

# **Philadelphia Flight Standards District Office (FSDO)**

## **LOW FLYING AIRCRAFT**

This document was prepared by the Eastern Region FAA Team to provide guidance on low flying aircraft. If outside the Philadelphia FSDO area, please contact the Flight Standards Office that has jurisdiction over that area.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is the government agency responsible for aviation safety. We welcome information from citizens that will enable us to take corrective measures including legal enforcement action against individuals violating Federal Aviation Regulations (FAR). It is FAA policy to investigate citizen complaints of low-flying aircraft operated in violation of the FAR that might endanger persons or property. Remember that the FAA is a safety organization with legal enforcement responsibilities.

We will need facts before we conduct an investigation. To save time, please have this information ready when you call. And keep your notes: we may request a written statement. Here is the type of information we need:

## **AIRCRAFT IDENTIFYING AIDS**

- Type of aircraft? Fixed-wing airplane, helicopter, glider, balloon, airship, ultralight vehicle, seaplane, or unmanned aircraft (drone)?
- Was it military or civilian?
- Was it a high-wing or low-wing type aircraft, or a quadcopter, octocopter, or fixed wing unmanned aircraft (drone)?
- What color was it? Did it have more than one color?
- Did it have distinct markings, designs, or logos?
- Was it a jet-powered aircraft, piston-powered aircraft, or electric?
- Did it have propellers?
- How many engines or propellers did it have?
- How large was the aircraft?
- If it was a helicopter, how many main rotors?
- Was there anything unusual about the aircraft?
- Did the aircraft have lighting, how many lights did it have and what color they were.

## **LOW-FLYING AIRCRAFT REPORTING CHECKLIST**

- What happened? Describe in detail.
- What was your estimate of the aircraft's altitude or height? How did you determine this?
- Where did it happen? Describe the location in detail.
- When did it happen? Date and time.
- What were the weather conditions?
- How many times did the aircraft appear to be low? Did it continue to fly low in the area?
- What was the direction of the flight?
- Who did it? List the name of the pilot or aircraft owner if known.
- What was the aircraft's registration number? (located on body or under wing) List any partial numbers if complete number is unknown
- Other witnesses? List all who witnessed the event. List names, phone numbers & addresses if known.
- Did you feel threatened? If so, contact local law enforcement immediately.
- Were the local police notified? Did police officer witness the alleged incident? Provide the police department and phone number of any officer involved.
- Was more than one aircraft involved? If so, provide details for each aircraft.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

- Did you take any photographs or video of the event?
- Were you able to zoom in on the aircraft's registration number, if it had one, to help identify the aircraft?
- Did you try to photograph or video the aircraft against a background that would show height such as against a tall building, tower, hill, mountain, or other such object to aid in determining the altitude?
- If an object is included in the photograph or video to help show the aircraft's height, do you know the aircraft's height?

**IT IS IMPORTANT TO KEEP POSITIVE CONTROL OF ANY TYPE  
OF RECORDING MEDIA USED TO RECORD THE INCIDENT.**

## **THE RULE for Manned Aircraft**

### **Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations**

#### **Section 91.119, Minimum safe altitudes, prohibits low flying except under the following conditions:**

General. Except when necessary for takeoff or landing, no person may operate an aircraft below the following altitudes: (a) Anywhere. An altitude allowing, if a power unit fails, an emergency landing without undue hazard to persons or property on the surface. (b) Over congested areas. Over any congested area of a city, town, or settlement, or over any open-air assembly of persons, an altitude of 1,000 feet above the highest obstacle within a horizontal radius of 2,000 feet of the aircraft. (c) Over other than congested areas. An altitude of 500 feet above the surface, except over open water or sparsely populated areas. In those cases, the aircraft may not be operated closer than 500 feet to any person, vessel, vehicle, or structure. (d) Helicopters. Helicopters may be operated at less than the minimums prescribed in paragraph (b) or (c) of this section if the operation is conducted without hazard to persons or property on the surface. In addition, each person operating a helicopter shall comply with any routes or altitudes specifically prescribed for helicopters by the Administrator."

## **THE RULE for Unmanned Aircraft**

### **Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations**

#### **Section 107.51, Operating Limitations for Small Unmanned Aircraft:**

A remote pilot in command and the person manipulating the flight controls of the small unmanned aircraft system must comply with all of the following operating limitations when operating a small unmanned aircraft system, The altitude of the small unmanned aircraft cannot be higher than 400 feet above ground level, unless the small unmanned aircraft: Is flown within a 400-foot radius of a structure; and Does not fly higher than 400 feet above the structure's immediate uppermost limit. The minimum flight visibility, as observed from the location of the control station must be no less than 3 statute miles. For purposes of this section, flight visibility means the average slant distance from the control station at which prominent unlighted objects may be seen and identified by day and prominent lighted objects may be seen and identified by night. The minimum distance of the small unmanned aircraft from clouds must be no less than: (1) 500 feet below the cloud; and (2) 2,000 feet horizontally from the cloud.

## **DO YOUR PART: REPORT LOW-FLYING AIRCRAFT**

**Your help is needed in preventing unauthorized low-flying aircraft.**

**Do your part, report such flying to the FAA.**

Once we have the appropriate facts, an FAA Aviation Safety Inspector from the Philadelphia Flight Standards District Office will attempt to identify the manned aircraft operator. We can do this in several ways. For example, we can check aircraft flight records with our air traffic control information and/or sightings from other observers, such as local law enforcement officers. We may need to trace and contact the registered aircraft owner, since the owner and operator may be two different people.

If the aircraft is unmanned, the evidence needs to be from eyewitness observations, because unmanned aircraft cannot be reliably tracked at this time.

### **U.S Department of Transportation**

Federal Aviation Administration

Philadelphia Flight Standards District Office

2 International Plaza-Suite 110

Philadelphia, PA 19113

For further guidance or to file a complaint with the Philadelphia FSDO,  
please call (610) 595-2440

To report issues related to Aviation Safety or FAA personnel and facilities:

[https://www.faa.gov/about/office\\_org/headquarters\\_offices/aae/programs\\_services/faa\\_hotlines/](https://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/aae/programs_services/faa_hotlines/) <https://hotline.faa.gov/>