PSNI AIR SUPPORT
UNIT

GUIDANCE FOR DEALING WITH INCIDENTS OF LASER ATTACKS ON AIRCRAFT
IMPLICATIONS OF AN AIRCRAFT BEING LASERED

• 1. Can cause temporary blindness and distraction to the pilot which includes glaring, flash blindness & after images, thereby endangering both the air crew and members of the public.

• 2. It prevents ASU from carrying out their tasks, potentially putting life at risk.

• 3. Incidents are immediately reported to Air Traffic Control and may result in disruption to the flight paths of commercial aircraft.

• 4. Post incident, pilots may require a medical check which would prevent further flying until cleared to do so, negatively impacting on resourcing levels and ability to meet demand.
THE LASER MISUSE (VEHICLES) ACT 2018

SPECIFIC OFFENCE

Shining or Directing a Laser Beam Towards a Vehicle

Section 1 - A person if commits an offence if –
(a) the person shines or directs a laser beam towards a vehicle which is moving or ready to move, and
(b) the laser beam dazzles or distracts, or is likely to dazzle or distract, a person with control of the vehicle.
The definition of ‘vehicle’ in the Act means any vehicle used for travel by land, water or air. It therefore includes not just planes, trains, ships and cars, but also bicycles, mobility scooters, etc.

In Northern Ireland the term ‘vehicle’ will initially apply to aircraft, vessels, hovercraft and submarines only. Aviation and maritime matters are reserved to Westminster but a legislative consent motion will be required from the Northern Ireland Assembly for commencement of the provisions relating to all other vehicle types.

In other words, this legislation does not apply to motor vehicles in Northern Ireland at present.
LEGISLATION

THE LASER MISUSE (VEHICLES) ACT 2018

PUNISHMENT

• On summary conviction in Northern Ireland, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding SIX MONTHS, to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum or to both.

• On conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding FIVE YEARS, to a fine or to both.
LEGISLATION

THE AIR NAVIGATION ORDER 2016

SPECIFIC OFFENCES

Article 240 - Endangering the Safety of an Aircraft

A person must not recklessly or negligently act in a manner likely to endanger an aircraft, or any person in an aircraft.

PUNISHMENT

• Fine (£5,000 at Magistrates’ Court, Unlimited at Crown Court)
• Imprisonment ≤ 5 years at Crown Court
SPECIFIC OFFENCES - continued

Article 225 - Lights Which Dazzle or Distract

A person must not in the United Kingdom direct or shine any light at any aircraft in flight so as to dazzle or distract the pilot of the aircraft.

PUNISHMENT

Fine ≤ £2,500
POLICE POWERS

POWER OF ARREST-
Article 26 PACE

POWER OF SEARCH-
PACE – Articles 3-5 (before arrest), Article 34 (after arrest)

POWER OF ENTRY-
PACE – Article 19* (*Not for Article 225 Air Navigation Order - Lights Which Dazzle or Distract)

POWER OF SEIZURE-
PACE - Article 21
WHAT ACTION SHOULD I TAKE?

1. A safe, prompt investigation, be aware of “come-on” situations.

2. If a suspect is identified by the air observer, speak to the suspect, if necessary arrest and search for the offending item.

3. Seize the laser for evidence and possible forensic examination.


5. If a LASER has been used - the suspect should ONLY be reported/charged with ‘shining or directing a laser beam towards a vehicle’ (Laser Misuse (Vehicles) Act). NB - No need to prove aircraft was endangered.

6. If a TORCH has been used, the suspect should be reported/charged in relation to Article 240 & 225 (Air Navigation Order) offences. (There IS a need to prove aircraft was endangered).
WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT FROM THE AIR SUPPORT UNIT?

1. Statement(s) will be provided.

2. Footage of the incident will be provided if available.

3. Pilot & Officers from the ASU will attend court to provide evidence if required.

4. Advice and guidance to assist the investigation at the time of incident and afterwards, if required.