General Aviation

January 2025

Understanding Drone Regulations

Over the last decade, drones—officially known as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs)—have become a common sight in the skies. Whether used for recreational activities, commercial purposes or government operations, drones are now part of the every day aviation environment.
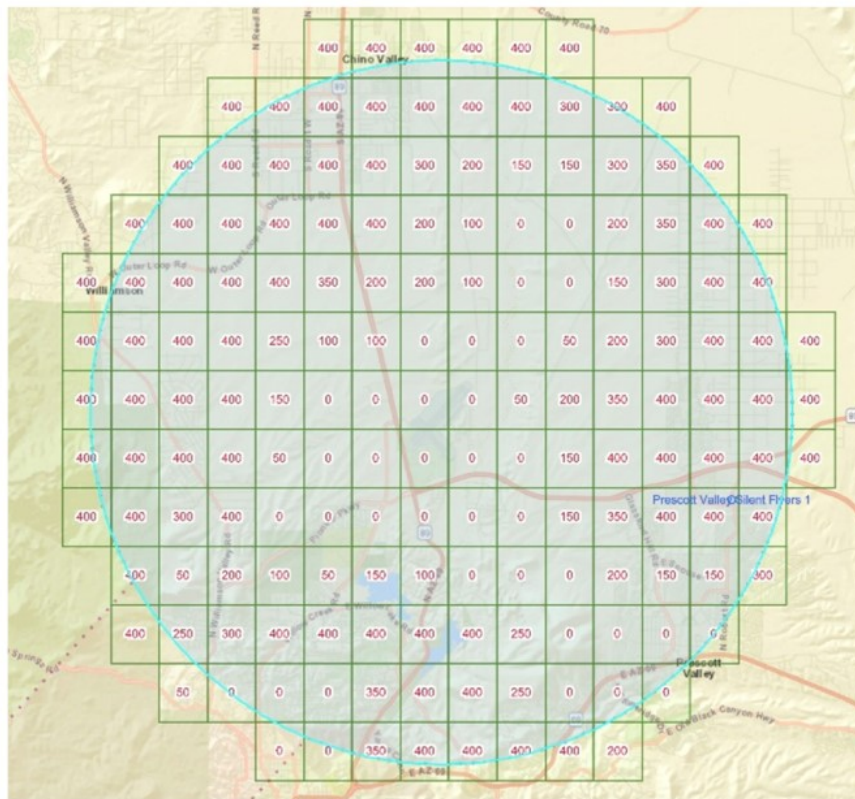
This article outlines the essential drone regulations that general aviation pilots need to understand to ensure safe and legal operations in shared airspace.

Operating Drones Near Airports

Drone operators generally avoid flying near airports due to the inherent safety risks but, in some cases, they are permitted to operate in these areas. It is important to understand when and how drones can legally fly near airports.

For recreational drone operators, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) generally requires drones to stay at least five miles away from airports, though this can vary depending on local regulations. Commercial drone operators, under Part 107, must obtain authorization from the FAA to fly in such areas, especially near controlled airspace. This includes the use of tools like the Low Altitude Authorization and Notification Capability (LAANC) system or the FAA DroneZone website to request permission from air traffic control (ATC) to operate in restricted zones.

Airspace Guide for Small UAS Operators - Image courtesy of the FAA

Example of a UAS Facility Map Grid at KPRC – Image courtesy of the FAA

Controlled Airspace

Understanding the difference between general airport areas and controlled airspace is vital. Controlled airspace, typically found in Class B, C, D or E airspace, is actively managed by ATC to ensure safe operations of both manned and unmanned aircraft. In these areas, drone operators face stricter regulations than in uncontrolled airspace.

For drones to fly within controlled airspace, operators must first obtain authorization from ATC, which is typically done through the LAANC system. Without this approval, drones are not permitted to fly within controlled airspace. Doing so could result in fines or other penalties.

In controlled airspace, there are specific restrictions regarding altitude limits, flight paths and the required distance between drones and manned aircraft. This is important for general aviation pilots to be aware of, since drones operating in these areas can be challenging to spot and avoid. Pilots should stay informed about any temporary flight restrictions (TFRs) or other airspace notices that may affect drone activity.

Notification to Airport Manager

Communication between drone operators and airport management is necessary for overall safety. When a drone operator plans to fly near an airport, they need to provide prior notice to the airport manager so they can issue a Notice to Air Mission (NOTAM) to alert pilots and other airport users to drone activity in the vicinity. This type of proactive communication helps reduce the risk of conflicts between drones and manned aircraft, particularly in the busy airspace at South Valley Regional Airport.

What General Aviation Pilots Can Do

1. Stay Informed About Airspace Restrictions: Pilots should regularly check for TFRs or other

temporary airspace restrictions that may affect drone operations. Several technologies and apps (e.g. B4UFLY) are available to help detect drones, especially in areas where drone activity is common. By using these tools, pilots can stay alert to any nearby UAVs.

2. Communicate with ATC: When flying in areas where drones are likely to be present, pilots should communicate with ATC for updates on drone activity. This helps ensure awareness of potential hazards.

3. Report Drone Sightings: If a drone is encountered during flight, it should be reported to ATC or the airport manager. This will help the FAA monitor drone activity and improve airspace safety.

Drones have become a significant part of our airspace, making it essential for general aviation pilots to understand the regulations that govern their operation. While drones bring numerous benefits, they also present new challenges and risks that require careful attention. Learning the rules around drone activity, especially near airports and in controlled airspace, helps to ensure safety for both manned and unmanned aircraft.

Upcoming Events & News

January 17 at 6 p.m.
FAASTeam Meeting: Mountain Flying Safety
A seminar hosted by an experienced NTSB investigator to delve into the critical lessons learned from mountain flying accidents. SLC Airport Activities and Training Center (ATAC), 1911 North 2200 West, Salt Lake City.

January 21 at 6 p.m.
FAASTeam Meeting: Helicopter Operations
Discussion about safety measures implemented daily when flying Utah Department of Public Safety missions. Logan Airport, 2500 North 900 West, Hangar J2, Room 202, Logan.

February 14-16
Buckeye Air Fair and AOPA Fly-In.
The 2025 Air Fair will feature an airshow, vintage and military aircraft, action-packed demonstrations, Aviation Academy exhibitions and more. Buckeye, Arizona, 3000 South Palo Verde Road. For more information, contact airfair@buckeyeas.gov | (623) 887-3316. https://www.buckeyeaz.gov/community/residents/events-in-buckeye/buckeye-air-fair

---

Points of Contact

General aviation operations, facilities maintenance, SLCDA GA newsletter, airfield and SLC Title 16 questions: Kevin Thornock, General Aviation Manager, (801) 531-4777 or **kevin.thornock@slc.gov**

FBO Operations, general aviation operations, facilities maintenance, airfield and SLC Title 16 questions: Sam Allen, FBO Manager, (801) 561-7531 or **samuel.allen@slc.gov**

Hangar lease and repair questions: Michelle Andreadakis Rudd, Airport Property Specialist, (801) 575-2957 or **michelle.rudd@slc.gov**

Aviation security questions: Gary Bilbrey, SLCDA Airport Operations, (801) 575-2401 or **gary.bilbrey@slcgov.com**

Gate access problems: Airport Control Center, (801) 575-2401.

Emergencies: SLCIA, (801) 575-2911. TVY or U42, 911 then (801) 575-2911.

For additional GA information call the GA Hotline: (801) 575-2443