



The Guild of Air Traffic Control Officers

PRESS RELEASE

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New drone legislation is not enough to ensure the safety of the travelling public

Risks to the travelling public must be reduced by introducing mandatory geo-fencing for drones without delay. The move is one of six safety steps being called for by GATCO, the UK Guild of Air Traffic Control Officers.

In 2018, there were 105 airproxes involving drones investigated by the UK Airprox Board with 75 resulting in assessments of a 'serious risk existing' or safety 'may have been compromised'. Research by the Department for Transport, the Military Aviation Authority and the British Airline Pilots' Association has shown that significant damage can be caused to an aircraft in a drone collision.

While the UK government has taken some welcomed action on drone regulation, including the introduction of new flight restriction zones around licensed aerodromes effective 13 March 2019, the problem with its piecemeal approach to regulation is that there is no emphasis on *stopping* drones from flying into areas where they can pose a risk to the flying public. The measures so far rely on individuals *following rules* and/or being competent enough to operate their drones within those rules. GATCO is calling for the government to mandate geo-fencing now, which will prevent drones from flying in areas where they could be a danger to passenger and private aircraft.

The six steps for safety GATCO is calling on the government to enact are:

1. Mandatory geo-fencing without delay

Geo-fencing must be made mandatory to prevent drones from flying in areas where they could be a danger to aircraft.

2. Fast track research and trials into electronic conspicuity

Air traffic controllers and flight information service officers need to be able to see drones on their equipment – this will be mandatory if drones are to be integrated into non-segregated controlled airspace in the future. The drone industry has so far developed far more quickly than the regulations to control them. Fast tracking electronic conspicuity research and trials is an opportunity to catch up in one area.

3. Clarity on rules on exclusion zones for helipads

The government's recent decision to increase the 'drone exclusion zone' around licensed aerodromes is not clear on rules around helipads. Drone collision research tests found helicopters to be particularly vulnerable.

The UK Member of The International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Associations (IFATCA)

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4. Urgent consideration of introducing restriction zones around unlicensed aerodromes

The government's latest regulations do not take into account unlicensed aerodromes. This leaves many smaller general aviation aircraft exposed to the dangers of drones.

5. Drone registration and tests for individuals brought forward from November 2019

The sooner these regulations can be enacted the safer the skies can be.

6. Further research on the effect of drone strikes

More research is necessary to fully understand the effect a collision with a drone would have on an aircraft and its safety implications.

While GATCO fully supports the development of the drone industry and recognises the immense benefits that it can bring both economically and socially, the integration of drones into uncontrolled and subsequently controlled airspace must be carried out while putting the safety of the public first – before any economic considerations. The UK government seems to be reluctant to act in advance of European-wide regulation even when some other European countries have already done so. It is not time for urgent action to protect the travelling public.

For more information, please contact info@gatco.org

NOTES

GATCO is a UK-wide professional organisation with active international involvement, which promotes the highest standards in all aspects of ATM. We represent around 1,600 civil and military air traffic controllers and flight information service officers. GATCO is actively involved in the work of the International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Associations (IFATCA), the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and the Single European Sky (SES), in addition to collaborating with UK-based aviation organisations.