

Iowa DOT Requiring Registration for Commercial Drone Usage

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AMES, Iowa – The Federal Aviation Administration has authorized several individuals and businesses in Iowa to use drones for commercial purposes, but the Iowa Department of Transportation Office of Aviation will still require operators to register their aircraft with the state.

The Iowa DOT says at least 10 individuals or businesses have received authorization from the FAA to use drones for research, real estate, photography and agricultural purposes. These “unmanned aircraft systems” – the official terminology for drones by the FAA as an attempt to move away from the term “drone” – are regulated by the FAA, but need to be registered by the Iowa DOT like any other aircraft. The state aviation office is notified whenever the FAA registers new unmanned aerial vehicles for commercial use.

Private drone operators – also called “model fliers” – are not required to get operational approval from the FAA or to register their aircraft with the state DOT, since they aren’t for commercial use. The Iowa DOT says it has nothing to do with enforcement of aircraft in the state, as that’s the FAA’s responsibility. Registration fees, along with aircraft fuel taxes, fund the state aviation program. Tim

McClung, Planning and Outreach Manager with the Iowa DOT Office of Aviation, says to think of registration as a “user fee.”

“We want to be careful there is not the idea or notion that the Iowa DOT is regulating the operation of drones,” he said. “Not to say the Iowa legislature won’t look into the use of these aircraft. There’s been discussion on what these drones can be used for, such as traffic enforcement. But as of right now, nothing has come out of the legislature on commercial drone operation.”

McClung says as of this week, only two operators have called about the registration process. Since commercial drone usage is still so new, the Iowa DOT is paying close attention to what policies and procedures the FAA develops over time.