



DRONE HITS PLANE AT HEATHROW AIRPORT, SAYS PILOT

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Police are investigating a pilot's claim that his plane was struck by a drone as it approached Heathrow airport.

The Metropolitan police said they were contacted on Sunday afternoon by the pilot, who landed the plane safely at Terminal 5. No one has been arrested, officers said.

The flight, BA727, was coming in to London from Geneva, carrying 132 passengers and five crew.

British Airways said the Airbus A320 had been examined by engineers and cleared to take off for its next flight after the incident.

Steve Landells, flight safety specialist at the British Airline Pilots Association (Balpa), said: "Frankly it was only a matter of time before we had a drone strike given the huge numbers being flown around by amateurs who don't understand the risks and the rules."

“It appears that no serious damage was done on this occasion, but what is clear is that while most drones are flown safely, sensibly and within the limits of the law, much more education of drone users and enforcement of the rules is needed to ensure our skies remain safe from this threat.”

Earlier this month, the airline pilots’ union called for an investigation into the likely effects of a drone strike on an aircraft after a report by the UK Airprox Board found that there were 23 near-misses between drones and aircraft in the six months between April and October last year.

They included one on 22 September, when a Boeing 777 that had just taken off reported that a drone narrowly passed the right hand side of the airliner. Investigators concluded that the drone was at the same height and within 25 metres of the jet. A report was made to police but the drone operator was not traced.

Days later, a drone was flown within a few metres of an Airbus A319 landing at Heathrow. The pilot told the UK Airprox Board the drone may have been just 20 feet above and 25 yards to the left when it passed by the aircraft.

The jet was flying at an altitude of 500 feet and was on the final approach when the drone was spotted.

After that incident, Landells had discussed the possibility of engine failure in the event of a drone striking a plane. “You end up with very high-velocity bits of metal going anywhere they like. That could be through fuel tanks, through hydraulic lines and even into the cabin,” he said.

“Losing the engine is not going to cause an aircraft to crash because they are designed to fly with one engine down. But an uncontained engine failure is going to be different every time. That could be very serious indeed.”

“The first thing we want to do is get a drone or at least the critical parts of a drone flying at a windscreen of an aircraft. The indications so far with computer modelling are that you’ll end up with penetration of a windscreen.

“One possibility is that the battery smashes the windscreen and the inside layer of the windscreen shatters and you end up with a lot of glass in the cockpit, probably moving at quite high speed.

“As a pilot, I don’t want to be sitting there when that’s going on.”

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