

FAA gets tough on drones with mandatory UAV registration

Chris Davies - Dec 14, 2015

Drone pilots in the US have until February 19, 2016 to register their aircraft, with the FAA announcing mandatory licensing with fines or even prison time for those who refuse. The database, which opened its digital doors today, is the Federal Aviation Administration's response to the huge upswing in UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle) ownership, with increasingly capable drones able to travel long distances, carry payloads, and potentially interfere with security forces or commercial aviation.

It means, U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx said in a statement today, that drone pilots need to recognize that there are obligations when you take to the skies.

"Make no mistake: unmanned aircraft enthusiast are aviators, and with that title comes a great deal of responsibility," Foxx said. "Registration gives us an opportunity to work with these users to operate their unmanned aircraft safely."

Under the new rules, any drone or unmanned aircraft weighing more than 0.55 pounds (250 grams) but less than 55 pounds (approximately 25 kilograms) must be registered. That weight bracket includes anything the drone might be carrying, such as a camera.

Any UAV owner who has flown a drone as a "model aircraft" before December 21, 2015, must now register on the FAA's new website. That has to be completed before February 19, 2016. Those buying a new drone after December 21st, however, must register prior to their first flight outdoors.

For those concerned about privacy, the registration process itself is fairly low-key. Name, address, and email address are required, and registering pilots must be over 13 years of age. The system generates a unique identification number which covers every drone operated by the pilot, assuming they're used for hobby and recreational use, and which must be displayed on the drone. The pilot must carry proof of registration too, though that can be kept electronically on your phone or tablet. Each registration lasts for three years, at which point it has to be renewed.

Registration itself is going to cost \$5, though the FAA is waiving fees until January 20, 2016, in the hope of encouraging drone owners to sign up promptly. It's worth noting that you'll still need a credit card even in that thirty-day period, since the FAA uses it as an authentication system; a refund will follow on afterwards.

Toy drones might be commonplace, but the potential sanctions for those operating an unregistered UAV are stiff. The FAA has the right to apply civil penalties that could reach as high as \$27,500, and the door is open to criminal sanctions too.

Those could hit fines of up to \$250,000 and even include up to three years of prison time. For businesses wanting to use a drone for commercial purposes, such as making small deliveries or doing surveillance or mapping, the existing paper-based process still applies. However, the FAA says that eventually that too will be rolled into the electronic system, likely in the spring of next year



Here are a few examples of FAA enforcement actions

QUARTERLY ENFORCEMENT REPORT
01/01/15 - 03/31/15

CASE NUMBER	NAME	ENTITY TYPE	DATE KNOWN	ACTION	SANCTION AMOUNT	SANCTION	CASE TYPE	CLOSED DATE
2014CE010019	RETTERATH AG FORCE+B32	AGRI OPR	06/10/14	CERTIFICATE SUSPENSION		INDEFINITE DURATION	OTHER	01/02/15
2013GL210010	KINERT AVIATION INC	A/C or COMM OPER	08/21/13	ORD ASSESS CIVIL PENALTY	250	DOLLARS	MAINTENANCE	01/05/15
2013SO350033	AIR GATO ENTERPRISES INC	A/C or COMM OPER	04/08/13	ORD ASSESS CIVIL PENALTY	5000	DOLLARS	MAINTENANCE	01/06/15
2013SO950319	CONTINENTAL JET CHARTER LLP	A/C or COMM OPER	08/28/13	ORD ASSESS CIVIL PENALTY	2000	DOLLARS	DRUG TESTING	01/06/15
2014EA650003	OXFORD AVIATION INC	APPROVD REPAIR STA	02/11/14	CERTIFICATE REVOCATION		REVOCATION	MAINTENANCE	01/06/15
2014GL190010	CENTRAL ILLINOIS AIR CORPORATION	APPROVD REPAIR STA	06/24/14	ORD ASSESS CIVIL PENALTY	4000	DOLLARS	RECORDS/RPTS	01/06/15
2011SO130031	KNH AVIATION SERVICES INC	APPROVD REPAIR STA	06/03/11	ORD ASSESS CIVIL PENALTY	10000	DOLLARS	MAINTENANCE	01/06/15
2013WP910256	TELEDYNE TECHNOLOGIES INC	APPROVD REPAIR STA	08/13/13	ORD ASSESS CIVIL PENALTY	49000	DOLLARS	DRUG TESTING	01/07/15
2014WP910139	GLOBAL EXEC AVIATION	A/C or COMM OPER	05/19/14	ORD ASSESS CIVIL PENALTY	15000	DOLLARS	DRUG TESTING	01/07/15
2014SO110049	PRECISION AVIONICS SPECIALISTS INC	APPROVD REPAIR STA	03/09/14	ORD ASSESS CIVIL PENALTY	500	DOLLARS	MAINTENANCE	01/12/15
2014SW030006	MAYEUX'S FLYING SERVICE LLC	A/C or COMM OPER	12/05/13	ORD ASSESS CIVIL PENALTY	3300	DOLLARS	FLT OPNS	01/13/15
2014WP910159	JACK HARTER HELICOPTERS INC	A/C or COMM OPER	06/04/14	ORD ASSESS CIVIL PENALTY	12612	DOLLARS	DRUG TESTING	01/13/15
2011SO190078	PAZ AVIATION INC	APPROVD REPAIR STA	01/13/11	ORD ASSESS CIVIL PENALTY	5000	DOLLARS	MAINTENANCE	01/13/15

