

HB 2520 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans

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Meeting Dates: 3/14, 3/23

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Updates criminal code violations for persons possessing or controlling unmanned aircraft that interferes with wildfire suppression, law enforcement or emergency response efforts. Imposes penalties for violation of the law.

FIS:

RIS: No revenue impact

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- How drones impact fire suppression efforts
- Examples of drone interference of fire suppression efforts
- Public safety response to proposed measure

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

Unmanned aircraft systems, commonly called drones, have occasionally interfered with fire repression and emergency response efforts in Oregon. The U.S. Forest Service reported two instances of drone interference with wildfire suppression efforts in Oregon in 2016 and 2017. In September 2022, the Oregon Department of Forestry's Southwest Oregon District Office had to temporarily suspend helicopter response to a structural fire due to drone interference.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulates the national airspace, and drones are considered aircraft under federal jurisdiction of the FAA. Federal law (49 U.S.C. § 46320) prohibits knowingly or recklessly interfering with wildfire suppression, law enforcement, or emergency response effort by operation of unmanned aircraft. Current state law does not penalize drone interference of emergency response in Oregon.

House Bill 2520 creates a Class A violation of reckless interference with an aircraft if a person operating a drone recklessly interferes with wildfire suppression, law enforcement or emergency response efforts. The measure also specifies that knowingly or intentionally causes interference with wildfire suppression, law enforcement or emergency response efforts is designated as a Class A misdemeanor.