EC Working on Regulations for Commercial UAV Use

Working hard to catch up to the rest of the world, the European Commission's Unmanned Aircraft Systems Panel began meetings February 9 in Brussels, Belgium, to agree on the key flight rules and technologies for commercial UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) to operate safely in civilian airspace.

Expected to go into effect between 2013 and 2015, the regulations will open up the possibility for hundreds of people to apply for permission to fly UAVs, according to Peter van Blyenburgh of Unmanned Vehicle Systems International (UVS), a global trade association based in Paris.

The UVS, said van Blyenburgh is looking for aircraft weighing up to 25 kilograms that can be granted permission to fly as long as the device remains in line-of-sight of the controller. Heavier drones are a greater safety risk, he stated and would need expensive sensors to automatically avoid other air traffic.

The drones could become vital tools in many fields, from assisting in emergency services in crisis situations such as fires, floods and earthquakes, to more prosaic tasks like advertising or dispensing fertilizer from the air. Civilian, hobbyist drones have already been used unexpectedly to provide information on crimes and are being used elsewhere in the world for agricultural monitoring environmental research.

For example, small UAVs made by Microdrones are used in Germany to monitor some of the 22,000 wind turbines in the country rather than send people aloft to inspect the turbine blades. In the US, a Texas hobbyist was testing the camera on board his small UAV and captured a meat-processing facility dumping blood and

toxic waste into a local stream, resulting in criminal action against the company.

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