

Press Release – FAA: Wildfires and Drones Don't Mix

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For Immediate Release

July 29, 2015

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WASHINGTON – Responding to recent incidents in which unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), also known as “drones,” interfered with manned aircraft involved in wildland firefighting operations, the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is supporting the U.S. Department of the Interior and U.S. Forest Service in their simple message to drone operators: If you fly; we can’t.

“Flying a drone near aerial firefighting aircraft doesn’t just pose a hazard to the pilots,” said U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx. “When aircraft are grounded because an unmanned aircraft is in the vicinity, lives are put at greater risk.”

Often a temporary flight restriction (TFR) is put in place around wildfires to protect firefighting aircraft. No one other than the agencies involved in the firefighting effort can fly any manned or unmanned aircraft in such a TFR. Anyone who violates a TFR and endangers the safety of manned aircraft could be subject to civil and/or criminal penalties. Even if there is no TFR, operating a UAS could still pose a hazard to firefighting aircraft and would violate Federal Aviation Regulations.

“The FAA’s top priority is safety. If you endanger manned aircraft or people on the ground with an unmanned aircraft, you could be liable for a fine ranging from \$1,000 to a maximum of \$25,000,” said FAA Administrator Michael Huerta. “Know the rules before you fly. If you don’t, serious penalties could be coming your way for jeopardizing these important missions.”

Since so many people operate unmanned aircraft with little or no aviation experience, the FAA is promoting voluntary compliance and working to educate UAS operators about how they can operate safely under current regulations and laws. The agency has partnered with industry and the modeling community in a public outreach campaign called “Know Before You Fly.”

The campaign [recently reminded](#) UAS users to respect wildfire operations. The National Interagency Fire Center also posted a [video](#) warning for users to, “Be Smart. Be Safe. Stay Away.”

Additionally, the FAA provided guidance to law enforcement agencies because they are often in the best position to deter, detect, immediately investigate, and, as appropriate, pursue enforcement actions to stop unauthorized or unsafe unmanned aircraft operations.

So remember this simple message around wildfires: If you fly, they can't. Keep your drone on the ground and let firefighters and aircraft do their jobs. And, if you see someone flying a drone near a wildfire, report it immediately to local law enforcement and the nearest FAA Flight Standards District Office with as much information as possible. You can find the closest FAA office at: http://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/field_offices/fsdo/.