

# Drone users face safety test under new UK regulations

Ministers propose measures to prevent potential collisions with passenger jets and increase in fines for violating 'no-fly zones'



Casual users may have to register their drones and take a test similar to the driving theory test. Photograph: Andrew Matthews/PA

**Nadia Khomami**

Wednesday 21 December 2016 09.17 GMT

Anyone who buys a drone in the UK may have to register it and take a safety test under new measures to prevent potential collisions with passenger jets.

Measures proposed by ministers also include criminal liability for anyone who flies a drone in “no-fly zones” surrounding airports and prisons, and an increase in fines, which currently cannot exceed £2,500.

Ministers also want to make drones electronically identifiable on the ground, in order to make it easier for police to track devices to their owners.

The government wants the drone industry - estimated to be worth £102bn by 2025 - to grow safely and with public consent.

While there are already strict rules for drone users, the unmanned aerial vehicles, which can operate under remote control or autonomously by onboard computers, have become increasingly widespread, and are cheaply available in high street shops and online.

Their popularity has led to a spike in the number of near-misses with passenger jets, with aviation chiefs receiving reports of 56 near-miss incidents in the 10 months to October - up from 29 in all of the previous year and six in 2014.

Fears that drones could cause a major air accident were reignited after two near-misses this month. In the first incident, investigators said a drone about 2ft (60cm) wide had just missed the right wing of a Boeing 767 coming in to land at Manchester airport. In the second, a drone the size of a football came within 20 metres of an Airbus A320 as it circled above London on its way to Heathrow.

The aviation minister, Lord Ahmad, said drones had enormous economic potential and were already being used by emergency services, transport and energy providers and conservation groups to improve services, respond to incidents and save lives.

He added, however, that while the vast majority of drone users were law-abiding and had good intentions, "some operators are not aware of the rules or choose to break them, putting public safety, privacy and security at risk".

Current regulations by the Civil Aviation Authority require drones to be kept in line of sight and flown no higher than 120 metres. They also forbid any drone with a camera from flying within 50 metres of buildings, vehicles, people or over large crowds, and anyone using a drone for commercial purposes has to register it with the CAA. But the new plans would mean casual users would also have to register their drones - if they weigh over 250g - and take a test similar to the driving theory test.

Tim Johnson, the policy director at the CAA, said: "Our priority is the safe operation of drones and we cannot underestimate the importance of understanding how to use drones safely and responsibly. Drones have significant potential to drive benefits across a range of sectors from farming to emergency response, healthcare to logistics. We encourage anyone with an interest in this area to respond to the government's consultation."

Steve Landells, flight safety specialist at the British Airline Pilots Association (Balpa), said: "We need to understand more about the threat drones pose, and Balpa is working with the government and regulators to ensure this is an issue that's being taken seriously in the corridors of power.

"Drones are here to stay and, as this technology develops and becomes more important in the aviation world, it is vital they are integrated into the airspace in a safe and sensible manner.

"Pilots are concerned about the growing number of near-misses and the potential for catastrophe should a collision occur.

“At the same time, Balpa believes drone operators, especially hobbyists, need to be made aware of the potential dangers of irresponsible flying. We support the Department for Transport in pressing for better education, compulsory registration and high-profile prosecution for careless operators.”

More news

## Topics

Drones (non-military)

Reuse this content