

Atlanta Falcons to use drones to clean stadium after games

The **Atlanta Falcons**' home, Mercedes-Benz Stadium, is believed to be the first professional sports venue to implement drones to clean the stadium, but they're not the only ones using new technology.

Beginning after the team's Oct. 11 game against the **Carolina Panthers**, the 71,000-seat stadium, which has not hosted fans for the first two home games because of the coronavirus pandemic, will welcome back a limited capacity. (The stadium hosted about 500 family members, friends and associates for a test run during Sunday's Bears-Falcons game.)

Mercedes-Benz Stadium partnered with Charlotte-based Lucid Drone Technologies for D1 disinfecting drones to sanitize areas. The drones use electrostatic spraying nozzles for even distribution of medical-grade disinfecting chemicals that include an inhibitor that prevents bacteria and virus from adhering to surfaces without leaving a residue. The nontoxic hypochlorous acid solution is in compliance with Environmental Protection Agency standards, according to the company.

Two drones will be used to clean the stadium, and the team will have a third as a backup.

"The process of welcoming fans back involves actively listening and responding to their concerns and we understand that proper cleaning and sanitization protocols are top of mind in the current environment," said Dietmar Exler, COO of AMB Sports and Entertainment. "We have worked tirelessly to provide a safe environment for not only our associates, players and staff, but especially our fans."

The Panthers will allow 5,240 fans into Bank of America Stadium for Sunday's game against the **Arizona Cardinals**, and while Carolina doesn't have drones, it does have a modern cleaning plan.

The **Carolina Panthers** appear to be the first NFL team to debut what team president Tom Glick called a "germ-zapping robot" that has been used in locker rooms, office space and other parts of the building.

The Xenex LightStrike Robot is being billed as the world's only proven coronavirus killing Xenon UV-Ray Robot. The robot, according to the company, is 99.9% effective at killing the coronavirus germ within two minutes.

"What you put in an operating room at a hospital, we want to make sure we had for our locker room and weight room and our suites and restroom," Glick said. "We've been using them all summer and we're using them in advance and after the game on Sunday."

The drone technology will be used for post-event disinfecting of the stadium's seating bowl, handrails and glass partitions. The drones allow for a 95% reduction of the time needed to clean the seating bowl.

"This stadium is incredibly large, and as we begin to slowly welcome fans back, these drones allow us to maximize the time between games and private events to thoroughly sanitize," said Jackie Poulakos, manager of building operations. "We are always challenged by leadership to continually innovate and this new technology is the ideal solution to effectively disinfect and sanitize our stadium in an efficient manner."

The Falcons (0-3) have six more home games this season, including the NFC South opener against the Panthers.

