YOU CAN FLY ’EM, BUT YOU CAN’T SHOOT ’EM

News / Airlines



The FAA wants people to stop shooting drones. At least 12 drones have been shot out of the sky in five U.S. states and the Federal Aviation Authority says it’s a federal crime, according to a report in Forbes. Even if they’re over your house. Even if they’re carrying running chainsaws.

The FAA says you can’t shoot them down and you can’t disturb or interfere with someone flying a drone. Apparently drone pilot harassment is a bit less of an issue than, say, banging on the flight deck door on a passenger aircraft, but it’s still against the law. Enforcement, however, seems sketchy — as in, no one’s been arrested yet under the federal statute.

In response to a question from a Forbes reporter, the FAA cited statute 18 USC 32. The aircraft sabotage law authorizes prosecution of anyone who damages an aircraft or commits a violent act against persons operating the aircraft, or even in the aircraft, should that act endanger the safety of the aircraft. Exactly what constitutes an “act of violence” is not defined in the statute, but clearly shooting a drone or its pilot would qualify.

As more hobbyists and people who enjoy cool tech fly drones, the potential for abuse increases, both on the part of drone pilots annoying people and retribution by those who prefer not to be “droned.”

Commercial interest in using drones for delivery service it’s growing. It’s near certain that some

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people won’t be happy about unmanned aircraft flying low over homes in their neighborhoods, even if they do have “AMAZON DRONE DELIVERY” stenciled on the bottom. Regardless, you can’t shoot down drones.

Conviction for violating the FAA statute could result in a 5-year prison term. There so far have been no federal prosecutions for drone or drone pilot sabotage under the law. Personally, I hope the law is enforced tightly; I’m not too thrilled by the prospects of drones looming over my neighborhood, but I’m definitely not in favor of my neighbors running outside to blast them out of the sky.

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