

Are current FAA drone reported hazardous incidents accurate?

Sensational headlines, “Pilot Reports of Close Calls with Drones Soar in 2015”

In 2015 FAA reported 764 incidents involving “near misses” between drones and airlines **and flights in sensitive areas** putting **people and property in danger**. These media reports have, in turn, been cited by lawmakers in Washington and in various states as a reason to call for new legal restrictions.

AMA’s analysis of these incidents indicated the following:

1. **Despite the perception from the media headlines that all of the 764 reports were “close calls,” only 27 reports** or 3.5% were actually described by pilots as near misses or close calls.
2. **Only 1.3%** of the records (10 of 764) explicitly note that a **pilot altered his course** in response to a drone.
3. More than a **dozen** events involved **military** drones.
4. The **two crashes** reported were also **military drone operations**.
5. **Public and Commercial** drone operations were identified and quite possibly there were others also presumed to be hobbyist. These have been inaccurately and unfairly characterized by the FAA as “hobbyist” operations, when they were not.
6. **Some sightings** involved **permitted locations and altitudes** with people flying responsibly within the FAA’s current recreational guidelines.
7. Many other reports indicated military drone operations since **altitudes were too high** for consumer drones to attain in Class A airspace (18,000 feet-60,000 feet above sea level). Including:
 - a) 24,000 feet Colorado Springs in July
 - b) 51,000 feet Washington, D.C. in July
 - c) 20,000 feet Los Angeles, CA in August
 - d) 25,000 feet Teterboro, NJ in February
 - e) 25,500 feet West Palm Beach in February
8. In more than a dozen FAA records, pilots reported **seeing “something” other than a drone**
 - a) July 19, ground personnel at JFK in New York reported a cluster of silver **balloons** blowing over the airport fence.
 - b) July 5, an American Airlines pilot near LaGuardia Airport reported seeing a “model **rocket” at 2,800 feet.**
 - c) On May 31, a Qantas pilot reported seeing a “**mini blimp**” at LAX.
 - d) On July 24, two aircraft near Washington, D.C. describe a **UFO at 51,000 feet.**
9. The data also included 13 sightings of people flying **drones over stadium events**, wildfires, and power plants. However, it is often not noted whether a **TFR** was in place at the time of the report.
10. The data included drones flying above 400 ft. AGL, but it was determined that the pilots neglected to subtract the **ground elevation** from an altitude report given in **mean sea**

level or MSL. (MSL of 5,700 ft. with a field elevation at Denver airport of 5,327 feet. That means that the drone is actually flying at 373 ft. above ground – under 400 ft.

Conclusions: The media reports were **inaccurate, misleading, and misrepresented the facts.** The general public, our nation’s lawmakers, and all stakeholders in drone technology deserve better from the government agency responsible for the safety of the nation’s skies and for reporting objectively and accurately on public safety issues.

AMA Recommendation(s): As with military reports, the FAA should clearly separate out and explicitly indicate reports that are public entities and commercial operators. In the absence of any operator identification, it is inappropriate to assume, or to report, that a drone was operated by a “hobbyist.”

During the House Transportation Aviation Subcommittee Report on October 7, 2015, Congressman Rokita, said that the current FAA incident data doesn’t accurately quantify and qualify the number or type of incidents reported.

Christmas, with the sale of 400,000 drones we now have over a 1,000,000 I was expecting to Hitchcock scene with drone birds flying all over and I haven’t seen one in my travels.