

ALERTS

Aviation Law Alert - Commercial Drone Use Soars Into New Territories

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Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), commonly known as drones, are taking to the American skies in record numbers to conduct commercial activities in response to recent changes in the law. Commercial drone businesses are climbing in numbers thanks to the FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012. Under this law, businesses can apply for a “Section 333 exemption” to the prohibition on commercial drone operations.

As of July 21, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has granted 823 exemptions to drone operators to commence their businesses. The permitted uses range from aerial photography to precision aerial mapping and agricultural assessment. Drones are also playing an integral role in saving lives as one drone company received clearance to drop a special delivery of pharmaceuticals and medical supplies in a rural Virginia county. The FAA is granting the Section 333 exemptions on a case-by-case basis prior to the finalization of FAA regulations expected to come in 2016. While the FAA reviews each submission on an individual basis, it is authorized to issue a summary grant for a filed petition if “it has already granted a previous exemption similar to the new request.” According to the FAA, petitions based upon film and television production and aerial data collection are likely to be reviewed and considered through the summary grant.

Operators of commercial drones no longer need to hold a private pilot’s license or present a medical certificate to operate under a Section 333 exemption. Now only a recreational or sport pilot license and driver’s license are required. These changes, coupled with the Section 333 exemption process, will continue to spawn new UAV industries and related services.

For more information, contact the Barnes & Thornburg attorney with whom you work, or Connie Lahn at connie.lahn@btlaw.com, Clifford Maine at Clifford.Maine@btlaw.com or Kenneth Suzan at kenneth.suzan@btlaw.com. You can also visit the [FAA’s website](#).

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