



Memorandum

Date: October 14, 2020

Subject: INFORMATION: Audit Announcement—FAA’s Oversight of Counter-Unmanned Aircraft Systems | Project No. 20A3007A000
Federal Aviation Administration

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

To: Director, Audit and Evaluation

Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), often referred to as drones, serve diverse sectors of the economy such as entertainment and recreation, agriculture, real-estate, and local and Federal government. According to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), there are currently more than 1.6 million registered drones, including both recreational and commercial UAS.¹ Despite the increasing use of UAS for authorized operations, the systems can be used for malicious or disruptive activities by terrorists, criminal organizations, or other lone actors. To respond to these threats, private industry has developed countermeasure or mitigation technologies referred to as counter-UAS. Counter-UAS technologies serve to detect, identify, monitor, and track UAS.

FAA is responsible for coordinating with other agencies—such as the Department of Justice, Federal Communications Commission, and the Department of Homeland Security—to ensure that UAS technology will not adversely affect aviation safety or the use of domestic airspace.² Further, the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018³ prescribes additional FAA requirements such as developing a plan for certifying and authorizing counter-UAS systems and chartering an aviation rulemaking committee to make recommendations for this plan. FAA is also required to evaluate counter-UAS technologies at five domestic airports that may detect and mitigate potential aviation safety risks.⁴

¹ FAA reported this data on August 25, 2020.

² 10 U.S.C. 130i; 50 U.S.C. 2661.

³ Pub. L. 115-254 (2018).

⁴ 49 U.S.C. 44810.

Given the increasing safety and security concerns related to UAS, the Ranking Members of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and its Subcommittee on Aviation requested that we assess FAA's coordination with other agencies pertaining to counter-UAS. Accordingly, we plan to assess (1) FAA's process for coordinating with other Federal agencies to implement and issue guidance on the use of counter-UAS technologies and (2) strategies undertaken by FAA to ensure that the use of counter-UAS technologies by other agencies do not adversely affect aviation and aerospace safety.

We plan to begin the audit later this month and will contact your audit liaison to schedule an entrance conference. We will conduct the audit at FAA Headquarters and other locations as determined during the audit. If you have any questions, please contact me at (202) 366-0500, or Tina Nysted, Program Director, at (404) 562-3770.

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