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Department of Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx has announced the establishment of a multi-stakeholder taskforce to develop recommendations on the registration with the FAA of unmanned aerial vehicles ("UAVs") or "drones." The group's recommendations would be due by November 20, with an FAA goal of reviewing the recommendations and adopting registration requirements by mid-December.

Currently, drone operators providing commercial services must register their drones with the FAA, a fairly straightforward process akin to automobile registration. This latest initiative is aimed at registration of "hobbyist" or recreational UAVs, which are currently not subject to FAA rules or policies.

Secretary Foxx said the accelerated timetable was being driven by both the anticipated purchase by the American public of one million drones during the upcoming holiday season and the recent increases in incidents involving UAVs in the National Airspace System ("NAS"). The Secretary noted that the FAA has education and enforcement initiatives underway, but, to date, those have been insufficient. While law enforcement authorities frequently find an errant drone, locating its owner has been much more difficult, Secretary Foxx said. FAA Administrator Michael Huerta also emphasized that it is illegal to drop anything from a drone flying in the NAS.

The Secretary also noted that the taskforce will consider retroactive registrations of drones that have already been purchased, likely with a grace period for registration. Establishment of the taskforce has the support of the Academy of Model Aeronautics, a national association representing over 180,000 members, many of whom are hobbyist UAV operators.

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