Drone Inspections: When Observers Become Participants in Hazards Fatality File

Two Amazon Prime Air drones collide with construction crane in Tolleson, Arizona – crane operator discovers impact mid-task as battery fires break out

What Happened

On October 1, 2025, a construction crane operator was performing roof work at a business park in Tolleson, Arizona when he felt an impact on his crane's boom. As he investigated, a second Amazon Prime Air MK30 drone struck the same crane within minutes. Both drones caught fire on impact and fell into separate parking lots below, sustaining what the FAA described as substantial damage. One person was evaluated for smoke inhalation. The FAA and NTSB opened formal investigations. This was Amazon's third drone operation pause in 2025 – two earlier crashes at its Oregon test site had already triggered investigations and software updates earlier that year.

What Went Wrong

The crane operator did not know drones were operating in his vicinity. The drones did not know his crane was in their path. Investigators examined whether the obstacle-detection systems failed to register the crane's boom or whether the crane was a newly placed structure not yet mapped in the drones' obstacle database. A worker performing a routine task became an unplanned participant in a drone incident because autonomous systems operating in the same airspace had no knowledge of his presence.

The Bottom Line

No coordination, no clearance, and no communication existed between the autonomous flight path and the active worksite below it. As drones are increasingly deployed in industrial and commercial environments, workers beneath them are participants in a hazard they may never see coming. Every worksite operating near drone flight paths must establish awareness protocols and clear stop-work authority for workers on the ground.

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