

BEFORE THE
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON, D.C.

IN THE MATTER OF

Petition of Aviation Systems Engineering Company for Amendment to Exemption No.
11509

Docket Number: FAA-2015-0481

COMMENTS OF THE SMALL UAV COALITION

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**BEFORE THE
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

IN THE MATTER OF

Petition of Aviation Systems Engineering Company for Amendment to Exemption No. 11509

Docket Number: FAA-2015-0481

COMMENTS OF THE SMALL UAV COALITION

Introduction

The Small UAV Coalition¹ is pleased to provide its comments in support of the petition by Aviation Systems Engineering Company (“ASEC”) for an amendment to Exemption No. 11509 to operate its small unmanned aircraft system (“sUAS”) within 500 feet of persons not involved in the sUAS operation and without ensuring a 5-minute power reserve at the beginning of flight.

Members of the Small UAV Coalition share an interest in advancing regulatory and policy changes that will permit the operation of small UAVs in the near term, within and beyond the line of sight, with varying degrees of autonomy, for commercial, consumer, recreational and philanthropic purposes. The Coalition believes there are additional steps the FAA can take to broaden the authority to conduct commercial operations. In particular, the FAA has the authority and the discretion to grant the relief requested by ASEC in its petition for amendment.

Operations closer than 500 feet from nonparticipating persons

The Coalition supports ASEC’s request to conduct operations within 500 feet of non-participating persons. In Coalition comments on the FAA’s sUAS proposed rule, we urged the FAA to allow small UAV operations over non-involved persons with appropriate conditions and limitations, noting that without such permission many UAS use cases would not be practical. As a result, such operations would continue to operate manned helicopters, increasing the safety risks to persons on the ground as well as to helicopter operators. The Coalition notes that manned helicopters are allowed to operate below the minimums set forth in section 91.119 if the

¹ Members of the Small UAV Coalition include AirMap, AGI, Amazon Prime Air, Botlink, Flirtey, Google[x] Project Wing, Intel, Kespry, PrecisionHawk, Strat-Aero, T-Mobile, Verizon Ventures, Walmart, and Zero Tech.

operation is conducted “without hazard to persons or property on the ground” and in compliance with any routes or altitudes the FAA may prescribe for helicopters.” 14 C.F.R. §91.119(d).

We also recognize that the FAA recently revised its policy with respect to operations closer than 500 feet from non-participating persons, differentiating between (1) persons directly participating in the UAS operation, (2) persons directly participating in the intended purpose of the UAS operation, and (3) other persons. For the third category of persons, the 500-foot distance remains.

ASEC’s petition has been redacted so that the minimum distance from non-participating persons it proposes is unknown. But ASEC’s sUAS will be tethered, and we believe that a tether is a functional equivalent of a barrier that reduces the risk of injury to nearby persons. ASEC refers to “a circular safety boundary” that provides a buffer between the maximum horizontal distance the sUAS may operate (given its tether) and the safety boundary, and also explains that there will be a shield erected along the safety boundary to protect the public from any flying debris. Although the particulars of the buffer and shield have been redacted from public view, the Coalition believes that the tethered nature of the sUAS plus these additional safety measures will provide an acceptable level of safety to permit sUAS operations closer than 500 feet to non-participating persons (in the petition, the max altitude plus [redacted] feet).

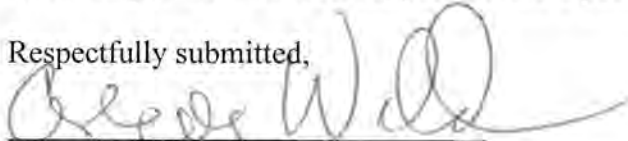
Relief from minimum fuel requirement

ASEC seeks relief from the minimum fuel requirements in 14 C.F.R. 91.151(a), which is 30 minutes for fixed wing aircraft and 20 minutes for rotorcraft. The FAA has routinely granted this relief in section 333 exemptions and required only 5 minutes of reserve power in its standard conditions and limitations. Given the tethered nature of the sUAS, the fact that it has continuous and monitored electrical power from a ground source, that such power system is backed up by a battery on board the UAV, and that loss of electrical power will trigger failsafe mode and a landing, these operations should be conducted safely even if the battery reserve is a few minutes.

Further, we note that in the final sUAS rule released earlier this week, the FAA no longer will require a power reserve. See 14 C.F.R. 107.49(d), to be effective in late August.

Accordingly, the Coalition supports ASEC’s petition for exemption.

Respectfully submitted,



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