ProtectUK

Advice, Information and an Introduction to Drones

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There has been a significant growth in the legitimate use of drones over recent years. This is anticipated to increase as the potential uses of drones continue to develop. You should understand your rights, insurance requirements and policing powers in regards to drones and more.

Drones and your responsibility

A drone is a remote-controlled aircraft that doesn't have a pilot on-board. Drones range from small children's toys to large military systems. This includes remote-controlled model planes and helicopters.

There are different rules for different types (categories) of drone flight. The categories depend mainly on the weight of the drone, where you intend to fly, and how close you will be to people and built-up areas (in towns and cities).

Your responsibility

If you fly or own a drone, it's your responsibility to make sure all flights are safe and legal.

The Drone and Model Aircraft Code

The Drone and Model Aircraft Code is like the Highway Code for drones. It was created by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and it tells you how to fly a drone legally and safely.



Drone operator

The operator of a drone is usually the owner.

If a drone is not owned by a single person, then a designated person known as the manager is the operator. For example, if a club owns a drone that members can use, then the club must designate a manager for the drone.

If you are the operator you must register with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and get an OperatorID if the drone weighs over 250g or has a camera that can take photos or record video.

You must clearly display your OperatorID on every drone you own or manage.

Toy drones

You don’t need an OperatorID for a drone that is classed as a toy.

Your drone is likely to be a toy if:

- the maker or shop describes it as a toy
- you bought it from a toy shop

- it is marked as suitable for under 14s
- it was advertised or packaged to attract children

The Pilot

Anyone flying (piloting) a drone that weighs over 250g must pass a basic test with the CAA to get a FlyerID. They must carry their FlyerID details at all times while flying.

Some categories have extra requirements for pilots.

Drone insurance

You need insurance if:

- you are not using it for sport or recreation, for example if you are using it for work
- your drone weighs over 20kg

Insurance must be at least EC 785/2004 standard.

Drone flight rules and the law

Flight rules

This summary of the rules applies to most drone flights. But, you must make sure you know which category your drone is in and exactly which rules apply:

- Don’t endanger anyone or anything while flying a drone
- You must be able to see the drone (including the space around it) at all times
- Don’t fly if you’ve drunk alcohol or taken drugs
- Respect other people’s privacy, and know what you can and cannot do with photos and videos

Don’t fly:

- over crowds (known as ‘assemblies’ in the rules)
- over 400ft (120m) from the ground
- in Restricted Airspace, for example near aerodromes, unless you get permission
- where fire, police or ambulance services are responding to an emergency, unless you get permission

Depending on which category of drone you’re flying you may need to stay at least:

- 50m away from crowds and other people
- 150m away from built-up areas (towns and cities)

The law

The laws on flying drones are part of the Air Navigation Order 2016.

In the law:

- a drone is called an Uncrewed Aircraft (UA)
- the whole system used to fly a drone (including the controller or mobile app) is called an Uncrewed Aerial System (UAS)
- the Drone Operator is the person or organisation that owns or manages the drone
- the Drone Pilot is whoever is actually flying the drone

The most important sections of the rules for drones are articles 265A to 265F, which are the rules on Drone Operators, Drone Pilots and Flight Categories.

Police powers

If you’ve read the rules and you think someone might be breaking the law, you can report a crime to your local police service:

- by calling 101
- at a police station
- or by submitting an online form on the service's website

Always call 999 in an emergency.

Policing powers to do with drones are in part 3 of the Air Traffic Management and Unmanned Aircraft Act 2021.

If the police think a drone could be connected to an offence, they can:

- make you land your drone
- stop and search people or vehicles to find drones or drone equipment
- confiscate and keep drones or drone equipment found during a search

The police can require you to show them:

- registration details and other information (for both pilots and operators)
- evidence of permission to fly where necessary (for example to fly near an aerodrome)

The police can also check a drone to understand which rules apply to it.

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