

UPS Seeks Certification for Drone Delivery Services

Robinson+Cole

Article By

[Kathryn M. Rattigan](#)

[Robinson & Cole LLP](#)

[Data Privacy + Security Insider](#)

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United Parcel Service of America, Inc. (UPS) is seeking permission from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to operate a network of commercial drones for purposes of delivering packages all across the U.S. If UPS' request for certification is granted by the FAA, UPS could be flying drones over people in populated areas, at night and beyond the operator's visual line of sight. Specifically UPS is seeking a Part 135 certification under the FAA, which applies to "air carriers and operators." The FAA has granted very few certifications under Part 135. In April 2019, Alphabet's Wing was the first company to receive FAA approval to operate drones commercially for this purpose, while others like Uber's food delivery services (Uber Eats) and Amazon Air have yet to receive approval.

For this venture, UPS has created a new subsidiary, UPS Flight Forward. If UPS's Flight Forward receives this certification, it will allow UPS to apply for FAA-approved flight operations beyond visual line of sight, at night, and without limit to the number of drones or operators in command, which are generally prohibited (without a specific waiver by the FAA) under the small UAS rule.

UPS's experience with drone delivery is limited to its pilot program with a startup company called Matternet, which uses drones to deliver medical supplies in North Carolina. UPS has also partnered with Zipline and Gavi to deliver blood samples to remote locations in Rwanda.

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