



Federal Aviation Administration

14 CFR Parts 48, 61, 89, 91, 107, 135, and 137

Settlement Policy for Small Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Cases

AGENCY: Federal Aviation Administration, DOT.

ACTION: Notification of enforcement policy.

SUMMARY: This notification announces Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)'s new Drone Expedited and Targeted Enforcement Response (DETER) Program to expedite and increase enforcement actions against small Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) operators who violate Federal Aviation Administration regulations. The program establishes prompt settlement procedures for certificated and noncertificated UAS operators who are individuals, first-time violators, and meet the eligibility provisions of the policy. This policy will incentivize drone operators to follow FAA regulations, deterring clueless, careless, and criminal violations of UAS regulations by incentivizing violators to admit to liability and waive lengthy appeals processes in exchange for reduced fees. This policy effectuates President Trump's Executive Order directing zealous enforcement of UAS laws and regulations.

DATES: This enforcement policy is effective [INSERT DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER].

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Nicole Zenerovitz, Manager, Aviation Litigation Division, AGC-300, Federal Aviation Administration, 800 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20591; phone: 718-909-5863; email: nicole.zenerovitz@faa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The FAA's safety mandate under 49 U.S.C. § 40103 requires the agency to regulate aircraft operations in the National Airspace System, including those involving UAS, to prevent aircraft collisions and protect persons and property on the ground.

On June 6, 2025, President Trump issued the Restoring American Airspace Sovereignty Executive Order (EO). Section 6 of the EO requires steps to ensure full enforcement of applicable civil and criminal laws when UAS operators endanger the public, violate established airspace restrictions, or operate a drone in furtherance of an element of another crime. This policy furthers FAA's compliance with that order.

Pursuant to the EO, on January 21, 2026, the FAA issued FAA Order 2150.3C, Change 13, Compliance and Enforcement Bulletin No. 2026-1 (UAS Enforcement C&E Bulletin). The UAS Enforcement C&E Bulletin requires mandatory legal enforcement action for all UAS operations that endanger the public, violate established airspace restrictions, or are in furtherance of an element of another crime.

The FAA investigates UAS violations and takes appropriate action based on guidance in FAA Order 2150.3C, FAA Compliance and Enforcement Program, and FAA Order 8000.373C,

Federal Aviation Administration Compliance Program. Prior to the issuance of the UAS Enforcement C&E Bulletin, the FAA used compliance actions to resolve UAS cases when UAS operators acted carelessly and were willing and able to comply with the Federal Aviation Regulations. After the issuance of the UAS Enforcement C&E Bulletin, most UAS violations are no longer eligible for compliance actions and must be handled with legal enforcement action.

When legal enforcement action is pursued for a UAS-related violation, the Flight Standards Service, Office of General Aviation Safety Assurance (AFG) investigates the apparent violation and develops an enforcement investigative report (EIR), which is subject to AFG management review. If AFG management deems the EIR sufficient, it transmits the EIR to the Office of the Chief Counsel's Aviation Litigation Division (AGC-300). AGC-300 reviews the EIR to ensure, among other things, evidentiary sufficiency and compliance with law and policy. If legal enforcement is appropriate, AGC-300 issues a Notice of Proposed Civil Penalty, Notice of Proposed Certificate Action, or Emergency Order of Revocation, depending on the circumstances. This process, while necessary to ensure fairness and legal sufficiency, delays prompt enforcement of FAA regulations relating to UAS operations. Accordingly, the FAA is issuing this procedure for prompt settlement to streamline the legal enforcement action process for UAS-related cases to deter UAS-related violations better and enhance aviation safety while ensuring UAS operators' due process rights are protected.

Policy Statement

The FAA's DETER Program outlined in this notification will accelerate and increase enforcement actions against UAS operators who violate FAA regulations by allowing eligible operators of small UAS, as defined in 14 CFR § 1.1, to pay a significantly reduced civil penalty or serve a significantly reduced certificate suspension period, as applicable, in exchange for quickly resolving the matter and paying the reduced civil penalty or submitting to the reduced suspension period. As an exercise of its prosecutorial discretion, the FAA will determine the locations and times for which the DETER Program will apply to otherwise eligible UAS operations. The program will initially focus on select locations during periods in which a high volume of UAS operations are expected. Operations in locations and times not covered by the DETER Program are subject to the FAA's regular legal enforcement action process.

Under the new DETER Program, the FAA will send a Violation Notice to eligible UAS operators. The Violation Notice will be issued to the UAS operator via Federal Express and email, if known. The FAA will use the following email address to send the notice: UASNotice@faa.gov.

The Violation Notice will state the EIR Number, Investigator Name, Date of Issuance, Date and Time of Offense, Place of Offense, 14 CFR Offenses Violated,¹ and Identifying Information for the UAS operator. The Violation Notice will provide the UAS operator with the option to elect to continue pursuant to the FAA's DETER Program or to continue under the FAA's regular legal enforcement action process. The Violation Notice will state the civil penalty amount or certificate suspension period proposed and any corrective actions that the UAS operator is required to complete. The Violation Notice will have an instructions page explaining the program, the two options available to the UAS operators, and what each option entails. The Violation Notice will provide an email address for UAS operators to contact if they elect to participate in the DETER Program. The Violation Notice will explain that if any of the information provided is fraudulent or false, then the UAS operator will be subject to the FAA's

¹ The Violation Notice will not list all possible 14 CFR offenses violated. If the UAS operator elects to proceed with the regular legal enforcement action process, additional regulatory violations may be alleged as part of that action.

regular legal enforcement action process for making a fraudulent or false statement to the FAA, the offer to participate in the DETER Program will be rescinded, and the FAA will take any other appropriate enforcement action. If the case involves a certificated airman, the Violation Notice will also provide the timely written notification required by the Pilots Bill of Rights, Public Law 11-152, as amended by Public Law 118-63, enacted May 16, 2024 (codified at 49 U.S.C. § 44703 note).

If the UAS operator elects not to proceed with the DETER Program, the FAA will pursue regular legal enforcement action as described in the Background section.

If the UAS operator elects to proceed with the DETER Program, they will be required to return the signed form and take the applicable action, which may be to pay the civil penalty at www.pay.gov, to surrender their airman certificate and serve the suspension, or to complete the corrective action, all within 10 days of its issuance. The UAS operator must attach proof of payment of the civil penalty and proof of completion of the corrective actions required, if any. If the UAS operator is a certificated airman, they must also surrender their remote pilot certificate to the address provided in the Violation Notice. By signing the Violation Notice, the UAS operator certifies under penalty of perjury that they paid the proposed civil penalty amount, surrendered their certificate, and completed the required corrective action, as applicable. If the UAS operator elects to participate in the DETER Program, the Violation Notice will constitute a finding of violation and will be considered a violation history. By participating in the DETER Program, UAS operators waive all rights to appeal or otherwise seek review of the Violation Notice. They also agree 1) not to initiate any litigation under any regulatory or statutory provision, including, but not limited to, the Equal Access to Justice Act, to collect any fees or costs they may have incurred arising from the matter, 2) not to seek review of the validity or amount of the debt owed by them to the United States of America, and 3) to waive any potential causes of action against the FAA, its employees, and agents, past and present, whether in their official or personal capacities, arising out of the matter. If the UAS operator elects to participate in the DETER Program and fails to return the signed Violation Notice or to take the appropriate action—whether to pay the amount due, surrender their airman certificate, or complete the required corrective action—within 10 days of the issuance of the Violation Notice, the FAA may proceed with the regular legal enforcement action process.

Generally, the DETER Program may be used to address operational violations. The DETER Program will only be available to individuals who are first-time violators of UAS provisions, and a UAS operator can only participate in the DETER Program once. The DETER Program will not be used in cases involving the following categories of violations:

- Alcohol or drug-related offenses;
- Weaponized drones;
- Operations involving criminal activity unrelated to regulatory violations (*e.g.*, the carriage of narcotics, assault, photographing sensitive military installations, harassment);
- Operations involving a Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR) issued under Part 91.141;
- UAS operations involving particularly egregious conduct; or
- UAS operations demonstrating a lack of qualifications to hold a remote pilot certificate.

The DETER Program is expected to streamline the enforcement process to allow for a quicker resolution of UAS operational violations, thus providing stronger deterrence against UAS-related violations and enhancing aviation safety and security.

The FAA retains prosecutorial discretion to determine that a specific alleged violation is not eligible to participate in this program and nothing in this policy or notice will require the FAA to offer the DETER Program to in such a case.

Issued in Washington, DC on April 15, 2026

William McKenna

Chief Counsel

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