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Drone Aircraft Move Closer to Flying in U.S. Civilian Airspace

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Drone aircraft moved closer to taking flight in U.S. civilian airspace as regulators issued a call for advice on establishing test sites.

The [Federal Aviation Administration](#) said it wants drone makers and the public to comment on where to locate proving grounds and their management, according to a filing yesterday in the U.S. Federal Register's Public Inspection Desk.

"Unmanned aircraft can help us meet a number of challenges, from spotting wildfires to assessing natural disasters," Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said in a statement. "These test sites will help us ensure that our high safety standards are maintained as the use of these aircraft becomes more widespread."

Drones have been used to kill terrorists and assist U.S. troops in Iraq and [Afghanistan](#), and manufacturers have pushed the government to allow greater domestic use for law enforcement and businesses. The unmanned aircraft, as large as a commercial jet or as small as a hummingbird, are made by companies including [Boeing Co. \(BA\)](#) subsidiary [Insitu](#) and [AeroVironment Inc. \(AVAV\)](#) of Monrovia, [California](#).

The FAA must establish test sites where drones can fly among manned aircraft by the end of June, under a provision of a defense bill signed into law Dec. 31.

FAA Spending

Similar language was contained in a law passed last month authorizing spending at the FAA. The measure ordered the agency to complete a "comprehensive plan" on how to integrate unmanned flights into the aviation system by Sept. 30, 2015.

To fly throughout the skies, drones must be capable of sensing when they get too close to other aircraft and avoid collisions -- just as pilots are required to do. While firms develop needed technology, the FAA has yet to set criteria for its operation.

The FAA later this year is scheduled to release its first set of rules allowing commercial operators to fly small drones without having to obtain special permits, according to the agency's statement.

To contact the reporter on this story: Alan Levin in Washington at alevin24@bloomberg.net

To contact the editor responsible for this story: Bernard Kohn at bkohn2@bloomberg.net

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