

CHP HELICOPTER HAS TO TAKE EVASIVE ACTION TO AVOID DRONE

MARTINEZ, CA – On December 5, 2015 at approximately 2100 hours, CHP helicopter (H-32) was searching for a reported stolen vehicle along Highway 4 Eastbound in Martinez. H-32 was approximately 700-800 feet above ground level when the crew's attention was drawn to a red light outside the aircraft. The red light was quickly determined to be a light on a drone at the same altitude as the helicopter and was almost directly in front of the helicopter and very close. The pilot of the CHP helicopter quickly took evasive action by veering to his right to avoid an imminent collision. The drone passed to the left of the helicopter at very close range. H-32 then circled back around to the left to reacquire sight of the drone. The crew located the drone and illuminated it with the helicopter's NightSun Spotlight. The crew continued to follow the drone until it landed on Roux Court in Martinez. The CHP Flight Officer kept the drone in sight while he requested assistance from Martinez Police Department and a Martinez Police Officer responded to Roux Court. Martinez PD contacted the drone operator, who had picked up the drone from the street and was carrying the drone in the front yard of a home on Roux Court. The drone operator was identified by Martinez Police for completion of a report that will be forwarded to the appropriate federal and local agencies for review and possible prosecution. The pilot of H-32 was in communication with the Concord Airport Control Tower at the time of the near miss and he notified the tower controller who made required FAA notifications. After the evasive action, H-32 was unable to continue the original police call due to having to track the drone.

As the holidays are quickly approaching, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reportedly expects about one million drones to be given and received as gifts. Everything from very small quadcopters to larger drones capable of high altitudes and beyond line of sight flight. Please remember that these drones, no matter what size, are a distinct danger to manned aircraft of all sizes. Please make sure that these drones are being operated at safe altitudes and in a safe manner. Make sure that children receiving these drones are mature enough and supervised while operating them.

Further drone safety information can be found on the FAA website. http://www.faa.gov/uas/publications/model_aircraft_operators/