Beat: Miscellaneous

U.S. announces 6 test sites for commercial drones

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USPA News - The U.S. aviation regulator has named the six states across the country that will host sites for developing and testing unmanned drones for commercial use. It is a critical step required by congress in order to develop operational guidelines.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) announced the test sites will be based in Alaska, Nevada, New York, North Dakota, Texas, and Virginia. They will all assist with congressional-mandated research to develop operational guidelines by the end of 2015 while meeting operation and safety standards. "These test sites will give us valuable information about how best to ensure the safe introduction of this advanced technology into our nation`s skies," said Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx. The drones are not currently allowed for commercial purposes but have been useful in helping law enforcement and government agencies, specifically the military. The test site operators were named as the University of Alaska, the State of Nevada, Griffiss International Airport in New York state, the Department of Commerce in North Dakota, the Corpus Christi campus of Texas A&M University, and Virginia Tech. They were all selected based on geographic and climate factors, including research needs, airspace use, safety, aviation experience and risk. "Safety continues to be our first priority as we move forward with integrating unmanned aircraft systems into U.S. airspace," said FAA Administrator Michael Huerta. "We have successfully brought new technology into the nation`s aviation system for more than 50 years, and I have no doubt we will do the same with unmanned aircraft." Commercial interest in unmanned aircraft has increased in recent months, with retail site Amazon.com announcing in late November that it plans to start using unmanned aerial vehicles for delivery in the United States as soon as the necessary regulations are in place. The company said the goal of the future delivery system - dubbed `Prime Air` - is to get packages into customers` hands within 30 minutes. The FAA received completed submissions from 24 states.

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