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# Ed Markey says FAA must do more to prevent drone-plane mishaps

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By **Matt Rocheleau**

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Concerned by recent reports of drones flying dangerously close to planes over the skies of Massachusetts, Senator Edward J. Markey sent a letter to federal aviation officials Monday seeking a host of details on what the agency is doing to prevent potential collisions.

“All it takes is one drone to fly into the path of one passenger jet and a disaster can ensue,” Markey wrote to FAA head Michael P. Huerta. “We must take action before a catastrophe like this happens.”

Markey cited an increasing number of reports in recent months of drones flying close to passenger planes and near airports around the country, including relatively close to runways at Logan International Airport .

“Just last month, on New Year’s Day, a commercial plane reportedly spotted a drone flying 700 feet in the air just one mile from Logan Airport,” he wrote. “These incidents have only heightened concerns about the safety and security of the airspace around the Commonwealth’s airports.”

Markey asked the FAA to provide him answers by the end of the month to the questions he has on



the topic.

Though some of his questions have been answered publicly before by the FAA, Markey sought more specific and more comprehensive answers.

Markey is a member of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, which oversees aviation operations and safety.

Markey's letter asked that the agency provide a list of drone sightings within 5 miles of any Massachusetts airport during 2014 and 2015 and details about the date, location, and FAA response to each incident.

Markey also asked the FAA to explain what it is doing to educate drone operators about where they can and cannot fly the devices; encourage drone manufacturers to help raise awareness of safety guidelines; and collaborate with state and local law enforcement officials to respond to reports of drones operating too close to airports or planes.

The FAA has worked to spread awareness about the possible hazards of drones and to educate users about how to fly their drones safely, including by working with other groups on informational campaigns and by posting YouTube videos.

The agency has said it works with drone makers to include information inside packaging. It has also said it partners with law enforcement to investigate illegal drone activity.

Markey's letter requested details on any warnings or civil penalties the FAA may have issued to drone operators in Massachusetts. He also asked whether the agency is exploring technological solutions to preventing collisions.

The FAA has imposed fines for a number of unauthorized flights and has dozens of pending enforcement cases. The agency has said that it has explored some new technologies aimed at preventing collisions.



The number of people who own and fly drones has surged as the devices have become cheaper and more popular.

At the same time, reports of near-collisions have also become increasingly common. Aviation safety officials have warned that it is just a matter of time before some of the popular unmanned crafts crash into planes and helicopters, potentially causing significant damage and even deaths.

If a drone is sucked into the airplane's engine or collides with its wings, tail, or other vulnerable equipment, it could cause catastrophic damage, according to recent research.

Even a small drone could cause major problems if it were to collide with an aircraft. A near-collision could also cause pilots to suddenly veer off course.

Flying drones recreationally is legal. But federal aviation rules still apply. The rules say people cannot fly the devices more than 400 feet in the air; must keep the devices away from other aircraft, particularly around airports; must keep them in sight; and must keep them outside of restricted areas.

The FAA announced in December that owners of small drones must register their devices with the agency and mark the machines with the owner's unique registration number by Feb. 19.

The commercial use of drones is largely banned, although the agency is drafting rules that would allow the unmanned aircraft to be flown for commercial purposes.

In the meantime, the FAA has issued more than 3,300 special permits for companies, including more than 20 in Massachusetts, to operate drones on a case-by-case basis.

Markey and others in Congress have previously called for oversight of drones to improve safety and to protect privacy. But others have said the new FAA rules and other proposed regulations are an unnecessary burden for aviation hobbyists.

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