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## Alum's firm managing drone test range

Center for Homeland Defense and Security

Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California

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# Alum's firm managing drone test range

 [chds.us/c/item/1397](https://chds.us/c/item/1397)



Chris Kluckhuhn at Avwatch

A company founded by Center for Homeland Defense and Security master's degree graduate Chris Kluckhuhn is managing a test site in Massachusetts where government agencies and entrepreneurs are unlocking the potential of Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS).

[Avwatch](#) was awarded a contract this spring to help the state of Massachusetts manage UAS activities throughout the state and the state and federal waters off its coast. Joint Base Cape Cod, a 22,000-acre installation encompassing units from the Army and Air National Guards, U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Air Force, serves as the headquarters for Massachusetts test site activities. In addition to the expansive area dedicated to testing on land, the location is ideal for launching and recovering UAS focused on offshore missions such as marine mammal protection and fisheries management.

The company will provide services to facilitate testing unmanned aerial vehicles such as situational awareness, frequency clearances, air to ground broadband communication and just about any service or equipment the experiments need. UAS and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, or UAVs have become a major focal point of the homeland security enterprise for their promise to cover expansive geographic areas at low cost.

"We're supporting everybody that has interest in learning and testing on the value of UAVs," Kluckhuhn said.

MassDevelopment, the state's economic development agency, is interested in the burgeoning technology as a source of job growth. The agency estimates the industry will generate 70,000 jobs by 2017 and 100,000 by 2025. Reflecting those estimates, Avwatch was recently listed as one of the fastest growing companies in Massachusetts by the Boston Business Journal.

At Joint Base Cape Cod, private industry and government agencies such as the Coast Guard and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) are testing capabilities in a range of applications. UAVs hold great potential for the homeland security enterprise, such as monitoring foreign ships sailing into U.S. waters, and for a host of other professions. Fisheries agencies and environmental groups are examining the same kind of surveillance ease the aerial systems bring to public safety agencies for overseeing catch limits as well as tracking marine mammals.

The test range in Massachusetts partners with Griffis International Airport in Rome, N.Y., which is one of six regional UAV testing sites established by the Federal Aviation Administration ([https://www.faa.gov/uas/legislative\\_programs/test\\_sites/](https://www.faa.gov/uas/legislative_programs/test_sites/)).

Avwatch, Kluckhuhn's company, specializes in providing real-time aerial data and communications. It has been providing UAS support to the Department of Defense since 2008.

"Over the years our network has provided us insights into where the technology is going and how to address avoiding other aircraft by providing situational awareness, long range communications and handing off control from one user to another while operating over a larger network beyond the line of sight," he said.

He formed the company after his CHDS studies and has worked on a series of high-profile events since. During the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill off the coast of Louisiana the company was enlisted to provide aerial surveillance and situational awareness to BP, the Coast Guard and to local and state authorities working on land. More recently Avwatch flew aerial surveillance at the 2015 Boston Marathon in partnership with the National Guard, State Police and local law enforcement agencies.

In June Avwatch hired Jose Vazquez, a 1989 Naval Postgraduate School alumnus in applied science, as company president. Vazquez is a 20-year U.S. Navy veteran and most recently worked as Director of First Responder Technology at the Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate.

Avwatch currently has about a dozen active contracts providing situational awareness for projects such as VIP protections, monitoring wildlife and providing situational awareness around the U.S. southern border.

Kluckhuhn formed the company with a goal of supporting typically constrained government homeland security agencies.

"From CHDS I learned what my bureaucratic constraints were at the Coast Guard," he said. "I realized most agencies needed an agile organization to rapidly test prototypes and decide what system is best for their needs rather than trying to do that exploratory work under their internal constraints. "

The [CHDS curriculum](#) also provided a head start on utilizing leading edge technologies. "I learned about the technology we're employing while it was in its infancy while I was at CHDS," he said. "That helped advance the company to the point it is today."

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