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Microdrones GmbH

The US Department of Transportation has launched a "streamlined and user-friendly" online registration process for aerial drones, starting today. [New regulations announced in October](#) require all drone owners to register.

In the view of the Federal Aviation Administration, drones or "unmanned aircraft systems" (UAS) qualify as aircraft, even if operated by hobbyists, and will be regulated as such. The registration [website has been launched](#) and includes [frequently asked questions](#) about the process. Actual online registrations won't begin until next Monday, December 21. For anyone registering in the first month, the \$5 aircraft registration fee will be refunded.

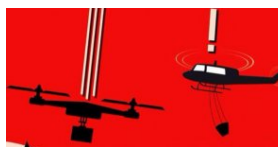
Registration is legally required by February 19, 2016. The rule applies retroactively, so even someone who operated an unmanned aircraft prior to December 21 must register by the deadline. Anyone purchasing a drone after December 21 must register before the first outdoor flight.

"Make no mistake: unmanned aircraft enthusiasts are aviators, and with that title comes a great deal of responsibility," said US Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx in a [press release explaining the process](#). "Registration gives us an opportunity to work with these users to operate their unmanned aircraft safely. I'm excited to welcome these new aviators into the culture of safety and responsibility that defines American innovation."

For now, the online system will only deal with hobbyist drone registration. Use of drones for business purposes may have more exacting regulations, and the FAA says it's working on "enhancements" to allow business-use drones to be registered online by spring 2016. The online application only applies to drones that weigh 55 pounds or less. Bigger aircraft must use the existing paper registration process.

Calls for widespread registration increased as several drones got uncomfortably close to passenger aircraft at airports, and [drones got in the way of some firefighting](#). Hundreds of thousands of drones are expected to be sold this holiday season.

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**Joe Mullin** / Joe Mullin has covered the intersection of law and technology — including the world's biggest copyright and patent battles — for a number of years, mostly at The American Lawyer.

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