

US proposes nearly \$2 million fine against drone operator

October 6 2015, byJoan Lowy



In this photo taken June 19, 2015, the Transportation Department's Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) building in Washington. The FAA proposed a record \$1.9 million fine Tuesday against an aerial photography company for flying drones in crowded New York and Chicago airspace without permission. (AP Photo/Andrew Harnik)

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration on Tuesday proposed a record \$1.9 million fine against an aerial photography company for flying

drones in crowded New York and Chicago airspace without permission.

SkyPan International Inc. of Chicago operated 65 unauthorized flights between March 2012 and December 2014 in some of the nation's most congested airspace, the FAA said in a statement.

Forty-three flights were in the heavily restricted Class B New York airspace without air traffic control clearance, the agency said. Class B airspace is generally from the ground up to 10,000 feet (3,000 meters) in altitude and in an approximate 40 mile radius around an airport.

The [drones](#) also lacked the two-way radio, transponder and altitude-reporting equipment required of manned aircraft.

Flying drones in violation of federal regulations "is illegal and can be dangerous," said FAA Administrator Michael Huerta. "We have the safest [airspace](#) in the world, and everyone who uses it must understand and observe our comprehensive set of rules and regulations."

Karl Brewick, a SkyPan production coordinator, said the company had not had a chance to review the fine proposal and had no immediate comment. SkyPan has 30 days to respond to the FAA.

The previous largest fine for drone operations was \$18,700, proposed in September against Xizmo Media, a New York video production company, the FAA said.

Tuesday's announcement comes one day before an FAA official is expected to face tough questioning at a House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee hearing on what the agency is doing to address safety hazards created by drones flying too close to manned aircraft.

FAA officials have said they are receiving multiple reports daily of

drones flying in the vicinity of airports and manned aircraft. Most of the flights appear to be unauthorized.

Hobbyists and commercial operators who have received permission to fly drones are supposed to stay 5 miles (8 kilometers) away from an airport and fly no higher than 400 feet (120 meters). Between November 2014 and August 2015, the FAA received over 700 reports by pilots of drone sightings.

Also, the U.S. Forest Service has reported 18 unauthorized drone flights above or near wildfires, and that 10 of the incidents hampered aerial fire-fighting operations.

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