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FEDERAL DRONE REGISTRY PLANNED

Regulators expect to have new rules in place before Christmas for the remote-controlled aircraft



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Anthony Foxx
Transportation secretary

By Jim Puzanghera
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON >> Debris from a drone spilled from the September sky, injuring an 11-month-old girl in a stroller on a street in Pasadena, Calif. A drone buzzing above a wildfire near Big Bear Lake this summer forced an air tanker to ditch plans to dump a load of fire retardant on the flames.

And more than 40 times since April 2014, pilots approaching Los Angeles International Airport have reported dangerous encounters with the small, remote-controlled aircraft that have become increasingly popular — and dangerous.

Concerned about the growing number of such incidents, federal regulators said Monday that they planned to require most recreational drones to be registered.

The goal is to rush the rules into place before a Christmas season in which drones are expected to be big sellers.

"The signal we're sending today is that when you enter the national airspace, it's a very serious matter," said Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx.

The requirement would apply to new drone buyers, he said. Existing owners would have to register after a grace period.

Foxx said the goal of registration is to help educate consumers about how to fly their aircraft safely and to help authorities trace troublemaking drones back to their owners to face penalties.

The Consumer Electronics Association expects 2015 to be "a defining year for drones," with sales approaching 700,000, a 63 percent increase from the previous year. Revenue will top \$100 million this year, the trade group said.

Consumers are flying drones for fun, movie directors are angling for aerial shots and companies are considering a variety of uses, such

as monitoring pipelines in remote areas and delivering medicine to far-flung communities.

The Federal Aviation Administration is working on rules governing commercial drones.

But with recreational drones straying more frequently near airplanes and drone malfunctions risking injuries, the agency joined state and local governments in trying to rein them in. The FAA has more limited authority over recreational use of drones.

In 2012 Congress prohibited the FAA from enacting new regulations on small model aircraft flown for recreational or hobby purposes. But Foxx said a registration requirement would be allowed under the FAA's power to assure safety of the skies.

Foxx said he wanted to create a user-friendly registration procedure. A task force of regulators and industry and recreational groups would turn in recommendations for rules by Nov. 20, and the FAA would have the final rules in place by mid-December. Failure to register would lead to penalties, he said.

A major issue will be deciding which types of drones, such as model aircraft used by hobbyists, are such a low safety risk that they would be exempt from registration.

Last month the FAA said it would investigate an incident in which pieces from a small privately owned drone fell and injured the 11-month-old girl in Pasadena. The girl was treated at a hospital for a bruise on her forehead and a cut to the side of her head, police said.

Police found the owner of the drone at the accident site, and he told police that he lost control of the aircraft.

But often it's difficult to identify the owner of a drone, Foxx said.

"Finding the drone has not been as much of a problem as finding the person who was using the drone. The registration is designed to close that loophole," he said.