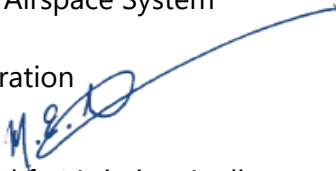




Memorandum

Date: November 8, 2018

Subject: INFORMATION: Audit Announcement | FAA's Role in Authorizing Small UAS Operators in the National Airspace System
Project No. 19A3001A000
Federal Aviation Administration

From: Matthew E. Hampton 
Assistant Inspector General for Aviation Audits

To: Director, Audit and Evaluation

The continuing growth of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) within the National Airspace System (NAS) presents challenges for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in maintaining the world's safest aviation system while fostering innovation. FAA has processed more than 1.1 million UAS registrations for commercial operators and hobbyists since December 2015. Further, the number of UAS sightings reported to FAA has increased, with 2,185 sightings in 2017¹ compared to just 238 in 2014.

To advance the safe integration of commercial UAS in domestic airspace, FAA published a rule for small UAS (i.e., systems weighing less than 55 pounds) in June 2016.² However, the rule does not permit commercial UAS operations in airspace managed by FAA's air traffic control without Agency authorization and approval. Further, our prior and ongoing work has shown that FAA is challenged to keep pace with the volume of requests for UAS to operate in controlled airspace near airports.

To help speed up airspace authorizations, FAA has implemented an automated system in partnership with industry called the Low Altitude Authorization and Notification Capability (LAANC). LAANC provides near real-time processing of airspace authorizations below approved altitudes. FAA began a nationwide test of this system in April 2018 using phased, regional deployments. The system is now

¹ As of October 26, 2018, there were 2,085 UAS sightings in calendar year 2018, primarily reported by manned aircraft pilots.

² 14 CFR Part 107 (June 2016).

active at nearly 300 air traffic facilities, providing service to approximately 500 airports nationwide.

Given the significant safety implications associated with integrating UAS operations throughout the NAS, we are initiating an audit assessing FAA's role in authorizing small UAS operations. Our objectives for this self-initiated audit are to assess: (1) the impact of LAANC on FAA's review and approval of UAS airspace requests; and (2) FAA's procedures for coordinating and communicating UAS airspace approvals and notifications between airports, FAA air traffic facilities, LAANC service suppliers, and UAS operators.

We plan to begin the audit this month and will contact your audit liaison to schedule an entrance conference. We will conduct our work at FAA Headquarters, air traffic facilities, and airports across the country. If you have any questions, please contact me at 202-366-0500 or Robin Koch, Program Director, at 404-562-3770.

cc: FAA Audit Liaison, AAE-100
DOT Audit Liaison, M-1