FAA unveils guidelines for drones

Rules represent leap forward for remote-controlled aircraft industry

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WASHINGTON New drone rules from the Federal Aviation Administration limit most small commercial drone operations to daylight hours and require operators to get certified every two years.

The rules, made public Tuesday, mark the FAA's first attempt at a comprehensive plan to ensure the popular remote-controlled aircraft can safely share the skies with commercial craft.

The FAA's 624-page rulebook allows commercial drones weighing up to 55 pounds to fly during daylight hours and lower than 400 feet in the air. Also:

The rules govern commercial flights, such as for aerial photography or utilities inspection.

- The aircraft must remain within sight of the operator or an observer who is in communication with the operator.
- The operators must be at least 16 years old and pass an aeronautics test every 24 months for a certificate.

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Drones can operate in the evening only if the aircraft carries lights visible for 3 miles, FAA Administrator Michael Huerta said.

Drone operators who want to conduct night flights, flights beyond what the operator can see or flights above people who are not associated with the operation would need to demonstrate specific safety measures and seek a waiver, Huerta said.

Hobbyists have similar flight guidelines, but Congress exempted them from these formal rules.

By June 8, FAA registered 464,591 drone operators who can fly one or more drones.

Another 10,054 people registered one drone apiece for special permission for non-hobbyist operations such as for police and fire departments.