picatinny Arsenal and Naval Weapons Station Earle — both in New Jersey — to better enable the installations to detect, track and monitor drone activity, Ryder said. Commanders can use the recently released counter unmanned systems strategy to craft their responses to any incursions.

The recent strategy looks at the priority installations and what the department needs to do to address the issue — particularly when the systems pose a threat to personnel or security. "The thing is, I think we've all recognized the fact that unmanned systems are here to stay," Ryder said. "They are a part of modern warfare, whether it's here in the homeland or overseas. We want to make sure that we're doing due diligence to protect our forces and protect our equities from a national security standpoint. You will see us continuing to look at that, and it's something we're going to continue to take seriously."

DOD is also taking the situation in Syria seriously and still

concentrating on the Defeat-ISIS mission in the country. The overthrow of the Assad regime opened up areas where ISIS was sheltering and those have become targets. "We all have a vested interest in ensuring that groups in the region capitalize on the situation there, to enable the people of Syria to be able to have a better life than they did under the Assad regime," Ryder said.

Even with the confusion in Syria, the mission against ISIS continues, "as evidenced by the counter ISIS strike, we took a couple days ago," Ryder said. "are able to conduct their mission. And, as it has always been, force protection remains a top priority for our forces."

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From: [Evangelista, Mary M. \[DEP\]](#)
To: [Mary Madelyn Evangelista](#)
Subject: drones
Date: Tuesday, December 10, 2024 10:35:00 AM
Attachments: [image002.png](#)

Drone Sightings Mount In NJ As Officials Demand Answers

Close to two dozen elected officials from one New Jersey county said the flights have raised "significant alarm," and demanded answers.



[Michelle Rotuno-Johnson](#), Patch Staff

Posted Mon, Dec 9, 2024 at 2:37 pm ET|Updated Mon, Dec 9, 2024 at 3:49 pm ET



In a letter, 19 Morris Co. mayors expressed "deep concern" with ongoing nighttime sightings of what appear to be multiple drones flying over their communities. And, a Monmouth Co. mayor said that half a dozen drones were hovering near a Navy base Friday. (Shutterstock)

NEW JERSEY — As local officials and law enforcement agencies continue investigating reports of suspicious drone activity, Gov. Phil Murphy reiterated that there appears to be no threat to public safety from the drones.

"This is something we're taking [deadly seriously](#). I don't blame people for being frustrated," he told reporters after an unrelated bill signing on Monday.

Since mid-November, residents in a [growing number](#) of communities have been spotting the unidentified flying machines at night, sometimes traveling in clusters.

The governor said there were 49 sightings reported in the state on Sunday, but that some were duplicate

sightings or were not actually drones.

"We don't see any concern for public safety," Murphy said. "Having said that, it's really frustrating that we don't have more answers as to where they're coming from and why they're doing what they're doing."

Local officials have been demanding more answers from state and federal investigators as reported sightings of the low-flying drones continue around neighborhoods, and even near military bases.

More sightings this weekend

Officials in at least 12 counties have received reports of the drones, with police

in [Camden](#) and [Middlesex](#) Counties now joining the chorus of law enforcement agencies that are looking into the mystery.

Middletown Mayor Tony Perry also said that [six drones](#) were spotted near Naval Weapons Station Earle on Friday night.

Also on Friday, Evesham Police Chief Walt Miller said some drones "were described as [large as an SUV](#) with blinking lights on them." Miller said that cops in Cherry Hill, Mount Laurel and Medford have also received complaints about the drones.

And police in Voorhees, which borders Evesham, sent [an advisory](#) Saturday about an increase of "suspicious" drone activity in the area.

The Ocean County Sheriff's Office, which has a [Drone Unit](#) assigned to review residents' complaints, told News12 they [captured footage](#) of one of the flying objects over the weekend. The drone [captured on video](#) was larger than the ones flown by hobbyists, officers told News 12, and was flying an estimated 60 to 70 mph.

"We took some video of it, and we're not really sure what it was," Sgt. Kevin Fennessy said. "Definitely something flying low and fast."

Officials in other New Jersey towns and counties have been [expressing concerns](#) about drone flights near infrastructure resources such as water reservoirs, power transmission lines, rail stations, and law enforcement agencies. This includes police in East Brunswick, [who asked residents](#) to report any drone activity near sensitive sites.

"Currently, there is no information indicating any specific, immediate, credible threats," police said on Saturday.

Some have theorized that these sightings are not drones at all, but rather airplanes, satellites or helicopters. However, public safety officials continue referring to the aircraft as drones, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), or unmanned aircraft systems (UAS).

Local police departments have been coordinating with state and federal agencies as the Federal Bureau of Investigation leads an investigation into the drone activity.

Mayors 'hindered' by lack of info

The appearances began in Morris County, where [19 mayors](#) have now sent a letter to Gov. Murphy expressing their "deep concern" about the paucity of answers, and demanding more information from higher-ups.

"The lack of information and clarity regarding these operations has caused fear and frustration among our constituents," officials wrote, noting that there are more than 500,000 residents of the county.

Community leaders identified four urgent concerns with the unexplained flights: Public safety, privacy and security, community well-being, and air space restrictions. Several local council members also signed this letter, which was sent Sunday.

"Our efforts to address these concerns have been hindered by the lack of information available to us," [the letter](#) states.

The local officials requested a full investigation into the origin and purpose of the mysterious flights, "clear communication" to local officials, law enforcement, and residents about their findings, and the implementation of measures to prevent unauthorized or unsafe drone flights in Morris Co. in the future.

The mayors signing on to the letter represent Chester Borough and Chester Township, East Hanover, Florham Park, Hanover, Jefferson, Long Hill, Mendham Borough and Mendham Township, Mine Hill,

Montville, Mount Arlington, Mount Olive, Parsippany- Troy Hills, Pequannock, Riverdale, Rockaway Borough and Rockaway Township, Roxbury, Washington Township, and Wharton.

As of Monday morning, Murphy has yet to respond to this letter specifically. The governor said he met with the Office of Homeland Security, state safety officials, and members of Congress for a briefing last week. There has been little information from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which began its own investigation on Nov. 26.

The FBI's Newark office and New Jersey State Police are asking for the public to report any information related to the drone sightings to the FBI by calling 1-800-CALL-FBI (1-800-225-5324) or submit it online at tips.fbi.gov by selecting "Submit a Tip" under the "Other FBI Crimes" tab. The FBI also is asking for photos and video of any drone sightings.

State lawmakers weigh in

Calls for more details have also come in from the New Jersey statehouse, as all three Republican legislators from the 23rd district (Hunterdon-Somerset-Warren) are demanding action from Murphy and their colleagues in Trenton.

Sen. Doug Steinhardt is asking legislative leaders to convene a bipartisan panel to address the mystery drones, while Assemblymembers John DiMaio and Erik Peterson told Murphy to "explain what you know or work to get answers immediately."

DiMaio and Peterson noted an incident on Nov. 26 where a medical helicopter had to change its landing location because [drones were hovering](#) around the scene of a car crash.

"[This reckless behavior](#) has to immediately cease and the public deserves an explanation," they said.

Steinhardt called on Senate President Nicholas Scutari (D-22) and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin (D-19) to "make it clear" that legislators hear their concerns and are taking them seriously. He called for a bipartisan panel to "to solicit statements, ask questions, and subpoena documents where necessary to ensure transparency."

"The incomplete answers and evasive assurances given by the Governor and others in authority positions have raised more questions than they have answered," he said.

Mary Evangelista, MF, LTE

FREC Administrator

Resource Interpretive Specialist 3

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