FAA ISSUES LIST DETAILING UAV SIGHTINGS IN COMMERCIAL AIRSPACE

News / Airlines

FAA has released a list of all reports by pilots, air traffic and the public of possible encounters with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) that were submitted between Nov., 2014 and August 20.

The list, posted on the FAA site Aug. 21, follows a statement released by the agency in mid-August stating that the number of reports by commercial pilots of drones flying close to their aircraft had increased dramatically over the past year, from a total of 238 sightings in all of 2014 to more than 650 by Aug. 9 of this year."

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The issue of UAVs operating illegally in commercial aircraft caught worldwide attention in July when a Lufthansa crew on approach to Warsaw Airport reported a near-miss with a drone. The Embraer E-195 with 108 passengers on board was arriving from Munich, on approach at about 2,500 feet altitude, when the crew reported an UAV coming within 100 meters (330 feet) of the airliner.

The Lufthansa flight landed safely. “Prompt intervention by air traffic controllers allowed for the safe conduct of further landings,” the Polish Air Navigation Services Agency (PANSA) said. Police helicopters were scrambled, but failed to locate the unmanned aircraft or its operator, the agency added.

In late July, the UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) issued a new code of practice for UAV operators and released information on an incident in which an unnamed airline’s Airbus A320 came within about 20 feet of a remotely controlled mini-helicopter hovering over London Heathrow Airport in July 2014. CAA recorded three further instances of similar close calls between airliners and UAVs between May 2014 and March 2015.

“We want to embrace and enable the innovation that arises from the development of drone technology, but we must ensure that this is done safely, with all airspace users in mind,” CAA director of policy Tim Johnson said. “It is imperative that people observe the rules when operating a drone.”

At a safety conference in Washington DC, Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA) president Tim Canoll said language requiring that Traffic Collision and Avoidance Systems (TCAS) or similar technology be installed on UAVs should be included in FAA reauthorization legislation that US Congress is expected to take up this year.

“It’s important that active collision avoidance [technology] be mandated on [UAVs], otherwise these aircraft are invisible to our pilots,” Canoll said, adding that UAVs must be required to “use the same rules as we do.”

US Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-Oregon) said he has requested FAA do tests on UAVs “being sucked into aircraft engines” similar to bird ingestion tests, and has been informed FAA will conduct these tests in the near future.

Canoll told *ATW* in an editorial board meeting Aug. 20 that ALPA wants to see a multi-layered approach to mitigate the risks of a drone colliding with a commercial airliner.

For small drones, ALPA is advocating for educating operators; the installation of “geo-fencing” technology that would prevent small UAVs from operating within 5 miles of airports; registration of UAVs so owners can be tracked down following an incident; and “more formalized” enforcement against operators violating the airspace used by airliners.

In its Aug, 21 statement to which it attaches the details of UAV reports from November to August, FAA says, “because pilot reports of unmanned aircraft have increased dramatically over the past year, the FAA wants to send a clear message that operating drones around airplanes and helicopters is dangerous and illegal. Unauthorized operators may be subject to stiff fines and criminal charges, including possible jail time.”

The FAA list of reports can be seen here.

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