



Federal Aviation Administration

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about the Use of Model Aircraft Near an Airport Airports

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Please check this page frequently as we continue to develop UAS (unmanned aircraft system)-related guidance for airports. For more information, visit FAA Model Aircraft Operations (www.faa.gov/UAS/model_aircraft/).

The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)) below provide airport operators with an understanding of model aircraft use within five statute miles of an airport.

For answers to general Model Aircraft questions, such as "What is the definition of a Model Aircraft?" or "Are Model Aircraft registered with the FAA?", please visit FAA Model Aircraft Operations (www.faa.gov/UAS/model_aircraft/) (www.faa.gov/UAS/faq/). We strongly encourage reviewing the general FAQs in conjunction with those below as the information is complementary and meant to be read together as guidance to all users of the national airspace system.

These questions identify:

- The model aircraft operator's responsibilities to notify the airport operator and the airport traffic control tower (if one is located on the airport) prior to flying within five statute miles of an airport.
- The model aircraft operator rules and best practices for operating in the National Airspace System (NAS (National Airspace System)).
- Best practices for the airport operator to identify and communicate to the model aircraft operators any activity areas that have the least potential to interfere with manned aircraft flight at the airport.
- Actions an airport operator can take if a model aircraft is being operated in a manner that interferes with manned aircraft flight.

While the FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) will help the airport operator understand model aircraft use of the NAS (National Airspace System), these FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) are also intended to assist the airport operator in safely integrating these users into the NAS (National Airspace System).

These FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) do not address model aircraft use from an airport operational surface (e.g., runway, taxiway, etc.). This is because model aircraft are expected to be operated in a manner that does not interfere with, and gives way to, manned aircraft flight. As such, model aircraft and manned aircraft cannot share the same operational areas and model aircraft do not have an inherent need to operate from an airport operational surface. While model aircraft do not share aircraft operational areas with manned aircraft, model aircraft areas have been established on airports in the past. Successful use of model aircraft on airport requires specific controls be put in place to ensure model aircraft and manned aircraft are segregated for safety.

Model aircraft are permitted users of the National Airspace System (NAS (National Airspace System)) just like any existing manned aircraft flight. Congress confirmed in Public Law 112-95, the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) Modernization and Reform Act of 2012, that model aircraft are aircraft consistent with statutory definition of an aircraft as set forth in Title 49 of U.S.C. § 40102(a) (6). This means that model aircraft operators can utilize the NAS (National Airspace System) as long the operator of the model aircraft meets all applicable statutes and regulations and operates the model aircraft in a safe manner.

The Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA (Federal Aviation Administration)'s) goal is the safe integration of unmanned aircraft, including model aircraft, into the NAS (National Airspace System). Federal legislation and FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) policy recognizes that integration of the model aircraft safely in the NAS (National Airspace System) is enhanced when the operator of a model aircraft and the airport operator coordinate prior to a model aircraft flight near an airport. As noted in the sections below, operators of model aircraft are required by law to contact the airport operator prior to flying within five miles of an airport. This coordination enhances integration into the NAS (National Airspace System) by:

- Allowing the airport operator to help the model aircraft operator understand the areas of manned aircraft flight near the airport, reducing the potential for conflicts between model aircraft activities and manned aircraft flights;
- Allowing the airport operator to understand the proposed parameters of the model aircraft activities for situational awareness and coordination with airport tenants and users as necessary;
- Allowing the airport operator to object to a proposed model aircraft flight when the airport operator determines the proposed model aircraft flight could impact the safety of the NAS (National Airspace System);
- Allowing the airport operator to advise the model aircraft operator of unique manned aircraft activities near the airport (e.g., parachute activities, glider activities);
- Allowing the airport operator to have awareness of model aircraft flights near the airport; and
- Encouraging coordination of the airport sponsor with the local Air Traffic Control (ATC) facilities, Flight Standards District Office (FSDO), and Airports District Office (ADO), and local law enforcement.

FAQs

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1. What rules apply to model aircraft use near an airport?

Section 336 of Public Law 112-95 established the following criteria for model aircraft operations:

- Flown strictly for hobby or recreational use;
- Flown in accordance with a community-based set of safety guidelines and within the programming of a nationwide community-based organization (CBO);
- Flown with an aircraft not more than 55 pounds, unless otherwise certified through a design, construction, inspection, flight test, and operational safety program administered by a CBO;
- Flown in a manner that does not interfere with, and gives way to, any manned aircraft; and
- When flown within five statute miles of an airport, the operator of the model aircraft provides the airport operator and the airport air traffic control tower (when an air traffic facility is located at the airport) with prior notice of the operation. Model aircraft operators flying from a permanent location within five statute miles of an airport should establish a mutually agreed upon operating procedure with the airport operator and the airport air traffic control tower (when an air traffic facility is located at the airport).

Model aircraft must be operated within the visual line of sight of the operator using only eyeglasses or contact lenses as aids. A model aircraft operator cannot use vision-enhancing devices (binoculars, night vision goggles, powered vision magnifying devices, and goggles that provide a first-person view from the aircraft) since these devices do not allow the model aircraft operator to maintain visual line of sight.[1]

The FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) recommends model aircraft operators limit operations to at or below 400 feet above ground level (AGL).^[2] Model aircraft are prohibited from operating in Prohibited Areas, Special Flight Rule Areas or the Washington National Capital Region Flight Restricted Zone, without specific authorization.^[3] Additionally, model aircraft operators should be aware of other Notices to Airmen (NOTAMs) that address operations near locations such as military or other federal facilities, certain stadiums, power plants, electric substations, dams, oil refineries, national parks, emergency services, and other industrial complexes. ^[4]

Please note that as of February 10, 2016, the FAA has updated its conditions for flying unmanned aircraft in the area between 15 and 30 miles from Washington, D.C., to clarify differences for various types of unmanned aircraft. For further information, read FAA Updates DC-Area Unmanned Aircraft Procedures (www.faa.gov/news/updates/?newsId=84787).

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2. Is model aircraft use prohibited within five statute miles of an airport?

There are no legislative prohibitions. However, Section 336 of Public Law 112-95 requires the operator of the model aircraft to notify the airport operator and airport traffic control tower (if one is located on the airport) prior to operating within five miles of an airport. For ease in determining distances, the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) interprets this as five statute^[5] miles from an airport reference point (ARP) as denoted in the current FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) Airport/Facility Directory (AFD) or for airports not denoted with an ARP, the center of the airport symbol as denoted on the current FAA (Federal Aviation Administration)-published aeronautical chart. Please note that model aircraft operators must also comply with the requirements of the airspace where they intend to fly the model aircraft. Please refer the model aircraft operator to the local airport traffic control tower, if one is located at the airport, for specific questions on airspace operating requirements.

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3. What procedure should I follow for a permanent model aircraft flying location that is within five statute miles of my airport?

Section 336 of Public Law 112-95 states that:

"Model aircraft operators flying from a permanent location within five statute miles of an airport should establish a mutually agreed upon operating procedure with the airport operator and the airport air traffic control tower (when an air traffic facility is located at the airport)."

A best practice for the airport operator is to enter into a letter of agreement (LOA (Letter of Agreement)) with the model aircraft operator, or operator's outlining the airport operator's understanding of how the model aircraft will be operated within five statute miles of the airport. This LOA (Letter of Agreement) could include:

- The type of model aircraft being used,
- Parameters for the flight (altitude and locations)
- Anticipated Times for flight
- The safety guidelines the model aircraft operator will use, and
- Notification procedures to the airport operator, if any.

A benefit to the airport operator for establishing a “mutually agreed upon operating procedure” is that the agreement could eliminate the need for the model aircraft operator calling the airport each time they fly, which is a requirement under Section 336. This is because the LOA (Letter of Agreement) described above would include a mutual understanding of how the model aircraft would be operated.

The Model Aircraft operator, or operators, should contact the airport traffic control tower if one is located at the airport to also establish and LOA (Letter of Agreement) with the ATCT.

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4. Why am I getting a call from the operator of a model aircraft?

Section 336 of Public Law 112-95 requires the operator of a model aircraft to notify the airport operator when a model aircraft will be flown within five miles of an airport.

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5. What questions could I ask the operator of a model aircraft who proposes a flight within five statute miles of my airport?

- What is your name and contact information?
- Where do you want to fly?
- At what altitude will you be flying (maximum)?
- What time will you be flying?
- How long will you be flying there?
- What are you flying (Make/ Model)?
- How can I contact you while you are flying?

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6. What should I tell the operator of a model aircraft who proposes to fly near my airport?

- Be familiar with the manned aircraft operating areas within five statute miles of the airport and share this information with the operator of the model aircraft.
- Based on the answers to the questions identified in Question 4 above, be able to describe to the model aircraft operator whether the proposed flight interferes with normal manned aircraft flight.
- Provide the model aircraft operator information on any special or unusual activity occurring at the

airport during the proposed model aircraft flight (e.g., skydiving, low flying agricultural aircraft, helicopters, etc.).

- Remind the operator of model aircraft operating parameters (outlined in Question 1 above).
- Ask the model aircraft operator to contact the air traffic control facility (if one is located at the airport).
- Ask the model aircraft operator to contact other airports that may also be within five statute miles of the proposed flight.

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7. How can I be prepared to discuss areas for model aircraft use within five statute miles of my airport?

A best practice is to coordinate with your stakeholders and air traffic control facility (if one is located at the airport) to identify areas within five statute miles of the airport where model aircraft would have the potential to interfere with manned aircraft flights. When describing these areas, consider describing areas of manned aircraft activity within five statute miles of the airport with regards to altitudes and locations in accordance with published flight information (e.g., traffic patterns, instrument approaches, departure areas, etc.). This facilitates the requirements of Section 336 of Public Law 112-95, which require that model aircraft be operated in a manner that does not interfere with manned aircraft flight. The airport operator and control towers are only identifying areas from an aviation safety perspective. It is the responsibility of the model aircraft operators to coordinate with landowners if they wish to operate from their property.

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8. Can an airport operator object to model aircraft flights near my airport?

Yes, according to the [FAA \(Federal Aviation Administration\)'s Interpretation of the Special Rule for Model Aircraft](#), you can object to the proposed use of a model aircraft within five miles of an airport if the proposed activity would endanger the safety of the [NAS \(National Airspace System\)](#). However, the airport operator cannot prohibit or prevent the model aircraft operator from operating within five miles of the airport.

If you object to a proposed model aircraft operation within five statute miles of the airport for safety reasons and the model aircraft operator flies anyway, the airport operator has the following options depending upon the airport operator's judgment of risk from the model aircraft flight:

- Contact the airport traffic control tower (ATCT), if one is located at your airport.
- Contact your local law enforcement agency to detect and potentially investigate and, as appropriate, pursue enforcement actions to stop the use. Please refer to [FAA Guidance for Law Enforcement \(www.faa.gov/uas/law_enforcement/\)](#).
- Notify the [FAA \(Federal Aviation Administration\)'s 24 hours Regional Operations Center \(ROC\)](#). Find [ROC contact information \(www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/ash/ash_offices/\)](#).

- Notify the local Flight Standards District Office (FSDO) (www.faa.gov/about/office_org/field_offices/fsdo/).

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9. What are best practices when I am made aware of a proposed model aircraft flight within five statute miles of my airport?

- Document the conversation with the model aircraft operator, including any objections you made to their proposed flight.
- Issue a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM), if necessary.

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10. Is the Airport Traffic Control Tower (ATCT) notified by the operator of a model aircraft flight that occurs within five statute miles of the airport?

Section 336 of Public Law 112-95 requires the model aircraft operator to notify the airport traffic control tower (ATCT) if the proposed flight is located within five statute miles of the ATCT (Airport Traffic Control Tower), if there is an ATCT (Airport Traffic Control Tower) at the airport. A best practice is to coordinate communications between the ATCT (Airport Traffic Control Tower) and the airport operator to share information on notifications and possible unsafe operations.

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11. What should I do if I see a model aircraft being operated in a manner that could interfere with manned aircraft flight or other uses (e.g. skydiving)?

Airport operators have an important responsibility to keep the airport and the surrounding areas free from hazards that could impact the safe operation of the airport. Airport operators are also in a unique position to observe and identify activity near an airport that could impact the safety of the NAS (National Airspace System). Accordingly, if you observe a model aircraft being operated in a manner that interferes with manned aircraft flight or other uses at your airport:

- Contact the airport traffic control tower (ATCT), if one is located at your airport.
- Contact your local law enforcement agency to detect and immediately investigate and as appropriate, pursue enforcement actions to stop the use. Please refer to FAA Guidance for Law Enforcement (www.faa.gov/uas/law_enforcement/).
- Notify the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration)'s 24 hours Regional Operations Center (ROC). Find ROC contact information (www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/ash/ash_offices/).
- To assist in the investigation of the event, the airport operator may wish to:
 - Keep good documentation of the time/location of the event;
 - Take pictures and/or capture video recordings of the activity, if possible;

- Attempt to determine the type of activity; and
- Attempt to determine the location of the operator of the model aircraft.

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12. How can I help ensure model aircraft are operated safely near my airport?

- Consider conducting community outreach activities that educate the public on model aircraft operators' responsibilities and requirements.
- Consider sharing information on the areas where manned flights normally occur at your airport.
- Establish a local process that allows you to effectively discuss proposed model aircraft operations within five statute miles of your airport.
- Enlist the assistance of local Law Enforcement Agencies to help identify operations near your airport that could impact the safety of the NAS (National Airspace System).
- Encourage the use of the *B4UFLY* app.

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13. Does the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) provide guidance on local and state regulation of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS (unmanned aircraft system))?

Yes, the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) has a fact sheet on state and local regulation of unmanned aircraft systems (UAS (unmanned aircraft system)) that provides information for states and municipalities considering laws or regulations addressing UAS (unmanned aircraft system) use. The document outlines FAA (Federal Aviation Administration)'s safety reasons for federal oversight of aviation and airspace, and explains federal responsibility in this area.

The fact sheet provides examples of state and local laws affecting UAS (unmanned aircraft system) for which consultation with the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) is recommended, such as restrictions on flight altitude or flight paths, regulation of the navigable airspace, and mandating UAS (unmanned aircraft system)-specific equipment or training.

The fact sheet also gives examples of UAS (unmanned aircraft system) laws likely to fall within state and local government authority, such as requirements for police to obtain a warrant prior to using UAS for surveillance; prohibitions on the use of UAS (unmanned aircraft system) for voyeurism; exclusions on using UAS (unmanned aircraft system) for hunting or fishing, or harassing individuals engaged in those activities; and prohibitions on attaching firearms or other weapons to a UAS (unmanned aircraft system).

[UAS Fact Sheet \(www.faa.gov/UAS/regulations_policies/media/UAS_Fact_Sheet_Final.pdf\)](http://www.faa.gov/UAS/regulations_policies/media/UAS_Fact_Sheet_Final.pdf) (PDF)

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14. Who should I call if I have questions?

- Contact your local [Airports District Office \(ADO\)](http://www.faa.gov/airports/news_information/contact_info/) (www.faa.gov/airports/news_information/contact_info/).
- Contact your local [Flight Standards District Office \(FSDO\)](http://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/field_offices/fsdo/) (www.faa.gov/about/office_org/field_offices/fsdo/).

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The following documents provide further background and supporting information:

- [Statutory Provision of Model Aircraft Operations \(www.faa.gov/uas/media/Sec_331_336_UAS.pdf\)](http://www.faa.gov/uas/media/Sec_331_336_UAS.pdf) (PDF)
- [FAA's Interpretation of Model Aircraft Special Rules \(https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-06-25/pdf/2014-14948.pdf\)](https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-06-25/pdf/2014-14948.pdf) (PDF)
- [FAA Notice N JO 7210.891, *Unmanned Aircraft Operations in the National Airspace System* \(www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/orders_notices/index.cfm/go/document.information.documentID/1028629\)](http://www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/orders_notices/index.cfm/go/document.information.documentID/1028629)
- [FAA Advisory Circular 91-57, *Model Aircraft Operating Standards* \(www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/advisory_circulars/index.cfm/go/document.information.documentID/1028086\)](http://www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/advisory_circulars/index.cfm/go/document.information.documentID/1028086)
- [FAA's Model Aircraft Website \(www.faa.gov/uas/model_aircraft/\)](http://www.faa.gov/uas/model_aircraft/)
- [B4UFLY Smart Phone Application \(www.faa.gov/uas/b4ufly/\)](http://www.faa.gov/uas/b4ufly/)
- [Model Aircraft "Dos and Don'ts" \(www.faa.gov/uas/publications/model_aircraft_operators/\)](http://www.faa.gov/uas/publications/model_aircraft_operators/)

Notes

[1] [FAA Interpretation of Section 333 of Public Law 112-95 \(https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-06-25/pdf/2014-14948.pdf\)](https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-06-25/pdf/2014-14948.pdf) (PDF)

[2] [FAA \(Federal Aviation Administration\) Advisory Circular 91-57A, *Model Aircraft Operating Standards*](#)

[3] [FAA \(Federal Aviation Administration\) Advisory Circular 91-57A, *Model Aircraft Operating Standards*](#)

[4] [FAA \(Federal Aviation Administration\) Advisory Circular 91-57A, *Model Aircraft Operating Standards*](#)

[5] [FAA \(Federal Aviation Administration\) Interpretation of Section 333 of P.L. 112-95](#)

Related Information

- [Unmanned Aircraft Systems \(www.faa.gov/uas/\)](http://www.faa.gov/uas/)
- [FAQs \(Frequently Asked Questions\) about UAS \(unmanned aircraft system\) Operations on an Airport \(www.faa.gov/airports/special_programs/uas_airports/\)](http://www.faa.gov/airports/special_programs/uas_airports/)

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