

DRONES IN PUBLIC SAFETY: A GUIDE TO STARTING OPERATIONS

Law enforcement and public safety agencies are realizing the potential of using drones to enhance their missions. Some agencies choose to hire drone pilots certified by the Federal Aviation Administration to conduct operations for them. But if your agency wants to conduct its own drone operations or create a program with multiple pilots and drones, this primer will help get you started.

Your agency has two options to operate drones:

- **Designate** individual members of your team to earn FAA drone pilot certificates and fly under the rules for small unmanned aircraft systems (sUAS).
- **Receive** an FAA certificate of authorization (COA) to function as a “public aircraft operator” that can self-certify its drone pilots and drones.

The sUAS Rule

Most drone pilots operate under the sUAS rule, which is commonly known as Part 107 after the designated section of the federal code. Part 107 defines requirements for drone pilots and drones, and it sets operational limits for drone usage.

Pilot certification and responsibilities

- Members of your team may choose to take the FAA Airman Knowledge Test to become drone pilots. Those who pass the test receive remote pilot airman certificates, giving them the right to operate qualified sUAS.

Operational limitations

- Drones flown by remote pilots must weigh less than 55 lbs. This limitation includes any attached equipment or cargo, such as emergency aid in search-and-rescue operations.
- Remote pilots cannot fly their drones more than 400 feet above ground level (or more than 400 feet above the top of structures like communications towers).

- Remote pilots must receive FAA authorization to fly in airspace near airports. They may use an automated system called Low Altitude Authorization and Notification Capability (LAANC).
- Other limitations include not flying over people or at night. Your agency may apply for waivers to certain rules. To request a waiver, visit faa.gov/uas/request_waiver.

Aircraft requirements

- No FAA airworthiness certificate is required to fly sUAS under Part 107, but your team must register each aircraft with the FAA. The remote pilot must confirm that an aircraft is in condition for safe operation before each flight.



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Public Aircraft Operator

Rather than certify pilots and register aircraft under Part 107, your agency may choose instead to request a COA from the FAA to become a public aircraft operator. This would allow your agency to self-certify your drone pilots and drones for flights to perform governmental functions.

The first step is to ask your legal department to draft a Public Declaration Letter that certifies your agency as a governmental entity and send it to the FAA. The FAA will send you a user ID and password to the UAS COA Online Application System, where you can complete your application. This process can take up to 60 days.

For more information about the COA process, please visit www.faa.gov/go/COA

Emergency Authorizations and Operations

To support emergency responders and other entities affiliated with them, the FAA can quickly issue authorizations for responses to natural disasters and other emergencies. For more information, please visit: www.faa.gov/go/EmergencyWaiver

Learn more at faa.gov/uas

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