



FAA Interim Policy Further Supports Section 333 Exemption Process

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Last week, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) announced an interim policy that it hopes will facilitate the use of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), commonly referred to as "drones," for commercial purposes. The new policy will grant UAS operators who have obtained a Section 333 exemption for small UAS (less than 55 pounds) a blanket Certificate of Waiver or Authorization (COA) for flights anywhere in the country (other than major cities and restricted airspace):

- That are at or below 200 feet;
- Operate during daytime Visual Flight Rules (VFR) conditions;
- Operate within Visual Line of Sight (VLOS) of the pilot in command (PIC); and
- Stay prescribed distances away from airports or heliports.

The "blanket" COA will apparently be given in conjunction with the Section 333 exemption grant. Until this announcement, UAS operators that had received a Section 333 exemption were still required to obtain a COA for each flight. This process could take up to 60 days, making a Section 333 exemption of limited value. Present holders of Section 333 exemptions should consider verifying the existence of a blanket COA before they engage in operations.

The new policy is further evidence that the FAA is encouraging companies that wish to operate UAS for commercial purposes to use the Section 333 exemption process. Section 333 exemption requests are the means by which companies can petition the FAA to operate UAS for commercial purposes. Thus far, the FAA has granted approximately 70 exemptions for commercial use of UAS for a variety of purposes, including precision agriculture, mapping and surveying, construction, insurance and the monitoring of utility lines, cell towers, bridges, flare stacks and other critical infrastructure assets.

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