CNN launches research for drones in journalism

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Then-senator Hillary Clinton is silhouetted off stage during a debate on January 31, 2008

CNN said Monday it was launching a research project with the Georgia Institute of Technology on how drones could be used for newsgathering by media organizations.

The research will evaluate the technology, personnel and safety needs to

operate effectively and will share its findings with the Federal Aviation Administration, which is considering rules for unmanned aerial vehicles.

"Our hope is that by working cooperatively to share knowledge, we can accelerate the process for CNN and other media organizations to safely integrate this new technology into their coverage plans," said David Vigilante, CNN senior vice president, in a statement.

Georgia tech researcher Mike Heiges said drones "have a number of applications that benefit society, such as search and rescue, disaster response and agricultural mapping and crop assessment," and added that "we're excited to be engaging with CNN to study the newsgathering applications" for drones.

The move comes amid intense interest in drones beyond military and intelligence purposes. US authorities are considering new regulations that could allow civilian drones to share the airspace with manned aircraft.

Unlike other countries, the United States prohibits the use of drones, or unmanned aerial systems for commercial purposes, although the FAA grants rare exceptions for government and law enforcement use.

Earlier this year, 16 major US news organizations joined to accuse the FAA of curtailing freedom of the press by restricting the use of drones for news.

In a brief to the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), the news organizations including The New York Times and The Washington Post argued that drones are a First Amendment—or constitutional rights—concern.

The University of Nebraska in 2011 established a Drone Journalism Lab

to examine how to use such aircraft for newsgathering.

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