

I'm getting a little worried about the attitudes of some of my fellow quadrotor enthusiasts. Namely, the people who think that they can fly anywhere they please and damn the "rules" or "recommendations".

We are amateurs, flying objects that have the potential to cause damage to persons and property. Most of us have absolutely no training in the science or methodology of flight (unless you are a trained pilot – which some of us are).

You insist it is your "right" to fly anywhere you please, out of visual line of sight, at any altitude you please (although many are beginning to realize the folly of that). All you have is a little camera on your craft that transmits a tiny picture (really tiny on a phone) of the area surrounding your craft.

You have absolutely no clue as to what else might be in the airspace that you are occupying.

You scream bloody murder when a helicopter or airplane comes near you (in most of the cases I've seen, the other craft was completely legal). You seem to think that the airspace below 400' is your exclusive playground. (1)

You brag about going MILES away with your craft, again with only that little screen to guide you. This is what really bugs me. Ok, you have your "radar" view and a map overlay but it certainly doesn't provide you with anything like real time situational awareness and, of course, you have lost visual with the craft at a few hundred feet. Then you hit RTH when you lose the only connection you have with your craft and allow the craft to come back (hopefully) to you on a seriously depleted battery.

The more I read on these forums, the more I'm convinced that we are going to have some pretty serious clamping down on our so-called "rights" in the near future. I agree that we need some level of instruction and testing and a certification that we are qualified to fly in the airspace. That training and testing should include the rules of the airspace and a healthy dose of operational restrictions, just like pilots are required to complete. Even ultralight pilots have to follow FAA airspace rules and need at least some training before they fly. But they can't fly at night, for instance. And, of course, they can't fly in clouds. I've seen video of people flying their Phantoms up into the clouds (Wow, is it ever neat!) Of course you never know what else may be legally up there in those pretty clouds. Did you know that there is often some pretty heavy turbulence in those fluffy, pretty clouds?

Basically when you go out of VLOS, you become an instrument pilot. That is not trivial, nor something to be done with a toy and without extensive training.

I am an Instrument rated Private Pilot. A good number of the Phantom owners are also certified pilots, many with much higher qualifications than I have. To fly an airplane on instruments, you not only need to be qualified, but you also need to be in an aircraft that is certified to fly on instruments. These are much more sophisticated than the standard "puddle jumper". AND probably the most important thing, you are under the guidance of Air Traffic Control, which helps you to avoid the hazards that you can't see. You are on an instrument flight plan, which guarantees that you won't be trying to occupy the same airspace as someone else. I maintained my currency in an instrument airplane and kept a small (homebuilt) airplane up until a few years ago. I now only fly my Phantoms for pleasure. I'm lucky in that I have hundreds of acres surrounding me to fly in without bothering anyone. I live less than 5 miles from a regional (non-towered) airport and have a notification on file with the airport manager. I don't fly out of VLOS. It's not hard to "follow the rules" and you can still enjoy your Phantom.

The point I'm trying to make here is that those of us who insist on pushing far beyond the "recommendations" are not doing themselves or the rest of us any good. You will only bring the full wrath of the government down upon us.

And, don't give me that crap about "pushing the envelope", or "Testing the limits". Those things are done in a controlled environment where persons or property are not in danger, not by some amateur "pilot" in somebody's neighborhood. If you want to be a test pilot, join the Navy or the Air Force.

Also, you might present the argument that soon many "delivery" drones will be flying around autonomously. That MIGHT happen. If it does, I guarantee you that they will be on published "flight routes" and on a "flight plan". They will also be flown by professional "pilots" and if you are caught interfering with them by flying your craft into their airspace, you will probably receive a heavy fine. It's all common sense.

(1) Here are the FAA rules on altitude for piloted aircraft:

Anywhere: an altitude allowing a safe emergency landing without undue hazard to person or property on the ground;

Over Congested Areas: an altitude of 1,000 feet above the highest obstacle within a horizontal distance of less than 2,000 feet;

Over Populated Areas: an altitude of 500 feet AGL;

Over Open Water or Sparsely Populated Areas: an altitude allowing for a linear distance greater than 500 feet from any person, vessel, vehicle, or structure;

Helicopters: If without hazard to persons or property on the surface, an altitude lower than in definitions 2, 3, and 4 above, provided in compliance with any routes or altitudes specifically prescribed for helicopters by the FAA.