



Washington Report

By Sterling Wiggins, Coordinator of Government & Public Relations

Yamaha RMAX Becomes First Drone Approved for Pesticide Application

On May 1 the FAA approved the Section 333 petition for the 218-pound Yamaha RMAX UAS for aerial application, marking the largest (by weight) UAS approval by the agency to date. The petition, filed by Yamaha, permits 4-gallon aircraft to spray crops and fertilizer in the national airspace system. The FAA also chose for the first time to allow users with as few qualifications as a sport pilot certificate (requiring 20 hours of flight time) and a driver's license to commercially spray pesticides.

In its exemption grant the FAA chose to cherry-pick the sections of Part 137 that it felt are applicable to UAS and exempt Yamaha from those it felt were not applicable. The 137 exemptions granted were the following:

- § 137.19(c) – Exemption from the requirement that a commercial ag operation applying for a 137 certificate have the services of a commercial pilot. Like other exemptions the FAA is permitting the exempted UAS operations with only a sport pilot certificate and driver's license. The petitioner is still required to comply with other Part 137 requirements.
- § 137.41(c) – Related to the above exemption, allowing sport pilots to operate the RMAX UAS commercially under 137.
- § 137.19(d), 137.31(a) – Requires a 137 applicant to have an aircraft with an airworthiness certificate; because the FAA is exempting the RMAX from airworthiness requirements, the agency is exempting them from this section as well.
- § 137.19(e)(2)(ii), (iii), and (v) – RMAX operators are exempt from the demonstration of skill of approaches to the working area, flare-outs, and pullups and turnarounds of this section; however, the pilot must still demonstrate satisfactory swath run procedures. If the operating manual (which is of course confidential) ever changes then Yamaha will need to re-petition for an exemption to this section.

- § 137.31(b), § 137.42 – exemption from the requirement and use of safety belts and harnesses.
- § 137.33(a) – exemption from the requirement of carrying a facsimile of the operating certificate on the aircraft, but the operator must have the certificate available at the operating station.



Joe Proudman/UC Davis

UC Davis researchers test an unmanned RMAX helicopter from Yamaha by applying pesticides on a vineyard. Vineyards are normally sprayed using ground vehicles.

The UAS is not allowed to operate within 5 nautical miles (NM) of airports; however, unlike past grants where the FAA simply indicated “airports,” the agency now specifies within 5 NM of the airport reference point (ARP) as denoted in the current airport/facility directory (AFD). If there is no ARP in the AFD, then it’s within 5 NM of the airport symbol on the current aeronautical chart unless an agreement is signed with the exemption holder and the airport. Thus, like many ag operations, if your operating field is not published on a chart or in the AFD, UAS are not required to remain greater than 5 NM from your facility.

NAAA vociferously voiced its concerns in its comments last fall on Yamaha’s petition, including asking that the agency require a commercial pilot certificate, ADS-B Out, strobe lighting, an airworthiness certificate, and for the FAA to uphold the integrity of Part 137 by not granting Yamaha’s original request for a blanket exemption from Part 137.

NAAA continues to urge all ag aviators to report drone accidents and incidents to their local FSDO and to NAAA. ■



MEETING ABOUT METS NAAA Executive Director Andrew Moore and Coordinator of Government and Public Relations Sterling Wiggins meet with Congressman Marc Veasy (D-TX) to discuss the critical safety issue of marking meteorological evaluation towers (METs). Congressman Veasy serves as the Democratic co-chair of the House General Aviation Caucus.

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ENLISTING AERIAL APPLICATION NAAA visited Dow AgroSciences at its Indianapolis headquarters in June requesting that the company continue to attempt to obtain an aerial use label for Dow’s new 2,4-D herbicide formulation “Enlist” for use with its new “Enlist” 2,4-D resistant seed. The product was just approved for ground use in the U.S. this year. NAAA provided evidence of aircraft setups that can produce droplet sizes at or larger than other forms of application, markedly reducing the likelihood of off-target movement. The EPA has put a tight rein on use of the product so far. Joining in the meeting were (right to left): Susanne Wasson, U.S. Commercial Leader, Crop Protection, Dow AgroSciences; Dr. Scott Bretthauer, Extension Specialist, Application Technology, University of Illinois; Scott Schertz, owner, Schertz Aerial Services in Hudson, Ill.; and Andrew Moore, NAAA executive director.