

FAA Mandates Registration for Recreational Drones

Approximately half a million drones or “Unmanned Aircraft Systems” were given as gifts during the 2015 holiday season. Just before Christmas, the Federal Aviation Administration announced its “interim final rule” regarding electronic drone registration. The regulations establish a streamlined, electronic registration system meant to enhance safety and education in the drone community.

If you weren’t sure whether you SHOULD register your drone, the FAA’s announcement was blunt — “[i]f you own a drone, you must register it . . . and you are subject to civil and criminal penalties if you do not register.”

The registration requirement does not apply to all drones and it does not apply to all operators. Here are the “who, what, when, where, why, and how” of the new registration rules.

Who: The new rules focus on owners of recreational drones (or “model aircraft” as the rule refers to them). The registered owner must be a person 13 years of age or older. If the owner is younger than 13, someone at least 13 years must register the drone. The registered owner must also be a U.S. citizen or lawfully-admitted resident. A “model aircraft” is defined as “an unmanned aircraft that is (1) capable of sustained flight in the atmosphere; (2) flown within visual line of sight of the person operating the aircraft; and (3) flown for hobby or recreational purposes.”

What: The new rules are for drones classified as “model aircraft” that are flown outdoors and weigh more than 0.55 lbs. and less than 55 lbs. (Yes, “outdoors” includes your backyard.) If you do not know the weight of your drone, you can use a postal scale or food scale. When you weigh your drone, make sure that it is outfitted with all equipment that will be attached to the aircraft at the time of takeoff (camera, battery, etc.). Do not rely simply on the weight listed on the package.

When: If you received a new drone after Dec. 21, 2015 and it meets the requirements, you must register before you fly outside. If you operated your recreational drone before December 21, 2015, you have until February 19, 2016 to register.

Where: You can register at “<http://www.faa.gov/uas/registration/>”. Non-qualifying drones must continue to use the paper method of registration.

Why: The FAA wants a means to locate the owner of a drone in the event of an accident or if the drone is lost or stolen. And, registration will aid the FAA in its drone-education programs. Many drone pilots are unaware that, when they fly their drones outdoors, they are operating in the national airspace system. The lack of understanding regarding the airspace system and a perceived lack of safety culture have been blamed for many of the close encounters between drones and other aircraft. The new registration system is designed, in part, to allow the FAA direct access to drone owners for educational outreach and for legal enforcement.

How/How Much: Once the drone owner logs onto the system, he/she will be required to set up an account and provide basic information such as his/her name, address, e-mail address and

“other information as required.” The owner must pay a \$5.00 fee to register the owner’s entire fleet of drones. Upon completion of the process, the FAA will deliver a Certificate of Registration by e-mail and the FAA will assign a registration number to the owner. The owner must mark his/her drones with the registration number and must carry a copy of the Certificate of Registration (in either electronic or paper form) **at all times** while operating the drone.

If you are considering about “forgetting” to register, you might consider the penalties. If one fails to register his/her drone, the FAA may assess significant civil and criminal penalties, which, depending on the situation, could include fines and/or imprisonment. The registration system is designed to be easy and it is not that difficult. So, go register, fly safely and have fun.