FAA Issues New National Policy – Greater Oversight of Drone Operators

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Unmanned aerial systems (UAS or drone) operators will now face stricter oversight and inspections by local Flight Standards District Offices (FSDO) under the new National Policy issued by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The Policy requires FSDOs to immediately update their 2019 National Work Program Guidelines to include new Required Surveillance Work Activities. Before the FAA’s issuance of this notice, FSDO’s requirements for conducting surveillance of UAS activities was much more limited. However, over the past year, the FAA has determined that there is a “robust risk profile for UAS.” Specifically, the FAA said:

“[Our recent] analysis indicates UAS do pose potential risks to air transportation due to UAS sightings in communities bordering airport approach and departure paths. Additional potential risks were identified from noncompliant operations that would require local analysis to target, and noncompliant operators also pose potential risk to firefighting, law enforcement, and emergency response efforts. In consideration of these potential risks, specific conditions and targeting mechanisms were determined to be the best risk-based approach to expanding UAS surveillance opportunities as part of a broader UAS oversight strategy.”

The FSDOs must now conduct additional activities in the event of near mid-air collisions, accidents, incidents or compliance and enforcement actions related to UAS. FSDO inspectors must now analyze the reports for the root cause and common elements. FSDO inspectors must also conduct a UAS site visit in support of enforcement actions against any UAS operations that interfere with wildfire, law enforcement, or emergency response. Be on the lookout for FSDOs whether you are operating a drone commercially or for hobbyist purposes.

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