

News story: Mini drones set to investigate hazardous scenes, announces Defence Secretary

As part of a collaboration between the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office, the Defence Secretary has awarded funding to a range of small-and-medium-sized-enterprises (SMEs) with high-tech concepts to assess potentially hazardous scenes.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

With intensifying threats abroad and the risk of accidents at home, we need the very latest technology to respond to any incident. Competitions like this with our £800 million Innovation Fund will ensure Britain has the latest in cutting-edge technology needed help keep us safe.

The Defence Secretary made the announcement on the back of chairing the quarterly Defence Suppliers Forum last week, which brings together prime contractors, international companies and SMEs.

The Minister for Security Ben Wallace said:

This competition has the potential to see world-class equipment created to support the emergency services when they arrive on the scene of an incident.

Through this funding, the Government is able to collaborate with academics and the private sector to turn these innovative ideas into front-line tools.

Amongst the winners were:

- Snake Eyes, produced by Autonomous Devices Limited in Milton Keynes, which is small enough to be posted through a letter box and relay 3D images of a space and can detect chemical agents.
- Bath-based BMT Defence Services, who have designed an unmanned aerial vehicle with high-tech gas-sensing technology.
- Horiba Mira, based in Nuneaton, which has a robot with its own neural networks which can deploy on decontamination missions.
- Loughborough University, with a pocket-sized drone which can search for chemicals.

The awards, worth over £1.6m, came as part of the Autonomy in Hazardous Scene Assessment competition, aiming to bring designs into being, and eventually

use, in a much shorter space of time than is usually possible.

Through the Defence and Security Accelerator, working with the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl), the competition –to be named Minerva – is set to meet some of the challenges of assessing potentially hazardous scenes.

Peter Stockel, from Dstl, said:

After a fast-paced first phase, we are now delighted to rapidly move the project forward into phase 2 with four highly innovative and technically exciting system propositions to tackle this priority challenge we're for UK Defence and Security.

With continued involvement and demonstration with the user community, we aim to mature this emergent capability over the next 12 months to test the 'art of the possible' and accelerate this into the hands of the prospective users for further operational evaluation, both for MOD and the Home Office.

The first round of the competition saw 18 companies selected for funding. This, the second round, chooses four of those initial winning companies to further develop their concepts.

For more information on AHSA, or Minerva, visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/defence-science-and-technology-laboratory>

[Press release: Getting to the root of tax avoidance](#)

The victory over scheme promoter, Root2, came after they failed to report a mass-marketed tax avoidance scheme, known as Alchemy, to the tax authority.

The scheme aimed to extract profits from owner-managed companies in the form of winnings from betting on the stock market, which the scheme aimed to ensure would be tax free, rather than in the form of taxable employment income.

HMRC brought the case against Root2 under the Disclosure of Tax Avoidance Scheme (DOTAS) rules, which requires promoters to tell HMRC about tax avoidance schemes they design and sell.

The First-tier Tribunal agreed with HMRC that the promoter did not abide by the DOTAS rules.

Penny Ciniewicz, Director General of HMRC's Customer Compliance Group, said:

This is a great victory that sends a clear message to tax avoidance scheme promoters that we will pursue you if you don't play by the rules.

Most tax avoidance schemes don't work. The DOTAS rules ensure that HMRC is notified of schemes so that we can investigate and challenge them.

Designers and promoters of avoidance schemes should come forward now if they haven't already disclosed a scheme to us. We will take action and nobody should think they can get away with not disclosing their avoidance schemes and misleading users about the need to report them.

HMRC will seek to impose a substantial penalty on the promoter for failure to disclose the scheme.

- There is no right of appeal against the Tribunal decision.
- HMRC does not approve tax avoidance schemes. Under DOTAS, promoters must notify HMRC of schemes that contain various hallmarks of tax avoidance. If a scheme has been notified under DOTAS, it does not in any way signify that it has been approved by HMRC.
- HMRC regularly investigates tax avoidance schemes and where it finds rules have been broken, will always take action.
- DOTAS was introduced in 2004 and has been strengthened and broadened since its introduction to keep pace with the ever-changing avoidance landscape.
- DOTAS covers tax avoidance involving: Income Tax, Capital Gains Tax, Corporation Tax, National Insurance contributions, Stamp Duty Land Tax, Inheritance Tax and the Annual Tax on Enveloped Dwellings.
- DOTAS relies on 'hallmarks' to describe what has to be disclosed, not on whether something fits a description of 'avoidance'. HMRC keeps these 'hallmarks' under review and has updated and strengthened them regularly since DOTAS was introduced.
- DOTAS is a self-assessment regime – the promoter must consider the scheme it is developing and disclose it to HMRC if it meets any of the hallmarks.
- How DOTAS works:
 - Promoter discloses scheme to HMRC
 - A Scheme Reference Number (SRN) is issued by HMRC which the promoter must provide to users.
 - Promoters must report details of their users to HMRC on quarterly client lists.
 - Users must report their use of a scheme to HMRC annually.
 - HMRC have various information powers to tackle non-compliance with the regime and promoters face penalties of up to £1m or more if they fail to disclose a scheme.
 - Disclosure under DOTAS is one of the three triggers to enable HMRC

to issue a notice to a taxpayer under the 2014 Accelerated Payments regime.

- DOTAS guidance can be found [here](#)
- Audio version of statement can be found [here](#)
- A picture of Penny Ciniewicz can be found [here](#)

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Press release: Home Office announces package of measures to tackle violent crime

The measures include a new offence of possession of a corrosive substance in public without a good or lawful reason.

It would place the onus on the individual caught in possession to explain why they are carrying it, rather than on the police to prove that it was intended to cause injury.

Those convicted of this offence for a second time would face a mandatory minimum sentence in line with existing knife possession laws.

The proposals are part of the '[Consultation on new legislation on offensive and dangerous weapons](#)', which sets out legislative measures to reduce violent crime; respond to recent rises in police-recorded knife and firearm offences; and the emergence of attacks using acids and corrosive substances.

Home Secretary, Amber Rudd said:

All forms of violent crime are totally unacceptable, which is why we are taking action to restrict access to offensive weapons and crack down on those who carry acids with the intent to do harm.

Acid attacks can devastate lives and leave victims with both emotional and physical scars.

By banning the sale of the most harmful corrosive substances to under 18s and introducing minimum custodial sentences to those who repeatedly carry corrosive substances to cause harm, we are sending a message that the cowards who use these as weapons will not escape the full force of the law.

Other measures on which the government will consult are new offences on the sale of acids and the most harmful corrosive substances to people aged under 18, possession of a corrosive substance in public and restricting online sales of knives so they cannot be delivered to a private residential address and must instead be collected at a place where age ID can be checked.

Other measures included in the consultation include:

- amendments to threatening with a knife or offensive weapon offence to lower the evidential requirement for prosecutors
- allowing police to seize offensive weapons which are already banned in public places from private properties
- prohibiting knives (currently banned on school premises) from other educational institutions such as colleges
- updating the current legislation on the definition of flick knives (to reflect new designs)
- moving two firearms (.50 calibre and certain rapid firing rifles) from the general licensing arrangements to the stricter provisions of section 5 of the Firearms Act 1968

Members of the public are encouraged to submit their opinions on the consultation which will be open until 9 December.

The Home Office will also review the Poisons Act and include sulphuric acid, meaning it would only be available to purchase with a licence above a certain concentration.

Sarah Newton, the Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability, also today announced the launch of the £500,000 [Community Fund for local projects aimed at tackling knife crime](#) and more than £280,000 of successful bids for community work aimed at ending gang violence and exploitation.

Sarah Newton said:

We know these crimes cannot be ended with legislation alone. We need wide-ranging action, including supporting communities to take action. Which is why I'm pleased to announce that we are awarding just over £280,000 funding to projects across the country to help people avoid and escape a life of gangs and violence.

We are also inviting bids for a new £500,000 Community Fund to help grassroots organisations tackle the scourge of knife crime.

[News story: Declaration by the Heads of State and Government of France, Germany and the United Kingdom](#)

Joint statement from Prime Minister Theresa May, Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Emmanuel Macron following President Trump's statement on the US' Iran Strategy.

We, the Leaders of France, Germany and the United Kingdom take note of President Trump's decision not to recertify Iran's compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action to Congress and are concerned by the possible implications.

We stand committed to the JCPoA and its full implementation by all sides. Preserving the JCPoA is in our shared national security interest. The nuclear deal was the culmination of 13 years of diplomacy and was a major step towards ensuring that Iran's nuclear programme is not diverted for military purposes. The JCPoA was unanimously endorsed by the UN Security Council in Resolution 2231. The International Atomic Energy Agency has repeatedly confirmed Iran's compliance with the JCPoA through its long-term verification and monitoring programme. Therefore, we encourage the US Administration and Congress to consider the implications to the security of the US and its allies before taking any steps that might undermine the JCPoA, such as re-imposing sanctions on Iran lifted under the agreement.

At the same time as we work to preserve the JCPoA, we share concerns about Iran's ballistic missile programme and regional activities that also affect our European security interests. We stand ready to take further appropriate measures to address these issues in close cooperation with the US and all relevant partners. We look to Iran to engage in constructive dialogue to stop de-stabilising actions and work towards negotiated solutions.

Our governments are committed to ensuring the JCPoA is maintained. Independent of the JCPOA, we need to make sure that our collective wider concerns are being addressed.

We have asked our Foreign Ministers to consider with the US how to take these issues forward.

[Press release: Foreign Secretary to](#)

visit Moscow

The Foreign Secretary will visit Moscow towards the end of the year following an invitation from Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, as the UK continues its robust engagement with Russia.

Boris Johnson and Sergei Lavrov last met at the UN General Assembly in September, and now is an important time for both countries to be talking about international security. As permanent members of the UN Security Council, shared concerns include reducing the risk from North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes.

The visit will be an important opportunity to cover the Iran nuclear deal and other issues of shared interest, including regional stability in the Middle East, and containing threats to international peace. It will also enable us to discuss security co-operation ahead of next summer's World Cup, on which the UK and Russia are constructively working together.

The UK has deep differences with Russia, in particular over Syria and Ukraine, including the Russian Government's illegal annexation of Crimea. That's why we cannot return to 'business as usual' but it is vital to continue dialogue on matters of UK national interest.

The visit comes as part of the UK's sustained, robust engagement with the Russian government. The Prime Minister also made it clear to President Putin at the G20 that it is in both sides' interests to continue these channels of communication.

The Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

Russia is a fellow permanent member of the UN Security Council and there are global security issues we need to discuss from Iran to North Korea. Of course we will continue to challenge Russia's approach where we disagree, whether that is Russia's actions in Syria or its aggression towards Ukraine. My visit will provide an opportunity to talk about these issues and more, face-to-face.

Our relationship with Russia is not straightforward. That is all the more reason to be talking to Russia – to manage our differences and co-operate where possible for the security of both our nations and the international community.

I am looking forward to visiting Moscow, to engaging with the Russian government and a wider range of Russian people including civil society and the all important next generation.