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Manned-Unmanned Airspace Integration



Manned-unmanned airspace integration will converge by 2015

By Bobby Sturgell, senior vice president, Washington Operations, Rockwell Collins; former FAA acting administrator

Unmanned aircraft system (UAS) integration into civil airspace is coming – by 2015, as mandated by the U.S. Congress, with small unmanned aircraft able to fly even sooner.

The FAA Modernization and Reform Act, which was signed into law on February 14, 2012, provides specific guidelines for expedited applications for micro-unmanned aircraft weighing 4.4 pounds or less. The bill directs the FAA to fully integrate small UAS (less than 55 pounds) by 2015. The FAA is doing a good job of accelerating this initiative and setting some real deadlines.

The key milestone will be 2015; however, many other milestones will be set and achieved along the way. This will be a phased, careful approach to ensure that standards, procedures and other elements are in place to make this a smooth transition. The recent approval of an expedited process to fly micro UASs (under 4 pounds) in civil airspace is a step in the right direction and demonstrates the FAA's commitment to making this happen.

Continued U.S. leadership and market growth will come from greater access to airspace. The opportunity to use UASs for a multitude of applications is good news for the public, our industry and the economy.

So, are you ready for the manned-unmanned airspace convergence in 2015? Do you know how to get your UAS to market and flying in integrated airspace? What are the major issues our industry is still facing related to safety, privacy, infrastructure and other concerns?

As an industry leader in UAS subsystems and solutions, Rockwell Collins continues to advocate for expedited safe and secure airspace integration. Frankly, growth in the UAS market for applications such as law enforcement, weather monitoring, disaster recovery, pipeline monitoring and cargo delivery will not only benefit our company, it will benefit everyone.