

Campus & Stadium Drone Security

The Overview

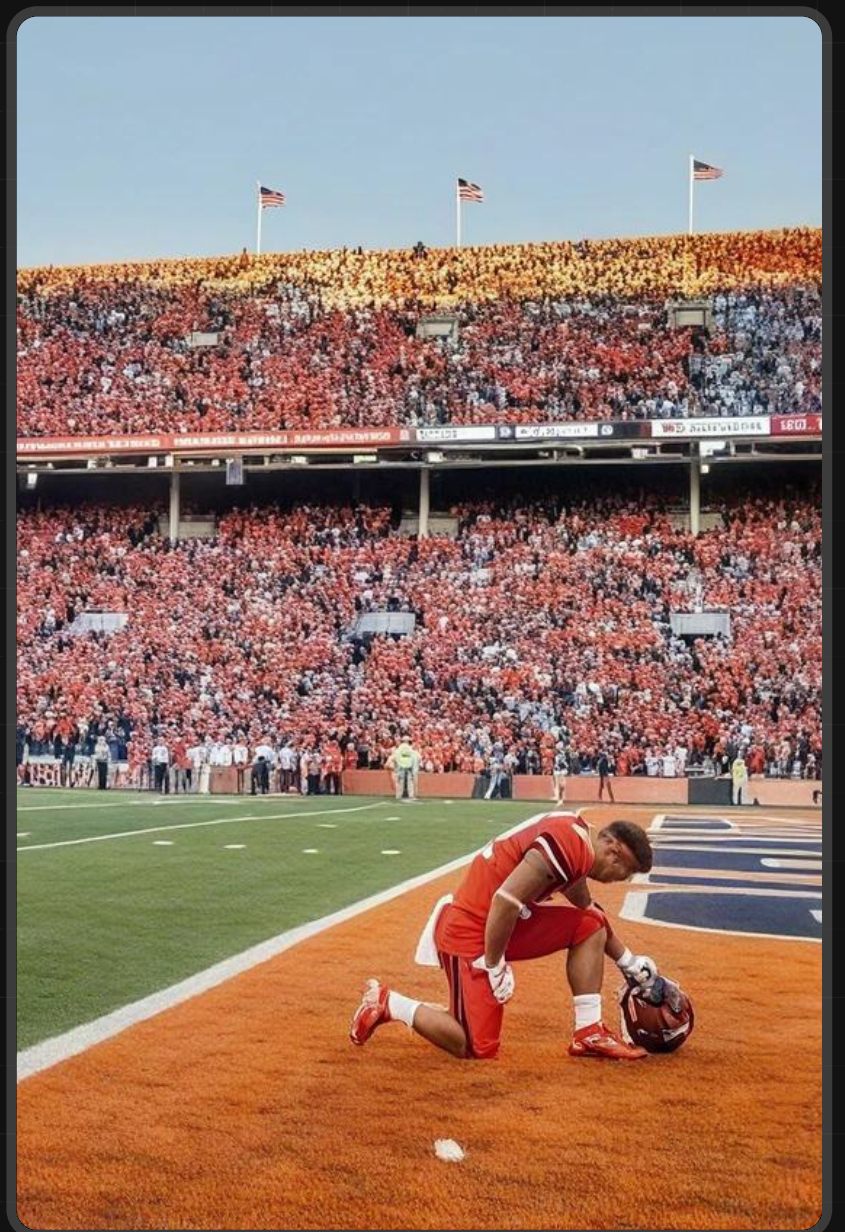
The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign spans 8 square miles and is home to over 55,000 students and nearly 15,000 staff. With a Big 10 football stadium seating over 85,000 and a commercial airport on campus, the university is a vibrant hub of activity. From football games and concerts to special events and daily operations, the University's Police Department, led by Captain Joe McCullough, is dedicated to maintaining campus safety and security.

The Challenge

With nearly 500 drone flights occurring on and around campus each month, the University of Illinois' Police Department had growing concerns about unauthorized drone activity. The combination of a dense student population, high-profile events like Big 10 football games, and critical infrastructure such as the campus airport make the campus an attractive target for drone incursions, posing serious risks to safety, security, and operations.

In one alarming incident, during a football game that coincided with a third-party security audit, a drone breached restricted airspace during the third quarter. The drone hovered dangerously close—within 10 feet—of a SWAT officer stationed in an overwatch position, capturing images of critical security tactics. This exposed a major vulnerability: drones could not only endanger spectators and staff but also compromise operational security with unauthorized surveillance.

The university relied on manual drone monitoring methods, including visual line-of-sight and officer dispatch, which were labor-intensive and often ineffective. During this incident, 14 officers were deployed to locate the operator, ultimately without success. Recognizing the urgent need for better drone security, Captain Joe McCullough and the University's Police Department sought a real-time drone detection solution.



The Solution

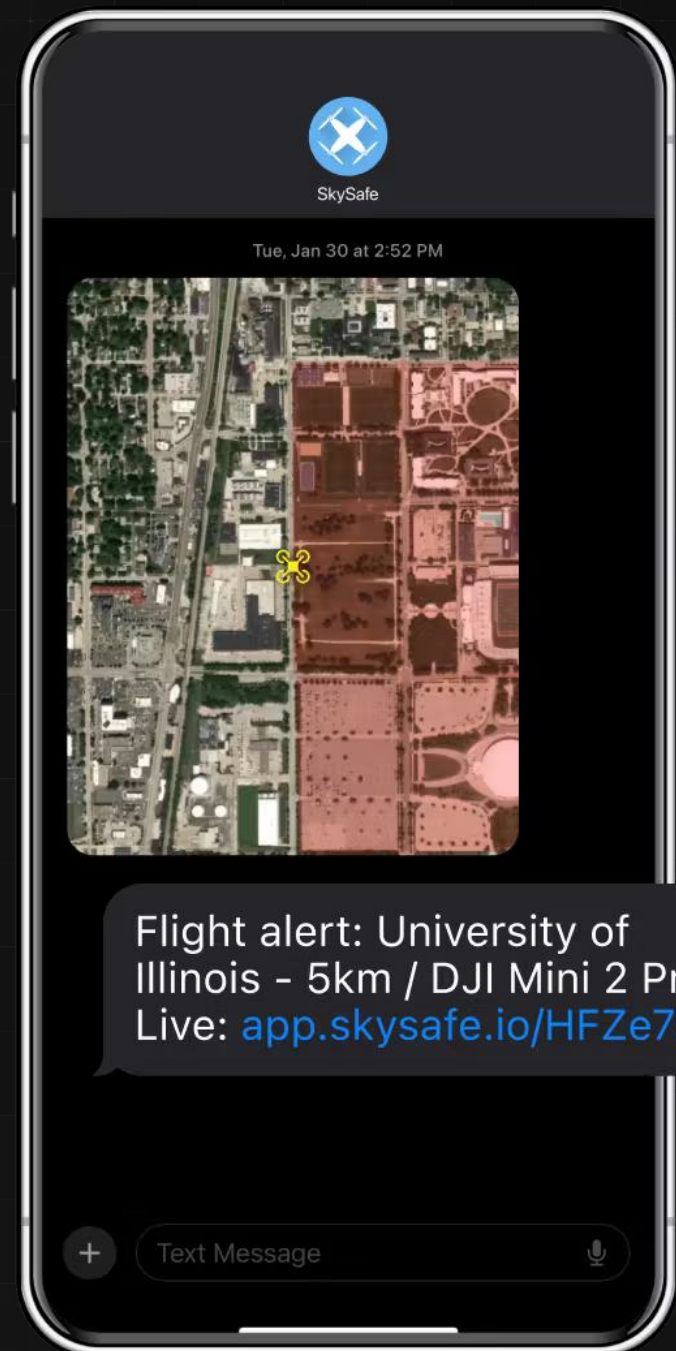
The University of Illinois selected SkySafe for its advanced cloud-based drone detection software and forensic capabilities, ease of use, and quick deployment. In comparison to the other systems the university evaluated, SkySafe also supported a wider range of drone makes and models, making it a more reliable solution. Fully installed and operational within 24 hours—just in time for the first football game of the season SkySafe now enables the university to identify, track, and analyze drones that pose potential security threats.

Case in Action: The Kansas Game

SkySafe's capabilities were tested during an incident at a football game when a drone breached restricted airspace, hovering over the 50-yard line. Using SkySafe, university police tracked the operator on a fourth-floor balcony a half-mile away within minutes.

The operator, a 34-year-old man, was arrested and charged with reckless conduct under Illinois law. Forensic evidence from SkySafe—including detailed flight records and geolocation data—irrefutably proved the drone had entered the stadium's no-fly zone and confirmed the arrested individual was responsible for piloting the drone.

The case was forwarded to the FAA and state attorney's office. This landmark case demonstrated SkySafe's ability to provide legal evidence for prosecutions and set a powerful precedent for enforcing drone safety laws on campus.



"The players, the fans, and our sponsors are our number one priority. We need to make sure they're safe."

Andrew Harmatys

Deputy Chief, University of IL



The Results

100% Success Rate

Achieved near-perfect accuracy in identifying drones and their operators, often within minutes.

Optimized security resources

Reduced officer deployment for drone responses, freeing police resources.

Proactive event security

Enhanced safety at all major campus events, including sporting events, concerts, and graduations.



Key Takeaways

Problem	Solution	Benefits
Large, densely populated campus	SkySafe deployed within 24 hours	100% success in locating drones and pilots
Nearly 500 drone flights on campus per month	Real-time and historical flight data	Arrested reckless drone operator
Inefficient, manual line-of-sight monitoring	Complete coverage across 8-mile campus	Freed up police resources
Stadium sniper positions captured by drone	Detailed forensic evidence to support prosecutions	Full situational awareness of campus airspace