

Dos and don'ts for drones

Offenders could face fines of up to RM50,000 or imprisonment

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PETALING JAYA: Thinking of flying a drone in Malaysia? Before taking to the skies, it is crucial to know the rules under the Civil Aviation Regulations 2016.

Drones, or unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), are governed by Regulations 140 to 144, and flying without following the rules can land operators in trouble.

The regulations cover everything from flight altitude and airspace restrictions to proximity to people, buildings and sensitive areas.

They also outline the responsibilities of drone operators and the penalties for violations.

Under Regulation 140, drones are banned in certain areas, including Class A, B, C and G airspace, within an aerodrome traffic zone and at altitudes above 400ft without approval.

Classes A, B and C are controlled airspaces, while Class G is uncontrolled. To obtain authorisation, an application must be made in accordance with Regulation 189.

"Dropping any object from a drone is also prohibited," the regulation states.

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Regulation 141 requires prior authorisation for any commercial or aerial work, such as surveying, mapping or agricultural operations, including dispensing pesticides.

Regulation 142 requires pilots to maintain direct, unaided visual contact with their drone to monitor its flight.

"This is to avoid potential collisions with other aircraft, people, vehicles, vessels or structures," the regulation notes.

Regulation 143 prohibits flying small unmanned aircraft in certain situations without prior authorisation.

This includes flying over or within 150m of designated areas, over crowds of more than 1,000 people, or within 50m of vessels, vehicles, structures or individuals.

Designated areas include residential, commercial, industrial or recreational zones.



No go: A picture of a drone with the background of the Subang Airport. — IZZRAFQ ALIAS/The Star

Regulation 144 further restricts flights of drones weighing more than 20kg without fuel unless authorised.

Beyond the Civil Aviation Authority of Malaysia (CAAM), other agencies – including Sirim, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, the Survey and Mapping Department, and state authorities in Sabah and Sarawak – also oversee drone operations.

CAAM issues various approv-

als, including the Standard Authorisation To Fly, Certificate of Approval for Remote Pilot Training Organisations, and Unmanned Aerial Work Certificate for agricultural drone operations or special UAS projects.

Penalties for breaking the rules are steep: individuals can face fines of up to RM50,000, imprisonment of up to three years or both, while companies may be fined up to RM100,000.

Fast-track rollout of UTM system, urge experts

PETALING JAYA: Drone experts are urging authorities to fast-track the rollout of the Unmanned Traffic Management (UTM) system, which could serve as a one-stop platform for drone permits and flight approvals.

Saravanan Letchumanan, chief executive officer of a drone services consultancy, said Malaysia already has clear rules under the Civil Aviation Regulations 2016, but a more streamlined system is needed to manage growing drone activity.

"The regulations clearly spell out how drones should be operated in Malaysian airspace. No one should fly a drone without permission or prior approval from the Civil Aviation Authority of

Malaysia (CAAM). From a regulatory standpoint, the framework is already in place," he said.

However, Saravanan noted that the UTM system, which could centralise permits and approvals, is still in development.

Under such a system, certain drone users may apply for a single permit, and designated areas could be allocated for flights meeting specific criteria.

"The framework is in the pipeline, although implementation may take time," he said.

Awareness remains a key challenge, particularly among recreational users.

"Most commercial operators are aware of the requirements. The main issues involve hobby-

"No one should fly a drone without permission or prior approval from CAAM."

Saravanan Letchumanan

ists," he said, noting that drones are widely accessible and easily purchased online, making it difficult to monitor open-air activity.

William Alvisse, secretary of the Malaysia UAV Drones Activist Society, said stronger enforcement is needed to address irresponsible drone use.

"The problem is enforcement. Unless authorities get police assistance, these incidents will continue," he said, noting some operators even post photos and videos of flights in restricted areas on social media.

"Self-incriminating pictures and videos online are enough to take action against these operators," Alvisse said, adding that reckless flights are unfair to legitimate operators and pose safety risks if drones crash in public areas.

He also called on CAAM to intensify awareness campaigns.



Previous cases of drone offences

Feb 2026

An 80-year-old was detained for flying a drone without a permit during the Thaipusam festival in Ipoh.

Aug 2025

Two Chinese nationals claimed trial to charges of espionage and documentation in a restricted area after they were nabbed for flying a drone in Wisma Pertahanan.

Nov 2024

Home Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail revealed there were 55 cases of drones being used to drop drugs into prisons that year.

July 2023

Police detained a teenager for flying a drone at the Institut Pendidikan Guru campus in Kota Bharu, Kelantan.

Dec 2022

Three men were arrested for allegedly attempting to smuggle prohibited items to a rehabilitation centre in Machang, Kelantan using drones.

Source: News reports *The Star* graphics

"There is still a lack of understanding, but after so many years, people cannot claim ignorance of the rules. Ignorance of the law is not an excuse," he said.

Despite concerns over misuse, both experts said drones have significant potential in Malaysia, especially in logistics and delivery services.

Saravanan cited ongoing trials for medical deliveries and cargo transport from ships to shore, adding that drones are expected to play a growing role in the low-altitude economy, covering deliveries, transportation and emergency response.

"Drones are here to stay and will definitely be part of the economy," he said.