Drones, or Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems

Montreal, 26 July 2016 – Small recreational “hobby” drones, also known as Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems, have emerged as a significant hazard to aircraft operations in the vicinity of airports. ACI considers that rule-making and enforcement activity with regard to recreational drone operations, as with any other unauthorized flying object (e.g. captive balloons or manned light aircraft), is the responsibility of the relevant Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and law enforcement agencies.

As CAAs work to advance regulations and develop programmes to educate drone operators on safe operating practices, it is incumbent on all industry stakeholders to take action to protect the safety of aircraft operations. Stakeholders include air navigation service providers, local governments, police, drone operator associations, air carriers and neighbouring airports.

This advisory bulletin is addressed to ACI members and proposes that they initiate a dialogue with the CAAs and law enforcement agencies, especially where there are no laws or regulations in place, about recreational drones. It identifies a number of leadership initiatives that should be considered to reduce the risk presented by drones operating at, or in the vicinity of, their airport to a level that is as low as reasonably practicable.

In addition, ACI, the International Air Transport Association and the International Federation of Air Line Pilots Associations have released a joint safety awareness bulletin directed to operators of recreational drones which is attached. It can also be accessed at www.aci.aero/RPAS.

Actions that airport operators may consider include:

- Advising their regulator promptly of all drone activity on or in the vicinity of the airport, and if considered to pose a serious risk, sending formal notification of concerns for flight safety. This is particularly important in jurisdictions where there is little if any regulation of drone operations. A series of other possible actions with the regulator are listed below.

- Collaborating with their local government(s) and lobbying them on the creation of bylaws governing the operation of drones in the vicinity of the airport.

- Collaborating with their air navigation service provider on the development of a process for the approval of drone operations on or in the vicinity of the airport if appropriate, and on standard procedures to deal with an event where a drone is found to be operating close to an airport.

- Publishing information on the airport’s website on safe drone operating practices and a link to national regulations.

Other possible actions may include encouraging the national CAA to:
• Initiate a hazard identification and risk assessment process to identify the geographic boundaries of “No Drone Zones” (no fly zones for drones) on and in the vicinity of the airport;

• consider establishing a standardized means of signing or otherwise marking “No Drone Zones” for these locations;

• promote safe drone operating practices and make the public aware of areas where drones are permitted to operate by use of standardized signs and other means;

• consider allocating an area where recreational drone operators can safely fly drones away from aircraft paths;

• establish a comprehensive communications programme to inform drone operators of the locations of where drones are permitted, and not permitted, to operate on or in the vicinity of the airport;

• collaborate with airport operators, and business or recreational drone operators on the development of a process/procedure whereby drone activities can be authorized on or in the vicinity of an airport;

• consider a national registration or licensing process for drone operators;

• establish a process for monitoring the airspace inside and outside of the airport for unsafe or unauthorized drone activity; and,

• develop a plan of action to find and identify the operator of any drone deemed to be a risk to aviation and seek to cease the drone operation.

Notes

1. State regulations supersede the information contained in this advisory where applicable.

2. Websites that airport operators may find useful include:

   • Federal Aviation Administration
   • Transport Canada
   • European Aviation Safety Agency
   • International Civil Aviation Organization
   • Civil Aviation Safety Authority
   • South African Civil Aviation Authority

3. There are numerous organizations developing and marketing technologies that claim capabilities to detect and either disable or “geo-fence” drones. Airport operators are advised to be vigilant in assessing these technologies and to apply Safety Management System assessment practices before introducing them to their operations.
Contact

David Gamper
Director, Safety and Technical
ACI World
Telephone: +1 514 373-1216
Email: dgamper@aci.aero

Nicholas Ratledge
Manager, Airport Safety and Operations
ACI World
Telephone: +1 514 373-1256
Email: nratledge@aci.aero