OTAS LIVE

Supporting Events and Professionals at Every Stage

OTAS Insight, event safety. Article

Who Owns the Sky Above Your Event?

A flyover before an NFL game in Seattle, where pyro was reportedly fired while the last helicopter was overhead, and who holds the stop when aircraft and effects share the same sky



Four people, one carrying a camera, walk across tarmac towards a parked helicopter. OTAS style image, generated from real photography. Not a record of a specific event.

Operational **Tactical** **Strategic**

OTAS Live Ltd · Correct as of 3 November 2026

SUMMARY

Two planned moments shared the same sky. Plan aircraft and effects as one show. Anyone can call hold, and one named person releases it.

4

military helicopters on a flyover before an NFL game in Seattle [1]

1

aircraft still overhead as stadium pyro fired, media reported [4][5]

0

injuries or damage publicly reported as of 3 November [4][5]

ACTION

Before your next event with aircraft, drones or aerial effects, put them all on one running order and name the one person who releases every effect.

Correct as of 3 November 2026.



Four people walk out to a parked helicopter. OTAS style image, generated from real photography. Not a record of a specific event.

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01
Read this first

Sources: 32 public sources opened on 3 November 2026. They are the team and kick off pages for the game, a local news blog, two news reports, an FAA page, UK aviation and explosives law, CAA guidance and exemptions, industry firework guidance, HSE guidance, operator and supplier pages for a planned airborne pyro show, and two US accident reports. This Insight does not say what caused the moment in Seattle, or who was responsible. No official account has been published. It is about what any event team can plan for. We describe venues and teams rather than naming them in the text. Some source links carry names. Each fact carries its source number. Everything without a source number is OTAS guidance for event professionals.

On Monday 2 November, four US Army Black Hawk helicopters flew over an NFL stadium in Seattle just before kick off [1][2]. The same aircraft had practised the route over the city a week earlier [3]. Media reported that pyrotechnics fired from the stadium while the last of the four helicopters was still overhead, and fan videos shared widely online appear to show sparks and smoke very close to it [4][5]. The aircraft held its course and left the area. The game went ahead, and no injuries or damage have been publicly reported [4][5]. As of 3 November, no official account of what happened has been published. This Insight is not about who got it wrong. It is about the gap between two planned moments that use the same sky, and who owns that gap at your event.

> **In short: when aircraft and effects share an event, airspace rules warn other pilots, but they do not stop your own effects meeting your own aircraft. Put both on one running order, fire effects only when the sky is confirmed clear, and agree that anyone can call hold and one named person releases it.**

Five things to take away

01	Airspace rules warn other pilots. They do not deconflict your own show.
02	Put aircraft, pyro, drones and lasers on one running order, and give each its own block of sky.
03	If the aircraft is not on your show clock, fire on the clear call, not on the clock.
04	Hold is the default. Anyone can call it. One named person releases it.
05	Rehearse the effects with the aircraft timings, not apart from them.

ACTION

Read the case, then share the actions with your team.



02

What was reported

One game, one flyover, as reported [1][2][3][4][5]. We describe the venue and teams rather than naming them in the text. Some source links carry names. We do not say what caused it.

Fireworks rise above a hangar stage at night. OTAS style image, generated from real photography. Not a record of a specific event.

The flyover

Where	An NFL stadium in Seattle, before a Monday night game [1][2].
Who	Four US Army UH 60M Black Hawk helicopters from a nearby military base [1][3].
When	Just before the 17:15 local kick off on 2 November, which was 01:15 UK time on 3 November [2][3].
Rehearsal	A military spokesperson told a local news site that low flights a week earlier were practice for the flyover [3].

The pyro

What was reported	Pyrotechnics fired from the stadium while the last helicopter was still overhead. Fan videos appear to show sparks and smoke very close to the aircraft [4][5].
Contact	Not confirmed. One outlet said contact could not be confirmed from the footage [5]. We describe it as "came very close".
Afterwards	The aircraft held course and left. The game went ahead. No injuries or damage publicly reported [4][5].

	As reported
Aircraft	Four military helicopters on a flyover before the game [1]
Effects	Stadium pyro fired with the last aircraft overhead [4][5]
Injuries reported	None publicly reported [4][5]
Official account	None published as of 3 November
Cause	Not known

Table 1. The flyover, as reported. Team pages [1][2], local news [3], news reports [4][5].

ACTION

Ask your team: if an aircraft was late over your event, who would stop the next pyro cue?

03

A contrast: aircraft and pyro planned as one show

Aircraft and fireworks can share a show when they are designed, permitted and rehearsed as one act. We describe the event and companies rather than naming them. Some source links carry names.

Planned, permitted, deconflicted

Where	At a major motorsport weekend, the opening and closing ceremonies put aircraft carrying their own fireworks into a drone light show, with lasers and fireworks in the same script [20][21][22].
Who	In 2024 a UK night aerobatic team flew the display [20][21]. In 2025 an air show agency supplied it [23][24]. Which aircraft flew in 2025 is not public.
One clock	The team's flight lead has said every element runs to timecode. Pyro, drones, media and lasers start on one button, and the aircraft, flown by hand, keeps to the same timecode [21].
Own block of sky	Drones fly in one zone, fireworks in another and the aircraft in a safe zone. From the crowd it looks close, but the elements do not share airspace [21].
The difference	There, the aircraft was part of the show, on the show clock, in its own sky. In Seattle, as reported, stadium pyro fired while a separate flyover was overhead [4][5]. How the Seattle cues were set is not known.

UK rules for pyro on aircraft

- Dropping articles from an aircraft is banned unless permitted, under article 89 of the Air Navigation Order 2016. Pyro on an aircraft whose embers or remnants reach the ground needs a CAA permission under that article for each location and each display, practice included [8].
- A ground observer who can talk to the pilot must be in place, unless only PRT 3 pyros are used. The observer can call Pyros Too Close or Pyros Too Low [8].

- A fall out zone must be set and risk assessed for the higher risk pyro tiers. The event organiser countersigns the risk assessment [8].
- Ground pyro launched under the display area should be protected from falling embers from pyro aircraft [8].
- The usual minimum distance between display aircraft and the crowd line is 230 m. It is more for fast aircraft flying towards the crowd and can be less for some light aircraft, with the Flying Display Director's agreement [8].
- Twilight displays usually have higher minima, and display lines may be marked with lights. Evening twilight ends 30 minutes after sunset. Flying after that is night flying, which the pilot and aircraft must be qualified for [8].
- Pyro carried on an aircraft can also fall under the dangerous goods rules made under article 97 of the Air Navigation Order 2016 [27]. Keeping and handling it falls under explosives law, which is the Explosives Regulations 2014 in England, Wales and Scotland [28] and the Explosives Act (Northern Ireland) 1970 in Northern Ireland [29]. Ask the display team which permissions and licences they hold.

What US investigators found

- A night skydiving display with a firework box fitted to the aircraft. The box exploded and the wing caught fire. The approval did not cover night airborne pyro [25].
- A night aerobatic pyro display about 55 minutes after twilight. Investigators said glare from the lead aircraft's pyro may have impeded the pilot's vision [26].

ACTION

If your event uses airborne pyro, ask the display team for their permission, their ground observer, their fall out zone and their stop calls.



04

Why the gap opens

Each element can be fine on its own plan. The risk lives in the gap between them. OTAS guidance.

A hand lifts a radio from a charging rack. OTAS style image, generated from real photography. Not a record of a specific event.

Fire on clear, not on the clock



The aircraft clear call is the step that a timecode cue skips. OTAS guidance.

Two plans

The flying is planned by aviation people and the effects by the show team. Each can be right on its own and still clash.

Two clocks

Effects are often fired on timecode. An integrated show puts the aircraft on the same clock [21]. A separate flyover runs to its own, and a late or held formation moves the gap.

Launch points

Pyro on roofs, towers and screens fires up into the same sky the aircraft are using.

No single stop

If nobody holds a stop over both, each team waits for the other to call it.

Separate rehearsals

The aircraft rehearse the route. The effects rehearse the cue. Integrated shows build up one element at a time in rehearsal [21].

ACTION

Find every effect in your show that fires on timecode, and check none of them fires while an aircraft could be overhead.

05

Six things to agree before the show

These are the six things to agree first. OTAS guidance unless a source is shown.

Before the show

One running order	Aircraft, drones, lasers and effects on one schedule, with times and heights [8].
Launch points	Every roof, tower and screen launch point marked against the flight path [8].
The owner	One named person who owns the sky at your event, working with the Flying Display Director [8].
The stop	The words for hold, who can call it and who releases it [17].
The clear call	A named aircraft spotter confirms the aircraft is clear, on the show channel.
Notifications	CAA notice for fireworks and lasers, and flying permission [7][10].

ACTION

Give each of the six a named owner today.

06

The hold call

Agree the words before the show. Keep them short and the same every time. An effect already fired cannot be called back, so call hold early. OTAS guidance.

On the show channel

- "All effects, hold, hold, hold. Aircraft overhead."
- "Effects holding." Each firer answers back.

To release

- "Aircraft clear." Only the aircraft spotter says this.
- "Effects, stand by. Effects, go." Only the show caller says this.

When the flying side stops

- Any TERMINATE or STOP call on the flying side [8] means all effects hold at once.
- The Flying Display Director, or someone listening for them, must be on the show channel.
- If the show channel fails, all effects hold until it is back.

ACTION

Write your hold call and test it at the rehearsal with every firer on the channel.

07

What to do at each level

Operational

Know the hold call

No clear call, no fire

See it, call hold

If you fire or cue effects, know your hold call. Never fire near a flyover without the clear call. If you see an aircraft overhead, call hold.

Tactical

One running order

Hold the channel

Release on clear

Run one running order for aircraft and effects. Hold the show channel. Release effects only on the aircraft clear call.

Strategic

Name the owner

Agree the stop

Notify early

Name who owns the sky at your event. Agree the stop in writing with the Flying Display Director and the Display Operator. Make sure notifications are in.

ACTION

Pick one action at your level and do it before your next event with aircraft or aerial effects.

08
What we do not know yet

- Whether any firework touched the aircraft. Contact has not been confirmed [5].
- Why the pyro fired while the aircraft was overhead. No official cause has been given.
- Who ran the effects and who called the show. This is not public.
- Whether any review is under way. None has been announced as of 3 November.

ACTION

We will update this Insight if the military, the teams, the venue or the aviation authorities publish more. We will not speculate on the cause.

09

Coming up: fireworks season and winter events

Bonfire nights, switch ons and winter festivals put fireworks, drones and lasers into the sky across the UK through November and December. If any of them shares the sky with an aircraft, a drone show or a helicopter, the same plan applies [9][10].

ACTION

If you need support planning aircraft, drones or aerial effects into your event, reach out to us to see how we can support you.

Questions

Does an airspace restriction protect our show?

It warns other pilots, and some restrictions cover drones only. Police and air ambulance helicopters can still fly low near your event [31][32]. It does not stop your own effects meeting your own aircraft. If any aircraft is overhead, effects hold [12][15][16].

Who decides whether the flying stops?

In the UK, the Flying Display Director must make sure unsafe displays are stopped [8]. Agree with them that any TERMINATE or STOP call holds all effects, and who releases them.

Can pyro fire during a flyover?

Only if it is planned with the flying. CAA guidance says the scale, heights, positions and timings of effects must be known and briefed, and every affected pilot must agree [8].

Do we need to tell the CAA about fireworks?

The CAA asks for at least 7 days' notice of fireworks and lasers, and fireworks must never be directed at aircraft [9][10].

Can aircraft and pyro share a show safely?

They can when they are one act. Integrated shows run on one clock with each element in its own block of sky [21]. In the UK, pyro on aircraft needs its own permission and a ground observer [8].

Did the pyro touch the helicopter in Seattle?

That has not been confirmed. Reports say pyro came very close, the aircraft held course and no injuries or damage were publicly reported [4][5].

> **If an aircraft was late over your event tonight, who would stop the next pyro cue?**

ACTION

Send us your question and we will add the answer to the next update.

Sources

Web sources opened 3 November 2026 and labelled by source type. Links are for checking only. Listing a source does not mean it endorses OTAS or has worked with OTAS.

1. **Home team video of the flyover before the game by four UH 60M Black Hawk helicopters, Week 8, 2 November 2026** seahawks.com
2. **Home team game day guide for the Week 8 game on Monday 2 November** seahawks.com
3. **Local news blog report on low flying military helicopters, 26 October 2026** westseattleblog.com
4. **UK national newspaper report on a firework and a military helicopter at an NFL game, 3 November 2026** thesun.co.uk
5. **Brazilian national newspaper report on fireworks passing close to a military helicopter during an NFL game, 3 November 2026** oglobo.globo.com
6. **FAA, airspace restrictions over sports stadiums** faa.gov
7. **Air Navigation Order 2016, article 86, flying displays** legislation.gov.uk
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19. **HSE, set clear roles and responsibilities** hse.gov.uk
20. **Display team statement on its night display at a major motorsport weekend, 2024** aerosparx.com
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25. **NTSB, final report WPR16FA183, night aerial pyrotechnic display, 2016** data.ntsb.gov
26. **NTSB, final report ERA19FA010, night aerobatic pyrotechnic display, 2018** data.ntsb.gov
27. **Air Navigation Order 2016, article 97, carriage of dangerous goods** legislation.gov.uk
28. **Explosives Regulations 2014** legislation.gov.uk
29. **Explosives Act (Northern Ireland) 1970** legislation.gov.uk
30. **CAA, airspace notification of air displays and flypasts** caa.co.uk
31. **CAA, ORS4 No.1526, general exemption for police flights from SERA minimum heights, 18 February 2022** caa.co.uk
32. **CAA, ORS4 No.1528, general exemption for air ambulance (HEMS) flights from SERA minimum heights and Visual Flight Rules, 21 February 2022** caa.co.uk

Related OTAS Insights

These are links to other OTAS Insights pieces, not to any OTAS Live product or service.

Stopping the show for the front of stage
Bonfire week: trouble outside your display

Guidance: this Insight summarises UK aviation and explosives law, CAA guidance, industry firework guidance and HSE guidance as published on 3 November 2026. US rules are background only. It is not legal advice. Ask the CAA, your Flying Display Director, your display operator and your safety advisory group what applies to your event.

Interest: OTAS Live Ltd, which publishes OTAS Insights, sells event operations services, handbooks and training related to this topic.

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Images are OTAS style images, generated from real photography. None is a record of a specific event.

ACTION

Check the sources before you quote them, and tell us if any link has changed.

OVER TO YOU

If an aircraft was late over your event tonight, who would stop the next pyro cue?

If you need support planning aircraft, drones or aerial effects into your event, reach out to us to see how we can support you.

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