

UN aviation agency seeks public input on drone tracking

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The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) on Wednesday asked the public for feedback on a proposal to track drones in real-time around the world to avoid collisions with jetliners.

The electronic system would identify all drones in use, their position, trajectory and altitude, as well as who owns them and the location of persons remotely operating the flying machines.

The real-time information provided by ICAO member states would eventually be used to create a database that may be consulted by authorities in each country, Leslie Cary, head of the ICAO's unmanned aircraft program, told AFP.

It would also be a first step in harmonizing drone regulations across jurisdictions as the industry rapidly expands.

"All of these states are facing the same problems" and wish to agree on a common "field of play," said Cary.

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The ICAO has until now been focused only on military or [surveillance drones](#), but the Montreal-based international organization decided to extend its mandate to [civilian drones](#) at the behest of member states growing increasingly worried about the potential dangers posed by unregulated drones.

Before setting a timetable for the establishment of such a global monitoring system for drones, civil aviation authorities want to first identify as widely as possible the needs and constraints of its 191 member states.

"We're not proposing solutions, we're asking questions," Cary said.

Persons and companies are being asked to submit their ideas to the

ICAO by mid-July and the "best proposals" will be evaluated at a conference in Montreal in September.

This open consultation, a first for the UN organization, was chosen in order to try to accelerate talks and the eventual adoption of new regulations, because the drone industry is progressing at such a rapid pace that "we cannot wait years before having a regulatory framework," Cary said.

Although the consultation is aimed primarily at harmonizing regulations at the international level, the responsibility for setting up the system at the national level will fall to individual states, she said.

Standards relating to the maximum weight or authorized flying altitude for various categories of drones used are generally the purview of national civil aviation authorities, with the ICAO having a purely advisory role.

Current ICAO recommendations call for drones to be kept at least 50 meters (164 feet) away from people, vehicles or buildings, and no more than 150 meters (492 feet) above the ground.

They also suggest an eight-kilometer (five mile) no-[drone](#) buffer zone around airports.

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